Phase A: Identifying signing requirements

A1. Identify site

A2. Identify site – specific objections

A3. Has the site interpretation potential?

NO

YES

A4. Is a Standardised Management Sign appropriate?

NO

YES

A5. Select management message as appropriate

A5. Select management message as appropriate

A6. Plan a Site Specific Information Plaque

A7. Investigate available interpretation methods – are sign boards appropriate?

NO

YES

A8. Investigate other interpretive methods

A10. Will financial and managerial constraints permit development of the proposed site interpretation?

NO

YES

A11. Plan interpretive sign boarding scheme

Phase B: Producing the sign board

B12. Produce a Site Specific Information Plaque

B13. Order a Standardised Management Sign

B14. Design interpretive panels

B15. Select appropriate materials

B16. Arrange production of sign panels

Phase C: Installation

C17. Arrange for placing of sign on suitable mount at appropriate location (or locations) on-site

C18. Arrange construction of suitable mount at pre-arranged location on-site and install sign-board

Phase D: Publicity

D19. Arrange for appropriate publicity

Phase E: Monitoring

E20. Monitor site to (a) ascertain if scheme objectives are being achieved, and (b) to ensure adequate maintenance of the sign

Figure 1: The procedure for implementing a site-signing scheme – to be used in conjunction with text section 7

APPENDIX 1: Interpreting Geological Sites by J. Wray (extracted from Earth Science Conservation, No. 29 (1991)

Producing signs – some do's and dont's

The purpose of a sign is to provide information close to the feature being explained. To do this it must be understood, otherwise there is no point in it being there! Here are some basic tips.

Writing text

- DO keep the maximum number of words on a sign to 150. The reader will lose interest in longer texts so be concise.
- DO assume the reader is not a specialist and has no prior knowledge of the site.
- DO NOT use jargon or write complex texts.
- DO ask someone not familiar with the site to read your text, together with any draft maps, to see if they can understand your message.

Maps

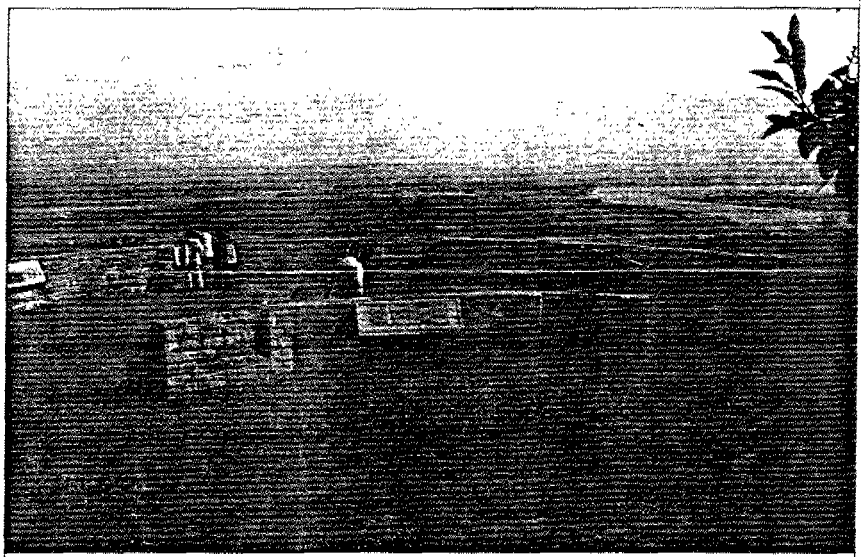
- DO keep maps simple – many people find flat plan maps hard to understand.
- DO include an easily recognised feature to which visitors can relate. Put on a scale and a north point.
- DO make the map big enough.

Layout of signs

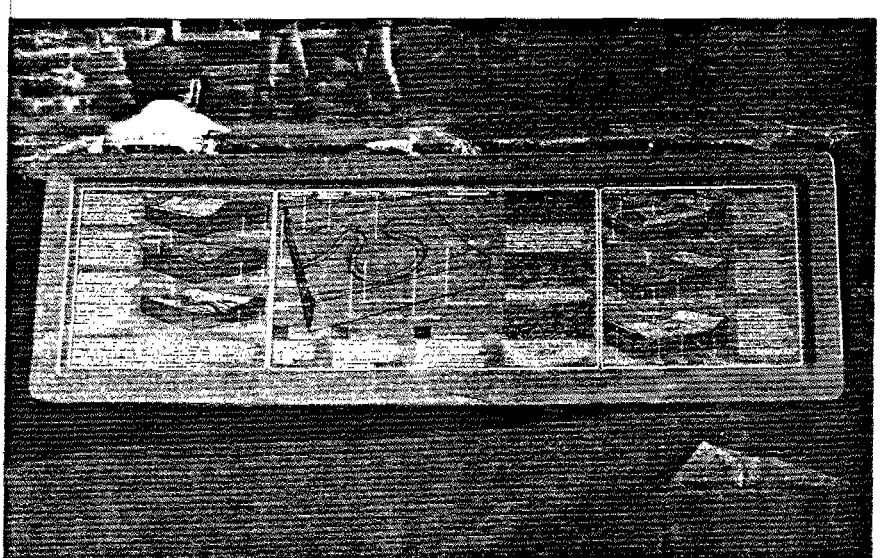
- DO keep signs simple and clear. Break complex information into simple messages and convey each one separately within the sign.
- DO NOT crowd signs with text. The open space on a sign is just as important as the words.
- DO NOT use blocks of capital letters. The eye will not easily read them.

Siting of signs

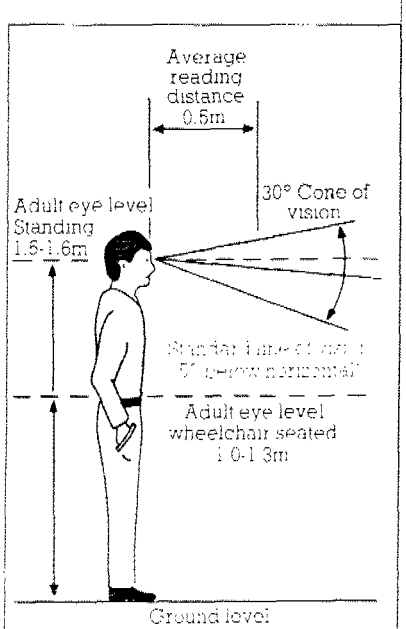
- DO keep signs to a minimum. Look at your site as a whole and plan your signs accordingly.
- DO NOT site signs where they cannot be read. The natural eye-line is slightly downwards. Children and wheelchair visitors will need signs at a lower level than adults.



Interpretation at a public viewpoint. The interpretive panel closest to the foreground describes the geomorphology of the vista. The panels in the wall beyond describe the panorama. (Photo by Keith Duff)



A close-up of the geomorphology panel. The story is broken up into three themes using graphic 'boxes'. Note the maximum use of illustrations. (Photo by Keith Duff)



Can your visitors physically read your sign with ease? Don't forget that children and wheelchair visitors will need signs at a lower level than for adults.
Adapted from *Information signs for the countryside*, Countryside Commission.

then their actual numbers will have a bearing on the type of interpretive media you use. For example, if you have a large number of non-specialist visitors it may be more economical to provide an interpretive panel on-site, giving basic information, than to give each visitor a leaflet.

It is well worthwhile to try and estimate the actual or projected visitor numbers; you may need to organise a survey for this.

Where and when?

Firstly, remember that not all interpretation takes place on-site. Visitors may wish to have some information about the site before or after their visit. Indeed, interpretation may be required for people who cannot visit the site at all.

Ideally, information should be available on-site when the visitors are there. For a variety of reasons – legal, operational or aesthetic – this may not be possible. In that case the interpretation may have to be provided nearby, possibly in the form of an information point.

Think about seasonality. Unlike biological sites, geological ones are, by and large, not affected by the time of year – but your visitors often are. Casual visitor attendance may peak during the summer, but educational usage may be greater in the autumn. If you are considering outdoor displays do they need to be out all year? You may need a simple non-specialist leaflet in the summer and an educational worksheet at other times.

How to go about it

This is the hurdle that the inexperienced, or over-enthusiastic, may leap at without giving any real thought to the basic interpretive rationale. As a result the medium may become more important than the message. There is a range of interpretive options available, and some are considerably more expensive than others. However, if you have given serious thought to the basic questions then the most appropriate will readily present themselves to you.

The most flexible medium is the human guide. He or she can pitch their message to the level of the audience, deliver the information at an appropriate rate and answer any questions as they are raised. They do not, necessarily, need any back-up interpretation. Guides, however, are not always the most practical solution.

The two most common interpretive media are leaflets and on-site displays (signs and interpretive panels). These have the disadvantage of presenting information in a predetermined form and of being 'one-way' forms of communication, the user not having the opportunity to ask questions. However, they can be very economical in terms of cost per user.

Leaflets can provide information about a site before, during and after a visit but think about how you will distribute them. On-site dispensers are all very well but need refilling regularly and can be prone to vandalism, especially if they have a container for money. If the leaflets are to be distributed off-site, from whom will they be available and when?

On-site displays have the advantage of providing information to anyone visiting the site. They can range from a simple sign identifying the site and providing a contact address for more information to a purpose-built interpretive panel. Panels often cost more to produce than leaflets but can be cheaper in the long run. If you get a large number of non-specialist visitors in the summer and few in the winter why not provide a removable, and so possibly cheaper, display that can be stored safely during the winter?

More ambitious forms of interpretation include geological trails. Here the information is usually provided by a combination of leaflets and on-site panels. Trails must be able to take a large number of visitors without giving rise to damage; by their very nature they encourage visitors to use them. Can your site cope? Are you able to provide facilities for the wheelchair visitor? 'High-tech' interpretation such as tape-cassettes and solar-powered listening posts are expensive to provide and maintain. Think hard before installing these: you need large numbers of fee-paying visitors to recoup your investment.

The same is true for visitor centres. To many people these are the ultimate form of interpretation almost an end in themselves. Much time and money must go into planning, building and fitting-out a centre, and then it must be staffed and funded, not just in the short-term but in the long-term as well. That is a considerable commitment. In reality, I suspect that few geological sites would warrant interpretation on that scale.

So there we are. I have tried to provide a very brief introduction into environmental interpretation and give some idea of the questions to ask while you are planning. Remember, there is no single 'right' answer to interpreting a site. It depends upon many factors but if you concentrate on getting the basics right, your interpretation will work whatever the available resources. Good luck and have fun!

Further reading

Aldous, A. 1990. Signs for the passing stranger. *Interpretation Journal, 46.* (A down-to-earth view from a countryside visitor.)

Aldridge, D. 1975. Principles of countryside interpretation and interpretive planning. *Guide to Countryside Interpretation Part 1.* HMSO. (Principles of interpretation, and media that you could use.)

Allwood, J. 1981. *Information signs for the countryside.* Countryside Commission. (The basic principles of signs; techniques and materials you can use.)

Binks, G., Dyke, J. & Dagnall, P. 1988. *Visitors welcome.* HMSO. (Concentrates on archaeological sites but describes the principles of interpretation clearly and gives practical tips on techniques.)

Countryside Commission. 1977. Interpretive planning. *Advisory series No 2.* (How to plan your interpretation.)

Countryside Commission for Scotland. *Battleby Display Centre information sheets* Vol. 1. (Details of countryside 'furniture'.)

Henchman, M.W. 1981. Site interpretation on nature reserves. *Documentation series No 7.* European Information Centre for Nature Conservation, Strasbourg.

Henchman, M.W. 1985. *Whither interpretation? A view from the Nature Conservancy Council.* Nature Conservancy Council.

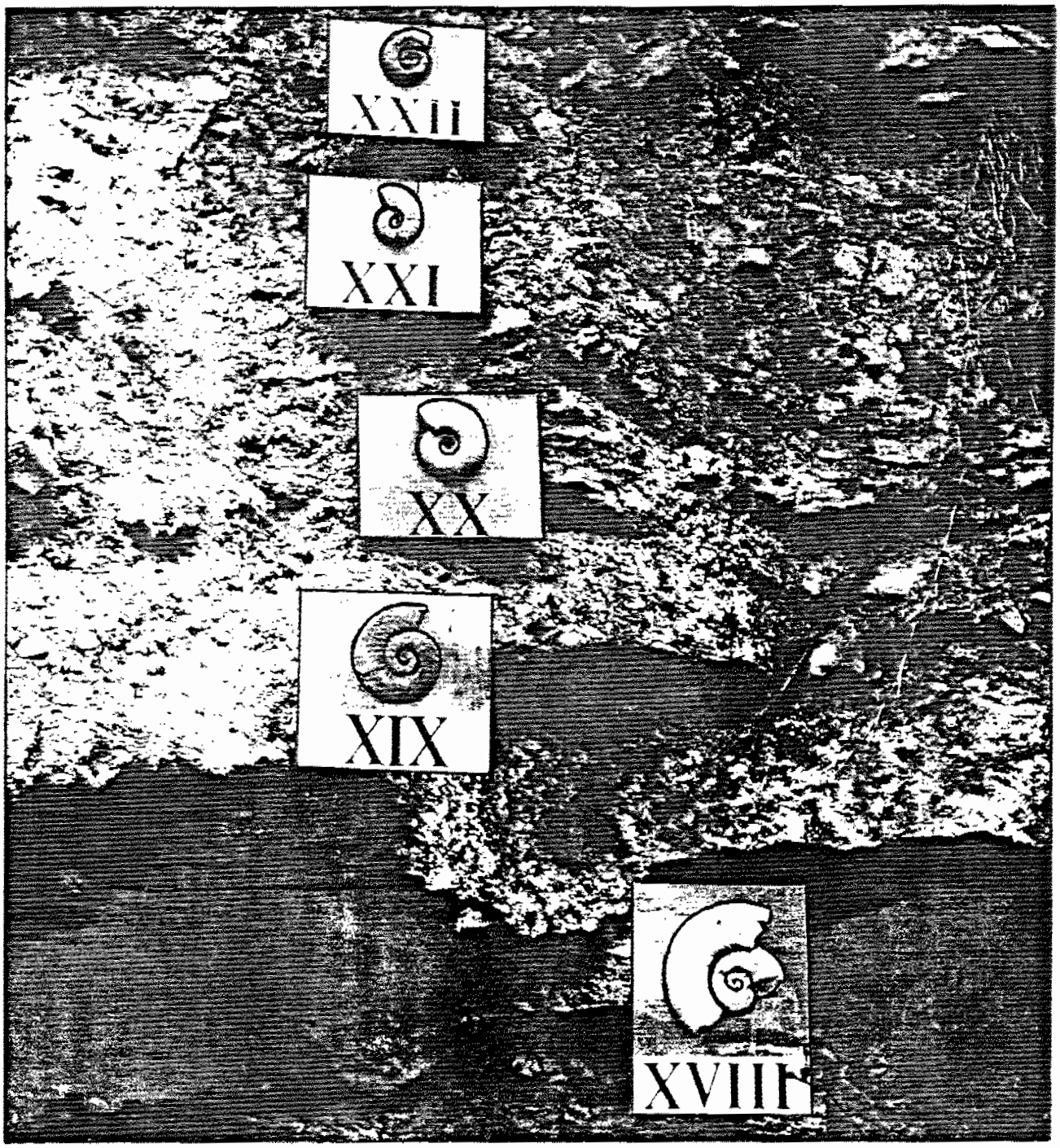
Pennyfather, K. 1975. Interpretive media and facilities. *Guide to Countryside Interpretation Pt 2.* HMSO. (Illustrates interpretive media and techniques.)

Wray, J.T. 1988. *How to produce a nature reserve leaflet.* Nature Conservancy Council.

Wray, J.T. 1990. *Guidelines for countryside signing by the NCC.* Nature Conservancy Council.

APPENDIX 2: Site interpretation at Thouars in central western France; extract from Earth Science Conservation No. 30; January 1992 (Page 1992)

The French Jurassic connection



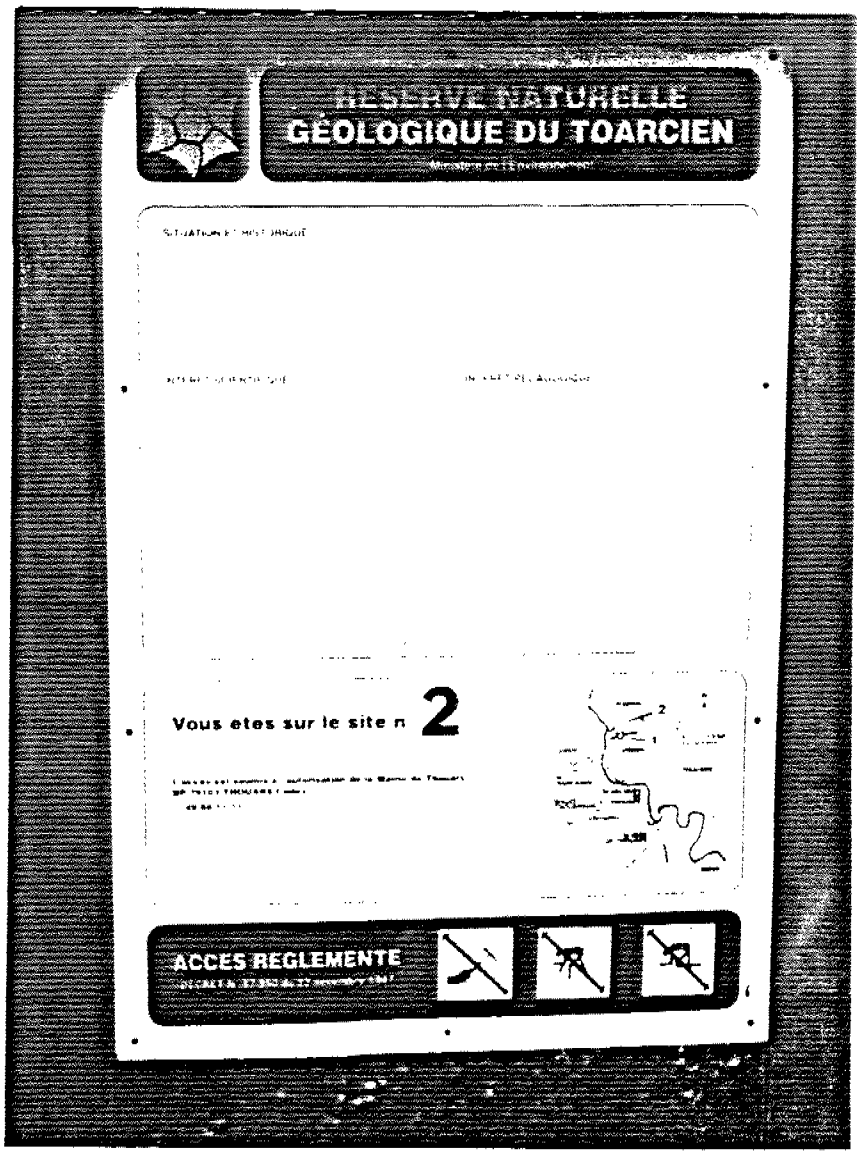
Important biostratigraphic horizons are marked by plaques and casts of key ammonites.

Kevin Page, English Nature

The Third International Symposium on Jurassic Stratigraphy, held in Poitiers (France) during September, provided research workers with a varied programme of thematic lectures, workshops and field visits.

Throughout the meeting, delegates expressed a common concern for the effective conservation of important stratigraphic localities. This was exemplified during a field visit to a site near the small town of Thouars, where the Toarcian Stage of the Jurassic System was first identified in the mid-18th Century. The site is protected as a geological reserve and provides a superb example of what can be achieved through the cooperation of professional geologists and local people.

The residents of Thouars have an intense pride in their reserve. It is seen as being an integral part of their local heritage, along-side the town's architecture and wine. This sense of pride is manifested in the management of the site. The local council carry out most of the day-to-day maintenance, as well as controlling access. This enthusiasm



One of the excellent site information boards at the geological reserve at Thouars.

has been fostered by the geological community, who have not only sought to explain the importance of the site to local people, but have also openly expressed appreciation for their support. Local involvement of this kind provides the ultimate solution to problems such as vandalism and fly-tipping, which are recurrent at many British localities.

The interpretation of the site's stratigraphic interest is excellent. A series of site information boards, pamphlets and guide books are designed to interact with the geological exposures. On the quarry faces, important horizons are marked by plaques, and casts of key fossils are mounted at the exact level from which they were originally obtained. This simple exercise conveys a complex body of information extremely well. It provides visitors with an understanding of the principals of biostratigraphy and of the evolutionary pattern of ammonites, each with its own distinctive form, during the Toarcian Stage.

The reserve at Thouars provides a first rate example of what can be achieved in increasing public awareness and understanding of geology, and involvement in geological conservation. Its success is based on two of the most important cornerstones of any conservation scheme - the support of local people and clear imaginative presentation of geological information.■