


# Sharing our Stories



Using interpretation to improve the visitors' experience at heritage sites



# This Manual focuses on what you can do to make a measurable improvement to how visitors experience your heritage site.

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## SECTION 7

# PLACE: making the most of what you've got

*Before you launch into planning exactly how you will develop new interpretation you need to consider your resources. This will help you decide which media will work best for you.*

*This is not simply about what you can afford – although obviously that is a very important consideration. It is also about making the best of what you already have.*

Visitors don't come to your site just to listen or read. They can do that at home. They come to you because they want to have a fuller experience. You are well equipped to give them that. As a heritage site you have an authentic, usually physical, link with the past. You may have a building, objects, documents, pictures or images. You will almost certainly have stories, drama, and characters. Hopefully, you have enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff and volunteers. Your job is to make all of these resonate with the visitor. Spend some time looking critically at your site, your people and your other resources to see how they can enliven the visitor experience.

## Making the most of your site

Consider your site, not just as it is now but as it could be. You need to find the locations and experiences that can create enduring memories. Look in particular for places that:

- offer the strongest link with people and stories
- are specific to your site and its story/message
- offer a direct sensory experience
- appeal to the imagination

These are likely to be the locations with the most potential for interpretation. You need to think about how the physical, sensory, or emotional experience they suggest can be enhanced.

When building up your understanding of how people experience your site, draw on what your visitors tell you (see *Section 4*). You can get this information from visitor surveys, on-the-spot interviews or from more informal contact with front of house staff, including guides.

**EXERCISE 10** tells you how to create a site experience map for your site.



## CASE STUDIES

### Using interpretation to enhance experiences

**The Irish National Heritage Park** near Wexford contains a collection of accurately reconstructed dwellings dating from Neolithic to Norman times. The interpretation aims to show how people lived in Ireland during those centuries. One way that this story is made vivid is by the presence of a living hearth in or near some of the dwellings. The fire makes the settlement into a home. At each settlement, the tour guide tends the fire, a small re-enactment that creates a direct sensory link with the past.



**Our visitors need easy access to our culture and heritage – interpretation can facilitate this and make their visit worthwhile, meaningful and memorable.**

