

ORCHARDS: EVENTS AND INTERPRETATION

These notes are for workshops at Killerton and Polesdon Lacey. They are accompanied by a power point presentation with photographs.

What does the orchard offer as an event venue?

The good news is that if you have an orchard, you are already onto a winner, as they are magical places just to be - I expect you know this already.

Precisely because they are magical, this can mean that 'less is more' in terms of on-site interpretation. It is a pity to clutter up a beautiful spot with interpretation panels and too many signs. There are, however, many subtler forms of interpretation – which I will mention later. Firstly, orchards are great venues for events.

EVENTS

If you have a budget for events, it is a good idea to look at the budget as a whole, as one event may subsidise another.

Here is a list of some of the kind of events that are suitable for an orchard:

Apple Day, 21st October or thereabouts

There is also now a Damson Day in Cumbria, a Plum Day in Worcestershire and Pear Days in Yorkshire and Gloucestershire. Quince and Medlar days are still to come.

Wassailing, Traditionally on 17th January, Old Twelfth Night - or between Christmas and then.

Blossom Festivals – Full Bloom – this year in Cumbria and Cornwall – Kate Merry will be speaking about this. The Japanese call their blossom festivals 'Hanami' – meaning 'flower viewing' – mostly of cherry and plum blossoms.

May Day, maypole dancing, Mummers' plays, Morris dancing.

Chutfest – Barrington Court do this. Rachel Brewer can tell us more...

Tree Dressing – first full week in December – Common Ground have a Tree Dressing poster, which has lots of ideas for things to dress the tree – they encourage a cross-cultural celebration. See their website.

Workshops: Planting, Pruning, Grafting, Picking, Juicing.

Plays, concerts, yoga and meditation, story telling, trails, 'Heathen Harvest' supper...

Outdoor Wildlife Classroom with local schools – also The Big Draw (see its website).

Night walks, wildlife watching events.

Picnics.

What makes a great event?

Atmosphere. Atmosphere is everything. If a great atmosphere is created then if a few things don't go according to plan – visitors are more likely to go with the flow.

A good atmosphere is often created by the incidentals – rather than the main attractions. For instance, a great welcome from staff and volunteers, a sense of entering a special place – created by decorations or an archway, music and street theatre.

I will start with the classic events, Apple Day and Wassailing and then we can go onto to talk about other forms of interpretation.

APPLE DAY activities

Identification of varieties by experts.

Juicing – visitors can bring their windfall apples for juicing.

Apple tasting.

Educational, campaigning stalls.

Games – apple bobbing, apple bowling, apple shy (knock apple off head of a scarecrow), apple orienteering – find hidden apples, a golden apple hunt, longest peel – more ideas can be found in Common Ground's 'Apple Games and Customs' book.

Farmers' Market, Rural Craft stalls, observation bee hive, rescue owls, heavy horses, vintage tractors, scything groups...

For sale: apple trees, apples, juice, cider, and apple-related cakes, jams, jellies, pies and ice-cream (crab apple ice-cream is very good according to Snowhill Manor).

Gardening questions to experts.

Theatre, for instance, *Cider with Roadies* is a touring theatre group, the Common Players, who travel with a play, an apple press and an educator who gives advice on growing. www.commonplayers.org.uk

Children's crafts and activities - Cotehele swears by Toilet Roll Bee making...

Wildlife walks.

Alfresco cookery demonstrations – with every conceivable way to cook an apple.

In the café/tea shop/restaurant: apples in everything – pork and apple sausages, apple chutneys, apple scones, crab apple ice-cream...

Live music, youth bands – there is often a good acoustic in orchards.

Dancing – Morris and other.

Apple Day at Acorn Bank, Cumbria

The first Apple Day at Acorn Bank was in 1994 and attracted 300 people and now 2,400 people visit. It has become like an agricultural show day with many of the suggested activities above taking place.

Prior to Apple Day, volunteers pick apples that are graded and stored – for sale, for juicing and for tasting.

Quince: their quince cheese, jelly and marmalade all sell very well.

Medlars: these are taken by a local persona and sold back as medlar jam.

Damsons: all taken by the tearoom for damson ketchup, chutney and crumble.

Crab Apple: they are experimenting with crab apple 'verjus' (usually made from unripe grapes) – which they are using instead of lemon juice in salad dressings – and they say it is delicious. (Verjus is £12 a bottle in their local deli...)

Pears: they are aiming to produce their own Perry – Dyrham Park produces its own perry and has a Pear Day. Dyrham uses the perry in sausages and cakes as well. (Sales of perry and cider in Britain have doubled in the last four years – the fastest-growing drinks category in the UK.)

Apple Day at Snowhill Manor, Gloucestershire

Linda Roberts, the Gardener-in-Charge, collects apples from around Gloucestershire and beyond in the month before Apple Day – they now display 506 varieties, 44 of which are grown at Snowhill. In its 10th year – now 1,700 visitors.

WASSAILING

After dark ceremony to bless the orchard and encourage a good crop - from 'waes haeil' – Anglo Saxon 'to be healthy'.

Gather round the most prolific tree, pour cider on its roots and dip branches in cider.

Cider soaked toast or cake placed in branches for robins, the guardian spirits of the orchard.

Bonfires – Lewes Bonfire Society give advice on how to make safe flaming torches.

'Holler' at the end of the wassail song – make a racket with all the instruments to drive away 'Old Nick', the Devil, and welcome the good spirits in...

Approach a local band to compose the music and lyrics to a wassail especially for your orchard - Cotehele has its own Wassailing Song, written by a local musician.

Cotehele Wassail

This has been going for about five years – six people turned up the first one and now over 250 come. They bless the youngest and oldest tree and hold it on the weekend closest to Winter Solstice. They ask visitors to dress up and bring something to make a noise with – for the holler – an instrument or other. Rick Stein came last year with a saucepan and wooden spoon.

INTERPRETATION

Trails – based on wildlife - collection or observation. For instance, a Senses Trail – a trail around the orchard where children find several features which respond to each of the senses – touch of bark, smell of blossom and so on. Stickers can be given to the parents to place by each sense once it's found.

Trails within the property and beyond – Apple Trail, Cider Trail, Blossom Trail – for foot, cycle, car.

Audio trails – more on these below.

If you would like longer written information in the orchard, one unobtrusive method is to incorporate information boards into seating. The information can be placed in shelves underneath a bench - see 'The Glendurgan Bench'. The content on the boards can be updated seasonally.

Interpretation panels – in an unobtrusive site.

Signs hanging from trees – these can be hung up just for special events. The National Fruit Collection website has reliable facts and figures and photos of fruit.

Signs for designated 'Scrup Me' trees.

Signs explaining that windfall cider apples are deliberately left on the ground to ripen – Barrington Court does this – in response to visitors thinking it was a sign of neglect.

Visitor Tips Book – placed in an appropriate location – visitors can be encouraged to jot down tips on growing fruit and tasty varieties they have discovered.

Menu in café or restaurant uses the variety name in fruit dishes, such as Beauty of Bath apple pie – perhaps with added information about the apple.

Calm the Queue in the café – give tasters of fruit chutneys/jams that are for sale.

Exhibitions – perhaps in the café - photographs of the orchard and orchard people – old and current. Photographs of plot to plate stories of fruit, from blossom, to fruit, to store, to juicing...Exhibitions could also focus on one aspect of wildlife in an orchard, such as bees, mistletoe, the noble chafer beetle...

Photos – keep a stockpile of high-resolution photos of the orchard throughout the seasons for website and media use.

Unusual focuses – such as Coopering – cask making. The Herefordshire Cider Museum has an extensive exhibition on coopering, where they manage to make the story behind wooden barrel making fascinating....

AUDIO TRAILS – in more detail

Why audio? It's versatility – number one strength. And this versatility has increased recently – with the ease of downloading audio from the web to mobile phones, mp3 players and so on.

Audio can be a mix of spoken word, music, sound effects:

Straight interview

Oral history – any age, but tends to be older people

Readings – poetry, letters, diaries

Drama – this is the hardest to do well and probably the most expensive

Soundscape – with atmospheric sound effects.

It has been calculated - by an enthusiast - that on average a 20 minute Audio Trail will deliver the equivalent of 8 sides of A4 in 12pt font – so you can convey much more detail than in a leaflet or panel.

Choice of audio playing out loud or through headphones.

Playing out loud – in locations that are not too busy, so not disturbing other visitors. Advantage of playing out loud is that you are still engaging in the outdoors with all senses and that it can be a joint family activity, listening around the device.

Head phones can be very effectively 'immersive' and sound effects can be used very effectively in the 'stereo image' – so a bee going past from one headphone to the next, or you can feel that footsteps are behind you – this is a bit overdone now.

Unlike with a film, people can keep walking as they listen. Also cheaper than film – and in my belief you can often get better interviews from people, as they are less self-conscious when not in front of camera.

It can be delivered without the need to clutter a site/landscape with audio posts/panels – either collected from Reception or downloadable before hand.

Can be a podcast on the web which visitors listen to before they come – as an introduction – rather than something to walk around with.

It can now be offered without the need to invest in equipment – downloadable to people's mobiles/mp3 players/iPods...

It can be offered 24 hours a day – via the web and also blue tooth hotspots.

Depending on the content, it can be updated easily.

Content is everything, equipment is secondary

Sometimes too much emphasis is put on the delivery mechanism – so the portable audio player/mp3 player.

Compelling content is the vital part – if the content isn't compelling, then it doesn't matter how snazzy the equipment is – it will be an under-whelming experience.

Content does not need to be expensive: for instance, a gardener who is a really good talker – taking you on an audio tour of the garden recorded outdoors - can be much more engaging than an elaborate drama or voice-over by a celebrity recorded in a studio.

I would suggest that it's important that the content is locally distinctive – some tours are voiced by 'received pronunciation South East' accents – rather than local voices which make you feel more rooted in the spot.

Keep it short – if using listening points 1-2 mins max, preferably less.

Windy sites – not too good for listening.

Delivery Mechanisms

Equipment does not need to be snazzy and expensive – the most important thing is that it's simple to use.

There is a huge variety within the National Trust – with some properties buying a job lot of mp3 players at 99p each and others spending £7,000 on the equipment.

Hand held audio players for hire – of myriad varieties, including with visuals, such as iPod Touch - video, audio, podscroll, and high res images - used in galleries, zoom in on details of pictures, quilts – zoom in stitch by stitch

Audio posts or panels – interpretation panels with audio points on them

Wind-ups, Solar-powered

Talking Pen - £50 each – can be used with headphones as well

GPS Triggered

Download to visitor's own device – mobile, mp3 players, iPod etc – via web

Blue Tooth hotspot

Old fashioned telephone – it rings when you pass and you can leave feedback on it – Barrington Court have used this

TALKING TREES AT COTEHELE – A MAVERICK EXAMPLE

Visitors to Cotehele's can now wander through the old and new orchards with the 'Talking Pen', a new technology which activates audio when you touch the device on an apple logo by each tree.

The different varieties of apple tree speak, including the Colloggett Pippin' with his Cornish accent, the Bramley with her Nottinghamshire accent and the posh Royal Jubilee – all voiced by local people. Honeybees, the mistletoe and a lonely solitary bee all speak as well.

The trail is aimed at families and there are questions posed throughout, such as:

How many varieties of apples are there in this country? What's the word for stealing apples? How much honey does a honeybee make in a lifetime? How do you make an apple puff?

The aim of the trail was for visitors to be inspired to plant varieties of apple local to them and to encourage more people to visit the old and new orchards.

It has been covered in the national and local media and visitor feedback has been extremely positive. All visitors comment that the voices are great – so it seems using local people rather than actors did come off.

The other clever thing that the Talking Pen can do is to allow people to record onto it, so we are keeping one Pen at reception just for feedback and asking visitors to record their feedback straight onto the Pen.

Play audio examples of Talking Trees.

BRAINSTORM IN GROUPS FOCUSING ON EXPLORER FAMILY AUDIENCE

Does the property need a new event or new interpretation in the orchard?

Golden Rules of Interpretation

1. Evaluate

Evaluation should happen at the start of the project and continue throughout.

Does the property need a new event or new interpretation?

Do visitors need it?

Pre-test interpretation on some families. This is the kind of thing that can go by the way side when you are in a rush, but it will probably lead to some essential tweaks to the trail. Feedback from visitors can then be sought throughout.

2. Know your Audience

In this case it's Explorer Families.

3. Decide your Theme

The theme is the message we want visitors to remember.

If you have a property theme – does it lend itself to an event/interpretation in the orchard?

The theme will help prioritise the content.

What makes it unique to you and relevant to your visitors?

4. Set Clear and Measurable Objectives

This is what you want the trail to achieve.

What does the property want to achieve and what will the event/interpretation do for visitors?

5. Try out Different Techniques

Once you've covered points 1-4, it will help decide which techniques are the right ones to use. What type of event? What kind of interpretation? See list of event and interpretation ideas.

Additional Information on Acorn Bank

Pruning Workshops

Acorn Bank in Cumbria run these in February each year and have three people per trainer and 18 people in all. They charge £20 per head, including lunch, and there is huge demand for the places, with waiting lists. They point out that you have to be a relaxed gardener, as although it's great to have extra hands for pruning and the visitors are under instruction, they are amateurs.

Grafting Workshops

Acorn Bank runs these two weeks after the pruning workshops. Acorn Bank buys in the root stocks and asks participants to bring their own scion. They charge £20-25 per head including lunch and again there is great demand for them. Acorn Bank also organises a staff grafting day where they graft trees to sell at Apple Day.

Money making at Acorn Bank

Selling apple and fruit products.

'Orchard Hire' - for weddings, birthday parties etc

They have registered the orchard with film and TV locations – though this can be disruptive to staff and wildlife.