

A Tale of Two Heritage Areas: Making Sense of the Past to Shape the Future

Claire Goold Shields, National Park Service, 1849 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20240

“We need, if we are to make any sense of the past, both to understand the significance of the physical remains and to place them in a social context.... Such awareness is necessary if the past is to be seen as having any relevance to the present and the future” (Burton 1983, 93).

THE HERITAGE AREA IDEAL PROVIDES THE MODEL FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT in protected landscapes. This paper compares the heritage preservation approach taken in two regions—the Lackawanna Heritage Valley in Pennsylvania, USA, and the former “HERIAN” project in Wales, UK—both of which are industrial heritage areas.

While traditionally heritage has been associated with castles, cathedrals, and similar examples of high culture, the second half of the twentieth century saw a tremendous expansion of what is considered a heritage resource (Alfrey and Putnam 1992). This has led to recognition of the importance of industrial heritage, which deals specifically with the buildings and artifacts of industry inherited from previous generations.

The greatest number of designated heritage areas is found in European countries where the concept dates back to the 1960s (Frenchman 2004). Within the USA, the heritage area movement is relatively young as it was only in 1984 that the first national heritage area (NHA), the Illinois and Michigan Canal Corridor, was designated. NHAs are nationally distinctive areas that have been shaped by human activity. They are designated because of their importance both physically, and in the traditions that exist within them (NPS 2008). They rely on a cooperative approach to achieve both conservation and economic growth. The nature and size of heritage areas varies, as each project involves areas of different sizes and historical themes, and is managed by partnership bodies that have no control over land use. Designated heritage areas are lived-in landscapes.

HERIAN

In 2003, the HERIAN project was launched with to develop a coordinated approach to heritage development in industrial South Wales. In the Welsh language “HERIAN” means “to challenge” and it is also the acronym for “Heritage in Action.” The total area covered by HERIAN was ap-

Citation: Weber, Samantha, ed. 2016. *Engagement, Education, and Expectations—The Future of Parks and Protected Areas: Proceedings of the 2015 George Wright Society Conference on Parks, Protected Areas, and Cultural Sites.*

Hancock, Michigan: George Wright Society.

© 2016 George Wright Society. All rights reserved. Please direct all permission requests to info@georgewright.org.

proximately 1500 square miles, with a population of 1.8 million, and included some of the richest and poorest communities in Wales (Figure 1). The area is predominantly English speaking, but Welsh is the first language of the majority of the population in the westernmost areas.

South East Wales had been one of the most heavily industrialized areas of Britain and Wales played a leading role in the formative years of the Industrial Revolution. In 1851, the UK census showed for the first time that more people in Wales made their living from industrial labor than from agriculture, suggesting that Wales had become the world’s first industrial nation (PLB 2003).

The mid-twentieth century saw a steady decline in heavy industry. Areas that were focused on heavy industries such as coal and steel were particularly hard hit. With the heavy industries gone, South East Wales was left with a legacy of industrial decline but this legacy had also left a rich industrial history and a unique society. Or, as the former First Minister of Wales, Rhodri Morgan described it, “the Taff [River] from Merthyr to Cardiff is the Grand Canyon of the Industrial Revolution” (HERIAN 2003).

The main impetus behind the HERIAN initiative was the recognition in 2000 of the Blaenafon

Industrial Landscape as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This recognition was set against a background of piecemeal development of industrial heritage tourism sites in the region. The Wales Tourist Board commissioned consultants to explore how best to capitalize on the unique heritage of South Wales. The resulting report recommended establishing a partnership for industrial heritage tourism in the South Wales Valleys. In 2003, a senior director from the Wales Tourist Board was approved to oversee the new initiative, and HERIAN was officially launched.

The original report which established the need for HERIAN recognized that heritage tourism initiatives had been previously tried in Wales and other regions of Britain and had failed. It was therefore stressed that while tourism would be a critical part of

the new heritage area, it would not be at the center of it. Any new initiative needed to ensure that industrial heritage was its primary focus, with tourism being one of five intrinsically linked objectives, the others being education, regeneration and economic development, social inclusion, and heritage conservation.

The initiative had a very small management team: a project director and a supporting office administrator. Other freelance consultants were brought in when needed to help coordinate partner activities. To avoid duplication of existing resources or activities, the team primarily acted as facilitators and enablers.

Lackawanna Heritage Valley

In 1991, the Lackawanna Heritage Valley was named the first state heritage park in Pennsylvania (Figure 2). This was followed in 2000 by recognition on a national level. The Lackawanna Heritage Valley NHA stretches for 40 miles, and encompasses the watershed of the Lackawanna River in Wayne, Susquehanna, Lackawanna, and Luzerne counties. Its history mirrors that of many other early industrialized regions throughout the world, including the South Wales valleys. In the early nineteenth century the area was sparsely populated pasture land, but within several years grew to be one of the great industrial districts on the continent. Towards the second half of the twentieth century, the coal industry began its steady decline. As mines closed, many thousands

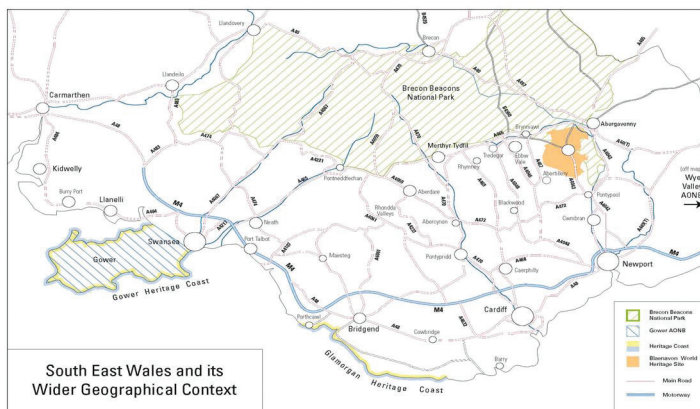


Figure 1. Map of the area covered by the HERIAN heritage initiative in South East Wales.

of jobs were lost, forcing families to leave the area in search of alternative employment. For a number of decades, the population of the region steadily eroded.

The designation of the Lackawanna Heritage Valley was ultimately the culmination of a number of converging initiatives, including the designation in 1986 of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western rail yard, and its collection of steam locomotives in Scranton, as Steamtown National Historic Site, a unit of the National Park Service (NPS). The preparation of a management plan for Steamtown stimulated local interest in linking together other significant historic resources in the area. The area is managed by a county municipal authority, and the Lackawanna County Commissioners appointed a board of directors. One advantage of this arrangement is that the authority can qualify for certain government funds which are not available to non-profit organizations. The Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority is involved both directly and indirectly in a range of activities within the region. These initiatives vary from bricks-and-mortar work to programming and special events. In recent years, the development of the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail has been a priority.



Figure 2. Map of the Lackawanna Heritage Valley.

Management plans

Both initiatives are underpinned by comprehensive foundation documents. All national heritage areas in the USA are required to produce a management plan within three years of designation. Therefore, in 2004 the Lackawanna Heritage Valley Management Action Plan and Environmental Impact Statement was published.

One of HERIAN's first actions was to commission a regional interpretive action plan. This document provides guidance and a non-prescriptive strategic framework for future regional and local interpretation and access initiatives. At the time of its publication (March 2003), the plan set out a framework for implementation of projects over the next ten or more years.

Funding

In the 2007–2008 fiscal year, HERIAN's core funding was £143,000 (approximately \$236,000). The majority of the core funding was provided by Visit Wales (formerly the Wales Tourist Board). Thirteen local authorities (local government) in South Wales were also partners, alongside the Brecon Beacons National Park, a number of statutory agencies, and a number of voluntary bodies. The financial contributions of the funding partners were relatively small. The strength of this approach was to generate and sustain partnership commitment to the initiative, and combining small amounts of funding into a more substantial pot of money. The major weaknesses with this funding structure were that in many cases no future guarantee of funding could be given, the annual task of chasing small amounts of financial support was time consuming, and the structure also worked against longer-term planning (Visit Wales 2008).

Most national heritage areas have an initial 15-year lifespan, and are funded as part of the budget appropriated for the NPS. As the end of the 15-year period approaches, the heritage area is subject to a review which determines if it should be reauthorized by Congress. The Lackawanna Heritage Valley's initial designating legislation expired in 2012, and what followed was a roller-coaster funding ride as its funding was threatened, subject to Congressional brinkmanship, and often approved at the very last minute. Finally, in December 2014, the Lackawanna Heritage Valley National Heritage Authority was among four national heritage areas reauthorized through 2021 by the U.S. Senate through the National Defense Authorization Act.

Community engagement

Although HERIAN and the Lackawanna Heritage Valley operate in isolation of one another, their goals were remarkably similar, a reflection of their similar legacies of industrial decline and the associated challenges that both regions face. Both strive to improve the visitor experience and use tourism as an economic generator, but at the same time their priority is to make their regions better places for the residents, and that it is only through the achievement of this goal that tourism benefits will accrue.

In the USA, one of the principles of the national heritage areas is that they should be “community centered initiatives that connect local citizens to the preservation and planning process” (NPS 2008). Heritage areas vary considerably both by size and historical theme. The Lackawanna Heritage Valley is one of the smallest, covering an area of 350 square miles with a population of 253,000. In contrast, the largest is the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area which covers the entire state of Tennessee, an area of 41,217 square miles with a population of 6.2 million. It is highly questionable whether significant community engagement is possible on such a scale. Indeed, it has been suggested that some regions are too large for meaningful community engagement, and that several heritage areas simply do not want to deal with the challenges that arise by involving citizens in the planning process, and do not have the skills “to deal with the competing interests and criticism that residents often provide” (Daly 2003, 6).

The Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority seeks to engage residents through festivals, events, and grant funding, and consults “community leaders” regarding future policy. The original management plan evolved from extensive community engagement with hundreds of people attending vision workshops and strategy sessions. In striving to achieve its objectives, HERIAN put communities at the heart of all its activities. It is widely recognized that support from the local population is critical to the success of industrial heritage initiatives, and “to provide both economic and cultural benefits to community, planners need to create an atmosphere in which residents can actively participate in caring for and protecting their industrial heritage, as well as an arena to share their accomplishments” (Xie 2006, 1328).

The model of community engagement developed by HERIAN was judged to be its key success (Visit Wales 2008). This aspect of HERIAN’s work was delivered through a community interpretation toolkit and associated training which gave communities the tools to shape their own narrative and develop their own local interpretation plan (Figure 3). The Green Badge Guides, where local people are trained to tell the story of their heritage and become accredited guides, was also judged to be one of the most effective means of telling the story of industrial south Wales.

Conclusions

As the heritage area movement begins to mature in the USA, evidence is starting to emerge for successful approaches, particularly the use of federal funds to leverage additional funding. It was never the intention of Congress or the NPS to provide national heritage areas with permanent federal funding. However, given the critical role it plays in allowing the areas to leverage other sources of funding, it is doubtful whether they could survive the withdrawal of federal funding. The Lackawanna Heritage Valley provides an example of what can be achieved with long-term planning and seed funding.

Although very similar to the structure in the USA and initiatives throughout Europe, the launch of HERIAN was innovative for Wales. The HERIAN area was four times the size of the Lackawanna Heritage Valley but operated



Figure 3. The Community Interpretation toolkit and associated training takes a community through the entire process of developing their own local interpretation plan (LIP), defining and interpreting their own heritage stories.

with fewer staff and a smaller administrative budget. In a survey of partners, carried out by Visit Wales (2008), it was generally accepted that the initiative had been under-resourced. Nevertheless, it was set up on a solid strategic foundation with a realistic expectation that it would take at least ten years for substantive outcomes to be realized. Despite this, HERIAN was never given a chance to fully deliver on its goals, with its funding removed just five years after its launch. HERIAN, as a company, ceased trading at the end of March 2009.

Within the USA, the management authorities that run NHAs gain strength from their independent status, allowing them to forge partnerships with a range of organizations. Similarly, HERIAN's management structure was a major strength but that ultimately became its major weakness. As a cross-cutting body working across institutional remits, it could not find a sponsor to advocate for it. HERIAN was not able to shake off the perception that it was primarily a tourism initiative, which is in part understandable, given that it was tourism development needs that had first inspired its creation. Given this perception, once Visit Wales decided that it was unable to continue funding the initiative, HERIAN no longer had a funding source or a home.

In conclusion, through a review of heritage area literature and the case study comparison of HERIAN and the Lackawanna Heritage Valley, it has been possible to identify certain critical criteria for a heritage area to be truly successful:

- a strong management plan that has been put together through extensive *consultation* and has the support of the local *community*;
- an *independent* management authority or organization;
- a central funding source with guaranteed funding for a minimum of *ten years*;
- the ability of the managing authority to form and sustain *partnerships*; and
- a manageable geographical area that allows for ongoing, *meaningful* community engagement.

Looking past the debate over whether, in the long term, a focus on heritage can revitalize previously neglected regions, there is no doubting the effect initiatives such as HERIAN and the Lackawanna Heritage Valley can have on renewing the civic pride and sense of place within their communities. Many parts of industrial South Wales and Lackawanna County suffered neglect and a lack of investment for many years. This decline cannot be turned around overnight, and if heritage areas are to succeed they must be given the time they need to become established and form both the external and community partnerships that they are so dependent on.

References

- Alfrey, J., and T. Putnam. 1992. *The Industrial Heritage: Managing Resources and Uses*. London: Routledge.
- Burton, A. 1983. *Our Industrial Past*. London: George Philip.
- Daly, J. 2003. Heritage areas: Connecting people to their place and history. *Forum Journal* 17(4):5–12.
- Frenchman, D. 2004. International examples of the United States heritage area concept. Unpublished report.
- HERIAN. 2003. Launch, a video by HERIAN. www.herian.org.
- — —. 2006. Local interpretation plans: A tool kit to help communities explore local heritage. www.gka.org.uk/herian/.
- NPS [National Park Service]. 2008. National Heritage Areas. www.nps.gov/heritageareas/.
- PLB Projects Ltd. 2003. *An Interpretive Plan for the South Wales Industrial Heritage Initiative*. North Yorkshire, UK: PLB Projects Ltd. www.gka.org.uk/herian/.

- Visit Wales. 2008. *HERIAN: Heritage in Action Partnership: Review 2008*. Cardiff: Visit Wales.
- Xie, P.F. 2006. Developing industrial heritage tourism: A case study of the proposed Jeep museum in Toledo, Ohio. *Tourism Management* 27(6):1321–1330. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2005.06.010.