



Community
Wetlands
Forum

Interpretation and Signage for Wetland Projects Information Sheet





Interpretation and Signage for Wetland Projects

🌿 In this information sheet you will find:

- Information about interpretation
 - How to develop an interpretation plan for your site
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- How to develop interpretive signage
 - Further information and resources
 - Case studies





Interpretation and Signage for Wetland Projects

What is interpretation?

Interpretation is the communication of the meaning of a place or thing using various media. Good interpretation is about good communication!

"An Informational and Inspirational process designed to enhance our understanding, appreciation and protection of our cultural and natural legacy" Beck & Cable (2002)

Developing interpretation for your site

Step One: Consider your site

Ask yourself...

- 🌿 Who owns the site?
- 🌿 Are there turbary rights on the site?
- 🌿 Is the site a designated area (NHA/SPA/SAC)*?
- 🌿 Is the site accessible and safe to navigate?
- 🌿 Is the site suited to large-scale or small-scale visits, or should you do interpretation completely off-site?

****See information sheet on Protected Areas for further information***





Step Two: Make a plan

- 🌿 Carry out an interpretation plan while considering the sites conservation values
- 🌿 Your local community should be at the core of this planning process
- 🌿 Consider your resources and budget
- 🌿 Think about what type of interpretation suits the site best

Examples:

- 🌿 Signage
- 🌿 Guided tours
- 🌿 Demonstrations
- 🌿 Videos
- 🌿 Images
- 🌿 Art
- 🌿 Self-guided tour
- 🌿 Audio

Your plan can include a combination of the above media.

Think about what you want to inspire in your visitors. Do you want them to

- 🌿 learn more information?
- 🌿 have a change in behavior?
- 🌿 understand the importance of your site culturally, socially, or environmentally?

You should know what you want people to think or feel after they visit your site and plan accordingly.



Step Three: Understand your audience

It's important to ask why people are visiting your site. Are visitors there because they have chosen to be or not chosen to be? Some visitors may have a specific interest in your site, for example in the local flora, and have chosen to be there on your tour. Others who are there may have been brought along but don't have a specific interest or have a mild interest. Some visitors might not want to be there at all!

- 🌿 You must prepare for a diverse audience, whether you are providing tours, developing signage, using multimedia, the arts, or anything at all.
- 🌿 Consider your visitors' motivation. Are they at the site because they have an interest, are they here by chance, are they spending some time here before going elsewhere, or have they been brought along by a family member?
- 🌿 Are you visitors local, or holiday makers, or experts, or families? Are they a group? Are they young or older? Are they colleagues, community groups, schools, or universities?

Be sure to tailor your content so that in some way each person that visits the site will come away with some new knowledge or understanding of the place.

Step Four: What are your key messages for visitors?

You should have up to three key messages you want to convey to visitors through interpretation. Key messages should form the base for the type of interpretation you choose to use for your site. Once you have chosen your key messages you then have to set about how best to convey them in a meaningful way to your visitors.

Consider things like:

- 🌿 What habitats and species are you likely to see on the site? What's special about them?
- 🌿 Who are the people living / have lived in the locality? What is their connection to your site?



- 🌿 What props can you use to address different living styles or include multi-sensory learning?
- 🌿 Use local resources – storytellers, people, archives
- 🌿 Make it enjoyable
- 🌿 Tell your own story – how are you connected with this site?
- 🌿 Make the information relevant to your audience
- 🌿 Build emotional connections between your visitors and the site
- 🌿 Use comparisons and analogies
- 🌿 Talk about family, friends, play, work, love, beauty, hope, etc. or anything we all experience as humans to make a connection with visitors

It's important when you are presenting information that you are giving a balanced view. Be sure that your opinion isn't guiding the interpretation experience for visitors. Consider all sides of the story and communicate it with your visitors.

Signage

Before developing signage for your visitor attraction or site you will have to consider the following:

- 🌿 Who will you need permission from?
- 🌿 Will you need planning permission?
- 🌿 Will you need an Environmental Impact Assessment?
- 🌿 Where is appropriate to place the signage? Consider your site – is it a designated site?
- 🌿 Is your town a 'historic town'?
- 🌿 What type of signage is appropriate?

If the site is managed by a state agency, for example, NPWS, it is best to make contact with your local Conservation Ranger before starting development of signage. NPWS, Coillte, Bord na Móna and other agencies that manage wetland sites usually have their own template for signage.

Although this saves you and your project a lot of time and money, local voice is important and your role here is to make sure that voice is included in the development



of signage.

Why do you need signage?

- 🌿 It helps people find your site
- 🌿 Provides good information at the best location
- 🌿 Conveys your message to the public at a low cost, high impact, and is permanent unlike a guided tour, and is accessible
- 🌿 Build appreciation of your site
- 🌿 Encourages further exploration and learning

Types of signage

- 🌿 Orientation
- 🌿 Directional
- 🌿 Interpretive

Interpretive signage should be placed at point of entry to the site if possible and along points of interest or other access point areas.

Designing signage

Most people spend very little time reading signs. Fáilte Ireland recommend using 1/3 images, 1/3 text and 1/3 space on signage. There are usually three layers – a headline title with the name or what it is, followed by important text about the place in bold (e.g. year, significance, people) and the rest short text but with more information about the site/story you want to tell. You should communicate only one or two messages on the sign and use short sentences and avoid jargon where possible. Keep the language accessible and use photos, illustrations, diagrams (you can always ask a local artist, photographer or graphic designer to develop these). If including a map, make sure it is clear and easily understood. Include all necessary logos of stakeholders who helped to develop the sign i.e. your group, funders, site owner(s), etc.

Style of sign

This will be determined by the site. If you are in a Historic Town you may have to comply with guidance on signage developed by Fáilte Ireland, or you will have to engage with other stakeholders who own the site as they may have a template they use at all their sites.

If you don't have to consider these things you can be original in your design. Most signage is in the form of lecterns and make for the most accessible signage and don't spoil the view of your site as they are low down and angled.



Sign makers

There are many interpretive sign makers in Ireland who can design your sign and manufacture it for you. It is best to shop around and get at least three quotes before choosing your sign design/manufacturer. For more information on sign production read the following case studies below.

Further information and Resources

[Interpretive Plan – Ecotourism Ireland](#)

[Getting Your Message Across: the role of interpretation in eco and nature based tourism – Dr. Deborah Benham, Wild at Heart](#)

[Tourism in the Community: a business toolkit for community tourism projects – Failte Ireland](#)

[Bored of Boards: ideas for interpreting heritage sites – Irish Walled Town Network and The Heritage Council](#)

[Guidelines for the Provision of Pedestrian Tourist Signage in Historic Towns – Failte Ireland](#)



Case Studies

Cloonlarge Loop, Kiltewan, Co. Roscommon

For the past six years (2017-2023) Kiltewan Tidy Towns (KTT) with the support of bog owners, landowners, stakeholders, and the local community developed the Cloonlarge Loop Walking and Cycling Trails. While they are involved in many other projects in the village of Kiltewan and the surrounding area, Cloonlarge Loop became their flagship project.



Interpretive signage at Cloonlarge Loop

KTT first developed interpretive signage for their local Heritage Trail with one sign dedicated to the Lough Ree SAC bog complex. This was funded by Roscommon LEADER. This community approached the NPWS to gather information about the bog to ensure accuracy. KTT worked with a design company, Red Heaven Design, to design and manufacture the signs.



In collaboration with NPWS, KTT then developed signage to highlight the biodiversity of the bog using photographs taken by local people. The text was compiled by local people with the help of the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC). They also proofread the text with the help of people outside the project. The NPWS funded the signs which includes text in both the Irish and English languages as it is funded by a state body. KTT

worked with Red Heaven Design again to design and manufacture the sign. The sign has made a positive impact locally and has encouraged children to explore the name of the bog flora.



KTT has also worked with a local designer to develop interpretive signage for a section of their trail called “The Lilliput Way”. The designer helped to limit the amount of text and used lots of imagery, and ensured the signs were low down for accessibility. The designer also advised on the positioning of the signs on the trail. A local sign manufacturer fabricated the signs. All signs were installed by Roscommon County Council.



Directional Signage at Cloonlarge Loop

Way marking became paramount for KTT as people were frequently losing their way along the trail. Initially, the group installed wooden posts with a small orange sign that included an arrow giving directions along with the name ‘Cloonlarge Loop’ and their logo. Despite their efforts, visitors were still getting lost and sometimes walking the loop twice, or walking the offshoot trails and getting lost. KTT spoke with their local designer who advised them to include a small map at each waymark post to indicate ‘you are here’. These signs have been recently installed along the loop and the group are keen to see the results.

Handmade signs

One member of KTT created handmade signs with short messages on them for The Lilliput Way. These small signs have made the trail colourful but also full of soundbites of information. Handmade signs are cost-effective and unique to your site. They have the ability to draw your eye which can help your visitors to engage with and understand your site better.





Key learnings from Cloonlarge Loop

- Get outside expertise
- Engage with NPWS if needed
- Ask outsiders to proofread your text
- Hire a professional designer

- Hire a manufacturer
- Ask County Council to install signage
- Have clear way markers on your trail
- Create homemade signs





Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park, Lullymore, Co. Kildare

Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park is a social enterprise day visitor attraction located on a mineral island in the Bog of Allen between the villages of Rathangan and Allenwood in North West Kildare.

Peatlands are a core part of the visitor experience at Lullymore. Visitors learn about the people of the peatlands and how the bogs formed, what they're made from, the bogs' historic secrets, its industrial past and the beautiful flora and fauna that thrive on peatlands.

Interpretive signage at Lullymore

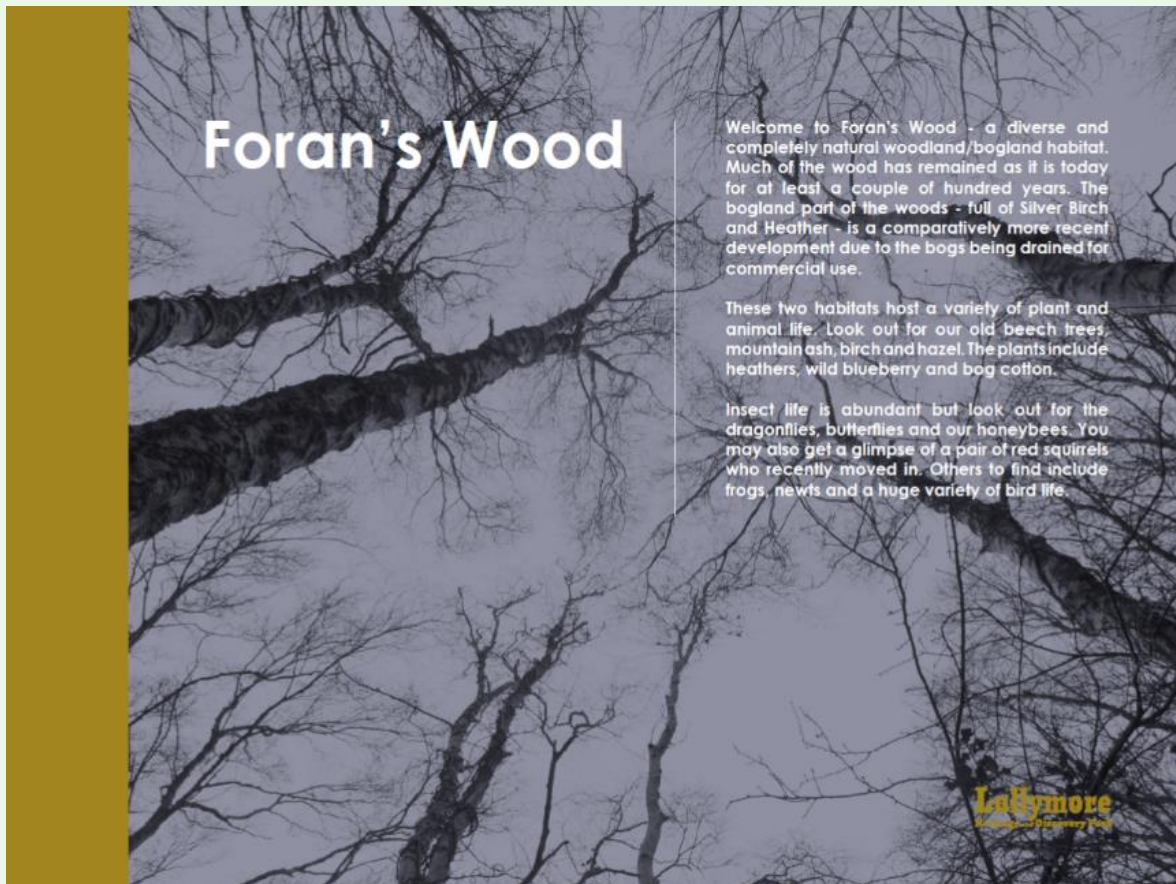
The main purpose of signage at Lullymore is interpretive. They wanted to create an immersive experience for the visitor.

The first step was to evaluate what they had at their site. The team at Lullymore sourced outside expertise to get a better understanding of their bog,

its history and the plants and animals that live there. This helped to inform the topics of each sign.

Lullymore has a number of exhibitions, including peatlands. They gathered a team of people who worked together to compile the text for signs based on their strengths, while also inviting outside experts to ensure their information was correct. They worked with ecologists, historians and school teachers to achieve this. The tour guides at the Park were consulted on the messaging in the text as they were considered to have their fingers on the pulse of the visitors.





The team worked with others to proofread and edit the text for their signs. They asked people with creative writing experience to edit and proofread which they said helped immensely with the accessibility of the text for all ages.

Once the text was compiled, Lullymore Heritage and Discover Park approached Mirror Door, a professional signage design and manufacturing company, with the support of grant aid from Kildare LEADER. They have been working with Mirror Door for the last 10-15 years on all of their signage. Working collaboratively, it has helped Lullymore to design signage to suit their visitors, to be accessible to children and wheelchair users, to promote their brand and to select the optimum materials for their signs. Most of their signage is text based with illustrations but they also have a crank-up audio sign that allows the visitor to listen to recorded stories told by local people. Mirror Dorr designed, manufactured and installed the signs for Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park.

The signs were installed on the site based on tour guide experience and at junctions where large groups can stop comfortably, and at the start and end of trails. Initially, Lullymore felt that they didn't get the placement of the signs rights and took steps to move the signs to better locations.



Developing interpretive signage for the Park did have its own challenges. The placement of signs was already mentioned, and the team at Lullymore has been able to relocate the signs. Ensuring that signs were secure was another challenge for the team when installing them on the boardwalk. The boardwalk is made of a flexible recycled plastic and was causing the sign to shake therefore further measures were taken to secure the sign.

The majority of the signs at the Park are outdoors. The weather has played its part in causing some damage to the signs as peatlands are so exposed to the elements. The choice of materials for your signs are important if they are to last in exposed weather conditions.





Key learnings from Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park

- Get outside expertise
- Work as a team to write your text
- Get outsiders to proofread your text
- Consult with your tour guides if you have them



- Hire a professional signage design and manufacturing company
- Accessible signage
- Install signs at key locations
- Choose durable and weather proof materials for exposed signs

