

NATIONAL TRUST OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INTERPRETATION STRATEGY

Strategic Intent

West Australians will cherish the National Trust's places and collections because they contribute to an understanding of our identity, in all its diversity, and our place in the world.

Strategic Theme

Illuminating the spirit of our places

Historical Context

We will use the Australian Historic Themes Framework to help ensure broad scale thinking about our places and their connections. The themes provide a broad context within which we can consider the National Trust's places and our role in their conservation and engagement with the community.

Each place is connected by major themes while projecting its unique personality as part of the broad National Trust family.

The themes are: Tracing the Evolution of the Australian Environment; Peopling Australia; Developing Local, Regional and National Economies; Building Settlements, Towns and Cities; Working; Educating; Governing; Developing Australia's Cultural Life; and Marking the Phases of Life.

Principles

1. The starting point for all our interpretation is based on the premise that all our places are settings for human activity.
2. There is no place with a single story: all have layers which we will aim to illuminate.
3. Landscape and place are inseparable and we acknowledge the stories of a place are broader than the extent of the property boundaries
4. We will tell the stories of our places referencing the landscape, collections and other forms of tangible and intangible heritage
5. We shall address Aboriginal connections to our places
6. We will articulate connections between the places and collections in our portfolio
7. The Interpretation Strategy will inform future acquisitions
8. We will strive to be honest and transparent (genuine) in the presentation of our places and our collections and the stories they tell
9. Accessibility is a priority and we shall find as many pathways as we can to maximise visitation experiences
10. Our interpretation will be evidence based and built on a foundation of research and knowledge.

Purpose

Interpretation enables audiences to engage and make connections that have long term value. The purpose of the Interpretation Strategy is to guide the design and integration of messages and mediums, to inform conservation and communications, and to contribute to education and engagement activities so as to create a clearly defined identity across National Trust of Western Australia places.

Aim

The aim of interpretation is to open new perceptions and perspectives of National Trust places and collections so that people are inspired to visit and experience the heritage values expressed in the places in our care and in broader contexts

Interpretation Objectives

1. To reveal and provoke consideration about what our places reflect and mean

2. To help our audiences find meaningful connections and a contemporary relevance to heritage
3. To provide satisfying audience experiences so that they become ambassadors for our places and our cause
4. To position the National Trust place experience as a unique and essential part of the WA narrative
5. To have broad appeal to a diverse audience
6. To redress imbalances in how our places have been conserved and interpreted
7. To ensure our volunteers to be well informed and aligned to the strategy
8. To communicate a personality that aligns to the overall interpretative framework adopted by the Trust
9. To tell different stories at each place informed by research, audience needs and strategic priorities
10. To achieve a minimum agreed standard of presentation across priority places

Philosophical Approach

The principal aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation. The place should be presented as a space for public discourse and invite the visitor to share the excitement of thinking about the past, the present and the future. The visitor experience should thus be one of discovery or inspired insight. The local visitor should experience a degree of self-revelation while those from further afield should enjoy a richer insight into the place, the State and the country.

Interpretation should aim to present the whole rather than a part. It should resonate with voices that encourage open-minded consideration of different perspectives. The interpretation should celebrate the significance of the place by promoting the exploration of knowledge and ideas and by providing a dynamic forum for discussion and reflection. When challenging convention and encouraging debate, the interpretation may sometimes be controversial but never dull.

Interpretation is not mere information - it is revelation based upon information. But the information upon which it is based must be thematically organised, based on rigorous research and specific to each place. The interpretation should aim to relate to the place being displayed to something within the visitor.

Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts. Interpretive techniques should be appropriate to the place and the various, or multiple, audiences. They should reflect a contemporary perspective and clearly distinguish themselves from the historic fabric, artefacts or reality. They should be imaginative, reflecting the best in creativity and ingenuity.

There are, however, many options for interpreting a place. There is no single right way. The philosophical approach outlined above should be used to explore all the options.

(Mulloway Studio/ Paul Kloeden 2005 for the National Trust of Western Australia)

Audiences

Volunteers

- We want our volunteers to embrace the National Trust's approach to interpretation as well as embracing the breadth and depth of the stories relating to the place

Visitors

- We aim to increase visitation and find new and more diverse visitor segments
- We aim for visitors to become ambassadors to National Trust places: to come back, go to another, and tell friends about the experience

Users/Tenants

- We want users and tenants of National Trust places to sign up to the story of the place they occupy

Local communities

- We aim to develop an understanding of a National Trust place's role and its contribution among in the immediate community

Education

- The content of the education program will align with the narrative the National Trust has adopted for a place and this will stimulate further enquiry about its significance

Public program participants

- The public program content will be informed by and respond to the interpretation strategy

Interpretation Approach – Places

- Acknowledges the National Trust's interpretation strategy and aligns with agreed principles and objectives
- There will be a focused interpretation strategy for each priority place
- The strategy provides for the implementation of the interpretation plan at each place
- The interpretation plan will include, but not be limited by the following contents:
- Significance
- Reasons why the place is being interpreted
- What meanings and messages we wish to communicate
- Identification of audiences
- Key messages
- Goals – what will visitors find relevant, what stories will we tell
- Critical review – what is known about the place before visitors arrive and what will they come to understand on the journey through the visitor experience

Design and Implementation

- We will apply a range of techniques and develop approaches selected to most effectively connect the stories of the place with the intended audience
- The interpretation will enhance, not dominate, the visitor experience
- Acknowledge that conservation impacts interpretation
- Acknowledge that interpretation should inform conservation
- Making a place 'accessible' may impact the place's fabric and its stories