

# *Transinterpret*

*Nature*  
*Heritage*  
*History*



*interpret*

*fascinate*

*inspire*

## Creative presentations inspire locals and visitors

- Inviting brochures



- Engaging information panels



- Exciting guided tours



- Fascinating museums

- **Gemstones – rough or polished?**
- **Interpreters as bridge builders...**
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## Gemstones – rough or polished?

### Do you actually know how rich we are?

You can compare the treasures of nature, culture and history with precious stones.

Very often they're hidden or unobtrusive. To display their astonishing brilliance, we have to put them under a spotlight.

Rough gemstones need to be shaped and polished to reveal their special characteristics. The same is true of natural, historical and cultural features in any region. That way they will **capture the interest of local people and visitors.**

These jewels of heritage are especially valuable when we want **to develop tourism.** They give a region its unique qualities. They also strengthen awareness and understanding of the natural and historical environment, and they help people **to identify more strongly with their surroundings.**

### It's how you do it that counts!

The way these features are presented says a lot about the value a region puts on its natural and cultural heritage and the importance with which it regards its visitors.

Who hasn't been on a boring guided tour, or seen information panels with poorly explained content, or overcrowded displays cabinets in museums where no one has bothered to sort out the important from the unimportant?

It is usually the bits that are missing from any kind of presentation that are responsible for failing to create that vital spark of interest and enthusiasm.

The real challenge is to make visitors curious, to fascinate them with lively, but true, stories, to show them the places where events happened, encourage them to discover new places or to see old objects through new eyes. Meeting this challenge needs creativity coupled with knowledge – and know-how.

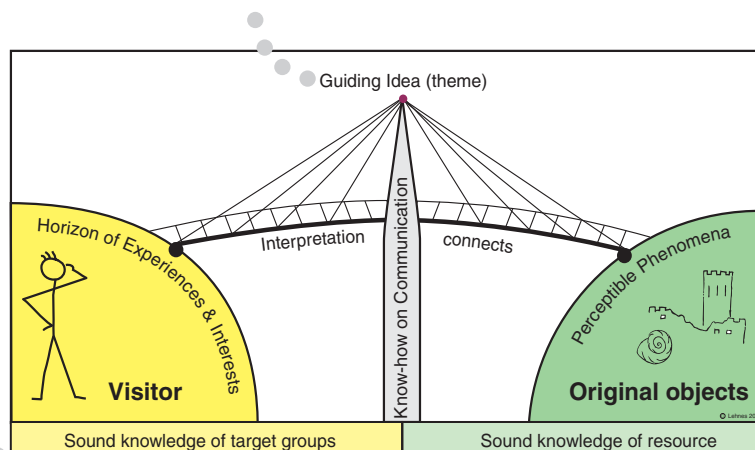
This skill, of presenting the wealth of natural and cultural heritage provocatively and memorably, is called interpretation. **Interpretation must always be oriented towards visitors' needs and expectations.**



## Interpreters as bridge builders ...

Successful interpretation bridges the gap of awareness and understanding between visitors and the natural environment or the physical evidence of our rich past. As in bridge building, a lot of cooperation is needed to achieve good interpretation.

The **interpretation experts** are like the designers of the bridge. Communication techniques and knowledge of the effective use of different media are their work tools. Like bridge designers, they have to combine technical know-how with creativity: from the available subject materials, interpreters shape the way history impacts on visitors. At the same time the interpreter, like the designer, must maintain an overview of all aspects of the project.



**The initiators** present the **goals** which they want the project to achieve. They know the context in which they are working and the financial parameters.

They must set priorities for their **target audience groups** and take into account their interests and foreknowledge – very much like the traffic planners who inform the bridge designer which road users are most likely to use the planned bridge.

**Technical experts** have the reliable **background knowledge** of the particular topic. It is this knowledge which provides the solid foundation upon which the interpretation – like a bridge – rests.

**Local experts** provide **detailed information** about the locality such as significant features, events, dates and key individuals, as well as anecdotal material and eyewitness reports. These are the building materials available to the interpreter to build the bridge.



## What is Transinterpret?

The Transinterpret scheme ensures that many projects in rural areas can access its accumulated knowledge and wealth of experience of visitor-oriented interpretation. Appealing and absorbing presentation of nature, culture, and history depends on well designed and presented interpretation.

### **Every village doesn't need to re-invent the wheel!**

They can share our experiences, avoid repeating old mistakes and come up with new ideas – that is at the heart of our work. The Transinterpret-network supports local project groups with their development of adventure and nature trails, historical themed trails, exhibitions and guided tours.

What is more, we are developing a series of practical recommendations and quality standards for the interpretation of natural and cultural heritage. These are based on

- International expert knowledge, based on research e.g. in the United States Parks,
- Extensive practical experience with projects in Europe,
- Feedback from project teams,
- Regular evaluation by visitors.

The Transinterpret quality standards are not static, they are being developed continually to accommodate new knowledge and the changing needs of visitors.

### **Not every recommendation needs to be followed**

Sometimes there are good reasons to do something differently and to go in a new direction. However, the recommendations and standards should be systematically and thoroughly considered during the planning of local projects, as they represent the professional and proven know-how of good interpretation!



## International - yet local

### The international network

Various rural areas worked together with universities during the development and test phase of Transinterpret from 2003 to 2008).

The EU initiative called LEADER+ (Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale) provided the framework for cooperation.

Partners from Germany, Italy, Greece and Switzerland took part under the overall control of the Southern Black Forest LEADER+ Action Group in developing a **common standard for quality management**.

**Local projects** form the basis of Transinterpret. It's all about supporting local initiatives which want to develop awareness and appreciation of their communities, countryside and history for visitors.



The first contact point for project initiatives is the LEADER+ **branch office**. It arranges liaison with the regional information centre and provides administrative support for Transinterpret.

The **regional information centres** provide individual consultation and practical help in implementation. They are familiar with the Transinterpret recommendations, manage the project locally and award the Transinterpret quality mark.

An international project always needs a **central coordination centre**. The Internet provides remote regions with the opportunity to reach the Transinterpret portal: **[www.transinterpret.net](http://www.transinterpret.net)**

The Transinterpret team in Freiburg carries out the coordination of the network, further development of practical recommendations and standards and training of the information centres. The connection with the university allows a close interaction with practical research.



## Aha! A quality experience!

Local people who are proud of their own region, and satisfied visitors who have developed an emotional affinity with their holiday destinations, are the best advertisements for a region's heritage. Poorly presented natural and cultural sites have the opposite effect. It follows, therefore, that tourist attractions which do offer visitors dependable quality must be easily recognised.

### Visible effects

Local attractions, which meet the Transinterpret quality standards receive the Transinterpret quality mark. In this way visitors can see at a glance that a worthwhile activity awaits them.

## *Transinterpret 2007*

### Looking for a place to visit?

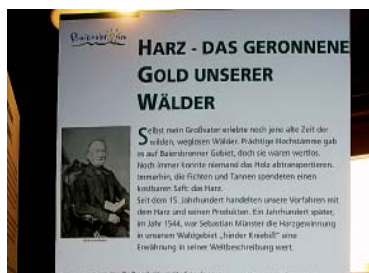
In addition, Transinterpret will list all qualified attractions as worthwhile places to visit on the Internet portal.

This helps smaller initiatives to reach bigger markets and shows potential visitors where they can enjoy what is really interesting about nature, culture and history in the region of their choice.

Attractions with the Transinterpret quality mark are exciting places for visitors to discover and enjoy.



## Project example: Glasmännle hut



### Then

The Glasmännlehütte provides hikers with a new place for meals and refreshments above Baiersbronn. The LEADER+ proposal planned an exhibition with eight information panels but without any interactive elements or exhibits. The small exhibition helps visitors to have a more satisfying experience in the Baiersbronn woods and to learn more about them.

### Transinterpret's role

The first challenge was to develop a theme-based concept to describe the woods, drawn from knowledge of the many woodland nature trails. The staff from the Baiersbronn tourist office who were involved with the project received support with research.

To give the exhibition some life, Transinterpret suggested using a famous historical figure as a guide through the exhibition. Johannes Gaiser, the Baiersbronn council scribe, was chosen because of his close connection with the area and its history. He lived during the period of Baiersbronn's involvement in the international timber trade in the 18th century, as well as the crisis which followed and which he recorded in his chronicle. The Transinterpret support group undertook to complete the writing of the exhibition text as well as giving assistance with its theme-based structure.

### Now

The Glasmännlehütte was opened in April 2006 and is part of the LEADER+ masterplan for mountain huts.

Within this lead project, a 'sister hut', Panoramastüble in Schwarzenberg, was opened in July 2007. Transinterpret also took part in the development of three information panels here, which were devoted to the themes of agricultural change and the local nomadic shepherds.



## Project example: Paths of tranquillity



### Then

As well as for the popular Kocher-Jagst cycleway, the middle Jagst valley is noted for its peaceful side valleys and lesser known treasures of nature and religious culture. The four districts of Mulfingen, Dörzbach, Krautheim, and Schöntal wanted to provide a collective interpretation of this tranquil but interesting place to visitors to Hohenlohe.

### Transinterpret's role

The project, Paths of tranquillity, was a special challenge for Transinterpret because of the size of the project area and the number of planned locations. The project management began with inspections of the terrain and intensive workshops with all participating communities. The next step was to develop a theme-based framework for the interpretation which would relate to the target audience groups. To do this, suitable locations had to be chosen and the amount of signposting optimised. It became clear, however, that the objectives of the individual communities would first have to be clarified and then agreed with the help of Transinterpret.

The layout of the panels to a standard pattern and the editing of text was done by an graphics practice, which implemented Transinterpret's recommendations well. The planning assistance from the project team for the choice of locations also helped at this stage. Based on structured descriptions, it was clear very quickly which key information should be included.

To bring its work to a close, Transinterpret, unusually, reworked some of the draft texts prepared by the graphic practice. By having practical examples, they could implement the overall recommendations with greater confidence.

### Now

The four paths of tranquillity can be explored by bike or on foot with the help of an information leaflet.

Since the opening in May 2006, detailed information on the tracks can be found at [www.pfade-der-stille.de](http://www.pfade-der-stille.de)

Visitor surveys have shown that the new interpretation has been well received.



## Project example: Bread and Ham Trails



### Then

Living conditions for mountain farmers in the southern Black Forest have changed considerably since the days when they had to be almost completely self-sufficient. Today the farmer is part of the EU agricultural market. The initiator of the Bread and Ham Trails project was the LEADER+ Action Group; they wanted to draw attention to typical products of the region with the two themed trails in Elzach-Yach and Höchenschwand. Apart from local people, target groups were day-trippers and holidaymakers in particular.

### Transinterpret's role

Transinterpret supported the teams with the theme-based concept, texts and the development of a standardised layout.

The active tradition of bread-baking on farms in the valley forms the central theme along the Bread Trail. Experts from Landsiedlung GmbH led discussions with farm owners together with Transinterpret. Along the way, interesting events from everyday life in the past can be experienced presented on the interpretive panels. The regular baking days of the farms provide a tasty opportunity for visitors to relive the old days.

In the partner Ham Trail project, everything revolves around the famous Black Forest ham. Transinterpret supported the project management and took over the drafting and finishing of text.

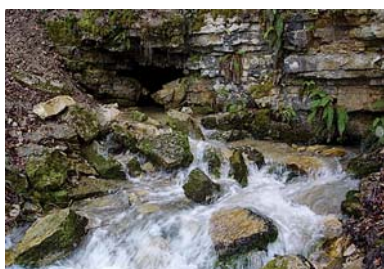
### Now

The Bread Trail opened in May 2006; the Ham Trail opened in July 2006.

The Bread Trail recorded its first success just a few months after opening. Fascinated visitors and satisfied farmers reflect the successful teamwork which achieved the goal of strengthening regional tourism marketing.



## Project example: Erdmann's Trails Hasel & Wehr



### Then

People have known for a long time about Erdmann's cave, a limestone cave near Hasel in the southern Black Forest.

In particular, school classes and families with children enjoy visiting the cave. However, the equally-interesting geological formations in the region around Hasel and Wehr were hardly noticed. To put this right, two themed trails were proposed to bring visitors closer to these landscapes shaped by the ice age and karstic processes. They were also to encourage the short-term visitor to stay longer and come again.

### Transinterpret's role

The Transinterpret team were contracted by the Hasel district to undertake an analysis of strengths and weaknesses in the existing information panels.

The texts, written on a voluntary basis by geologists, offered an highly specialised scientific background. However, in order to make the trails more attractive for a recreational public with no geological background, a common central theme had to be developed.

A graphic designer assisted in creating a historical figure for the information panels. An ancient local character, Erdmann, describes many stories about the dramatic changes to his home. Children and adults can read about the astonishing traces of millions of years of landscape history.

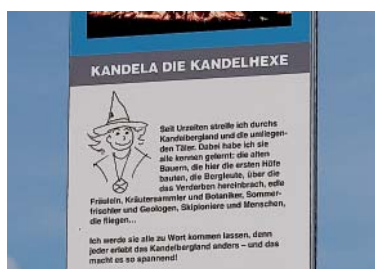
### Now

Erdmann's Trail was opened in 2006. More information can be found on the homepage at [www.erdmannsreich.de](http://www.erdmannsreich.de). The lively Erdmann's realm is planned to be used as a classroom in the future. Development of classroom material is planned in the next promotional phase.

*The Erdmann's Trails Hasel and Wehr are supported by the Naturpark Südschwarzwald (Southern Black Forest Nature Park). Here, the transferability of Transinterpret practical recommendations and quality standards was successfully tested.*



## Project example: Interpretation strategy for Kandel



### Then

Although the Kandel summit is easily accessible by car and bus, the tourist facilities were less than satisfactory. Interesting information about the mountain and surroundings was absent and visitors' lengths of stay were rather short. For this reason, the adjacent districts, together with the newly founded association, Zukunft Kandel e.V. (Future Kandel), instituted measures to improve the attractiveness of the Kandel region.

### Transinterpret's role

Experience-oriented visitor information was created for the Kandel-Platte-Zwribach region with the support from the Naturpark Südschwarzwald. The Transinterpret team was part into the planning process from the beginning and, until October 2006, developed the overall layout. It contained several main themes under the title of Kandel – Mountain of Power.

At the same time, it was very clear that the Kandel highlands had the potential to attract foreign tourists. In place of the usual information panels, which looked uninviting with their long text in three languages, a three-sided slender pillar was developed. The layout is attractive with one side for each language – English, German, and French.

Interpretation areas will replace the existing paths: visitors can put together their own routes and, depending on the route, always discover something new. In places where there is something interesting to discover, Kandela, the friendly witch, created by researchers and locals together, talks about the animals and plants.

### Now

The first pillars and the dedicated website ([www.der-kandel.de](http://www.der-kandel.de)) provide information about the current state of the project. An information leaflet produced in spring 2007 encourages people and regional businesses to participate actively so that the theme-based pillars could be installed at the end of 2007. The implementation of the overall project will continue for several years.



## Project example: Pocket Ranger



### Then

Interpretation of the natural and cultural heritage takes place not only with the help of well-tested media as guided tours, information panels and brochures but also with pocket-sized computers which are now available as an information medium and orientation assistant. Personal digital assistants (PDA) possess small screens and can receive global positioning system (GPS) satellite data in order to determine an exact location.

### Transinterpret's role

Before proceeding with a concrete plan, a feasibility study to introduce a mobile multimedia tourist information and location system (MILES) was undertaken to sound out the opportunities for the system's use. In addition to technical questions, the quality of the natural history information needed to be checked against Transinterpret quality standards. For this, new recommendations needed to be developed as only a very small screen was available for this medium. On the other hand, PDAs offer completely new interpretation mechanisms; for example, computer animation, video and sound clips can be played outdoors.

### Now

The study was presented in 2005. Following this, the Feldberg District instigated the *Pocket Ranger* project. Since August 2007, hikers have been able to obtain the small computers from the Haus der Natur (Nature House) at Feldberg and watch humorous short films at different locations along the 12km Feldberg summit track. The Feldberg ranger, as the main character in the films, tells interesting stories and gives background information about the sites nearby. Design and creation of the film lay in the hands of a professional film director.

Further information in the Internet at:

[www.feldberg-steig.de/fst/hosentaschen\\_ranger](http://www.feldberg-steig.de/fst/hosentaschen_ranger)



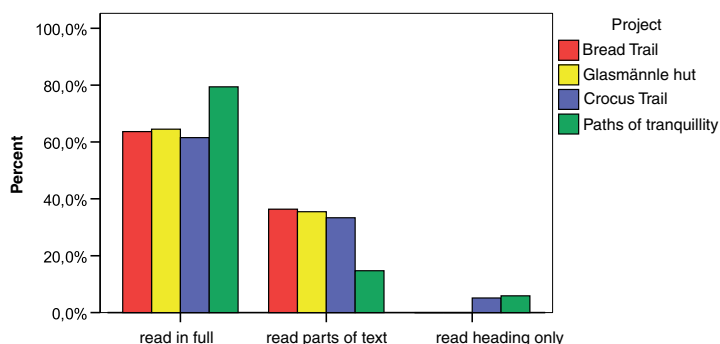
## What do the visitors say?

A fundamental purpose of Transinterpret is the continuous development of practical recommendations and the creation of common quality standards for interpretation. This means putting the interests of visitors first.

### We have undertaken surveys

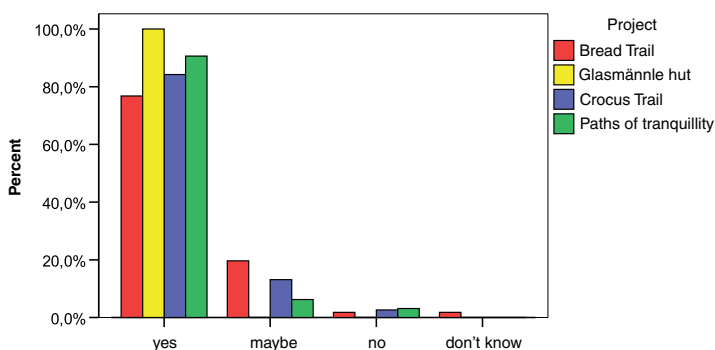
Within our overall framework of continuous evaluation, visitors are asked about their levels of satisfaction with the interpretation-based attractions they have visited. All attractions chosen had Transinterpret quality marks. The first results can be seen for themselves.

The common assumption that visitors read nothing was disproved. From the surveyed attractions with Transinterpret quality marks, we learned that more than 60% of the people questioned answered that they read the information panel text in full (around 200 words each). Almost all others read at least a few parts of text.



The surveys thus proved that meeting the quality standards in an increasing readiness among visitors to read interpretive panels.

Even when all recommendations were not successfully implemented, the overwhelming majority of those surveyed agreed they would recommend the attraction to others.



## What happens next?

Up until now, the results for Transinterpret are encouraging but they have also revealed difficulties which still need to be resolved:

- Professional advice is required before applying for financial assistance. This is because, once an application is approved, the basic parameters of the project such as budget, media choice, and themes are fixed.
- Writing text, which is interesting for visitors, is too onerous for most project teams. This is not surprising since hardly anyone is trained in the necessary skills.
- The time and effort required by the project is often underestimated.

What this means for the future is that **interpreters and interpretive writers** will need to be trained because they, as graphic designers currently do, support the project team as **service providers** and should be able to take over the more difficult tasks.

### Keeping going

Although the Transinterpret project will be concluded in the LEADER+ partner districts during 2008, what has been achieved needs to be nurtured and expanded. Permanent institutions are needed for this.

Such a European organisation is being developed with the founding of **Interpret Europe**. Its main task is, with the help of professional interpretation, to improve visitors' and local people's experience of the natural and cultural diversity of Europe.

Interpret Europe will allow the exchange of know-how and experience among all those concerned with the quality of interpretation of natural and cultural treasures. Transinterpret quality management will play a leading role in this as will holding conferences and issuing publications.

For more about Interpret Europe go to the Internet: **[www.interpret-europe.net](http://www.interpret-europe.net)**



## Imprint - or... ...successful cooperation

### Overall control and there from the beginning:

LEADER-Action group Southern Black Forest  
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Tel.: 07751-86 26 09  
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The following LEADER action groups participated in the cooperation: Northern Black Forest, Hohenlohe-Tauber, Appennino Genovese (Italy), Epirus, Kastoria, Kozani, Xanthi, Drama, Rhodopi, Olympia, Trichonida und Aitolia (all Greece) as well as the Brig-Aletsch region (RegioPlus Switzerland).

### Complete project management, specialist coordination and regional information centre for Baden-Württemberg:

Lehnes Landscape Interpretation in cooperation with the Institut für Physische Geographie der Universität Freiburg (Institute for Physical Geography, University of Freiburg).  
Contact: Patrick Lehnes, Transinterpret, c/o IPG  
79085 Freiburg  
Tel.: 0761-203-3595  
E-Mail: p.mail@transinterpret.net

### Partner Information centres:

- GAL Appennino Genovese, Genua
- IRIS Laboratory, University of the Aegean, Chios
- Fernfachhochschule der Schweiz, (Technical College of Switzerland), Brig

The Technical College of Switzerland was responsible for the **technical implementation** of the Transinterpret databank with Internet interface:

- The Ministry for Nutrition and Rural Areas in Baden-Württemberg
- The Swiss RegioPlus-Programme
- The Swiss Canton Wallis
- The Greek agricultural ministry
- The administrative districts of the participating LEADER+ regions

**Design and text of this project information folder:** Patrick Lehnes (Lehnes Landscape Interpretation) and Hannah Jahn (IPG, University Freiburg), Freiburg 2007.

