



Changing approaches to heritage

Lake District: telling the world

Julie Wilkinson

Bob Sutcliffe is the Head of Planning and Communication at the Lake District National Park Authority. Here he explains the National Park's strategy for branding and interpretation.

Bob Sutcliffe

So if people want to understand the basic idea of a national park, then we'll say the Lake District is one of the UK's fourteen national parks, it is one of Britain's breathing spaces. Then when we look more specifically to this national park we have our own brand wording attached to it, which is about thinking deeper. We want people to really come here and think deeper 'cos it's one of the most complex national parks in the country, because it has all the issues that you could possibly think of in quite a small space, which is around balance, and the balance between tourism, and conservation - people living in a national park versus visitors, development versus management - all those issues are complex and challenging. And then because we've realised that we can communicate with different audiences through interpretation rather than sort of direct, sort of sending newsletters, and all that sort of thing, we can actually do things in more subtle ways, with learning a little bit more, or reinvigorating that sort of element of our work.

Bob Sutcliffe

We're actually just moving to purple as our new colour range for a new, the colour that we will be using, and also we'll be wearing, and the logo matching into that will be purple. And that sort of fits. It's a sort of quite a modern, sort of fresher look, because we don't want everybody to sort think oh, so old fashioned, go into National Park, everything's preserved in sort of the traditional way, it's quite, and it should be there for life, so it is, you know, for a future life a modern sort of interpretations, but it's still got to fit in with the natural appearance of the landscape, so the colour purple for us has quite sort of some modern connotation, rather than green or brown, and it looks quite good against the sky and matches quite well in that way.

Julie Wilkinson

In the next five assets, Bob Sutcliffe comments on a variety of different styles of interpretation, which he finds in different parts of the National park.

Bob Sutcliffe

Right here we are at Loughrigg Tarn. Absolutely wonderful landscape around the Tarn, a wonderful footpath we've walked through, all abilities, and this sign is something that blends in to the landscape if you look at all the different colours of lichen that's grown on the wood. The wood will have been preserved. It'll be in a local hardwood, and it's been there probably for a good twenty years I think that sign. We avoid replacing them even if someone might come along and think crikey, that needs a good scrub - it's absolutely perfect for its job. But we also have a responsibility to try and, or a desire to make sure that a lot of the signage doesn't affect the quality of the view, and the experience. People don't want to be coming across bollards you know with a yellow post-it note on here and a blue one here, and make it too sort of, some people use the word urbanise, with that sort of over-signed environment but um we try and get the balance right.

Julie Wilkinson

At High Dam, near Finsthwaite at the southern end of Lake Windemere, there are four different styles of signposting in a very small area. First, an information board.

Bob Sutcliffe

Right, when you arrive at High Dam, the main car park, there are different signs taking you on different routes around the place, but at the main point where you would go up to the dam areas which is the most attractive place to be, there is this more modern sign, lower maintenance because it's made out of metal, using the blue colour. It's got a nice bit of information just to sort of explain to people what they might see in the area. Some pictures of animals, wildlife there, you know the "you are here" symbol is always important. People do lose their orientation very quickly when they arrive at a car park. And then the Countryside Rights of Way Act which allow people greater access, and that's really important people understand what that actually means and how that allows them to walk off a footpath. But as you see probably if I looked at that I'd probably think that's quite a lot of words to read on my trip out, probably shut off after, half way there. I might actually go back to the office and suggest that we cut that down a little bit.

Bob Sutcliffe

I was talking to our Head of Service for Countryside Services recently about the combination of interpretation boards or signs with a message that could be just carved onto the kissing gate as you walk through, so a very subtle message sort of, so that people aren't required to stop and read or sort of look at a load of information on a board so when you walk through a gate you go, "Oh, a little poem or a little fact". You know like say, "Did you know the same number of people visit the national park that actually live in New York City?" So, well my principle is that if you can get everybody to learn one new thing every day, then that's fantastic.

Julie Wilkinson

Set in amongst the trees just below the information board at High Dam, is a piece of interpretation which uses its shape as well as its words to convey a message.

Bob Sutcliffe

This is a wonderful example of an interpretive sign that takes the form of a sculpture. It comes to about your hips so you can have a good look at it, peer over it. It's actually a sculpture of the landscape in miniature set upon a large oversize wooden bobbin made of oak. It's 3-D. It's got this wonderful metal block which serves as an interpretive map in many ways. You can feel yourself around High Dam. You can see how far you'd have to climb up to get to it, and in fact the dam itself, and the rivers that come from the dam, can fill with water on a rainy day, so actually it fills and shows the water running through the landscape.

Bob Sutcliffe

It has got a significant historical context associated with the sculpture, so around the edge of the sculpture, it describes a process that would have gone on hundreds of years ago through a form of poem. So I'll read that out. It says "These are the trees that cut by men, will sprout again, to feed Stott's Mill. To make the bobbins, to earn the pay, that feed the folk of Finsthwaite. This is the water that turns the wheel that spins the lathe that shapes the wood, to make the bobbin, to wind the thread that will have wealth of Lancashire." And that sort of shows how the water and the trees come together around High Dam to provide all the resources that were needed to keep Stott Bobbin Mill going, which is just down the road from High Dam.

Julie Wilkinson

Within sight of the bobbin are two different signs, very close to each other. They show two contrasting ways of conveying information, and may reach out to different groups of people. Bob Sutcliffe focuses on the older of the two.

Bob Sutcliffe

This is an example of a much older sign at High Dam. High Dam is owned by the National Park and does have a lot of interest from local people and it's very popular, so the new sign that provides more information and interpretation still exists alongside this older sign, which is a bit like the old village sign it says what's going on, and it allows the ranger just to give a little bit of information. The roof bit always reminds me of a wishing well but it's actually very good it does protect it from the elements. It's got a really nice sort of community sort of spirit to it,

and any of our volunteers can also put information up there as well. It means that it's changing, bit more flexible I suppose as a way of providing interpretive material. It's something that I think has a place in the national park actually.

Julie Wilkinson

Finally Bob Sutcliffe turns his attention to what's perhaps one of the most iconic pieces of interpretation in the Lake District.

Bob Sutcliffe

Well, here we are looking at one of our classic, because it's like a finger post, we call them, and you put on as much information to these finger posts as possible, without distracting the person who's trying to read it. Again keep it as simple as possible. So obviously the yellow points the official footpath way, but it may be quite difficult, and often, especially in terms of improving access for all abilities, there may be an alternative route that's been agreed with the landowner, that's called a permissible footpath. So in this case going up to High Dam, it's quite a steep climb so the yellow route is your classic footpath, very steep, some slippy elements to it, so as part of the development of access into that area, we would have negotiated a new footpath around the side on a lighter gradient, so the white marker means that you could get round with a pram.