

## *“I Know Where I'm Going”*

### **Remote Access to World Heritage Sites from St Kilda to Uluru, a Conference**

**23-24 November 2011- Edinburgh (UK)**

At a time of economic crisis and environmental threat, countries everywhere have to address the dual challenge of protecting and preserving their natural and cultural heritage while maximising their economic value. This two-day international conference will focus on the potential for new technologies to create high-quality, remote-access visitor experiences for World Heritage Sites and other sites of cultural, historical and natural significance where remote access is either desirable or necessary.

#### The Conference has three main aims:

- To showcase some of the new technologies available (3D/4D scanning, mobile technologies, GPS/GIS, satellite technologies, apps and social media) & discuss their applications.
- To debate policy issues linked to the benefits and challenges these new technologies present for sites preservation, conservation, and interpretation worldwide; particularly in terms of remote and virtual access to sites which are sensitive, and in terms of economic benefits for tourism.
- To encourage site managers worldwide- particularly within the UNESCO World Heritage Sites Network - to consider the benefits & impact the new technologies could have for their own sites and allow them to investigate those further.

The digital age presents new opportunities to create unique access experiences for visitors who would never be able to physically visit a site, due to issues of access and/or sustainability. Interpreters have an opportunity to harness the best of technological innovation, digital media and the internet to both promote and preserve. However new technologies also present challenges for the sites (in terms of ownership, visitation, availability, awareness, etc) and it is key that this is debated.

St Kilda World Heritage Site will be used as a case study and be the focus of a live digital exhibition throughout the Conference. St Kilda is the UK's only dual UNESCO World Heritage Site, for both natural and cultural heritage, and also been identified as having a marine landscape of international importance. It is currently the focus of a development project to create a technologically innovative, remote-access Interpretation Centre based on the west coast of Lewis. There, the ambition is to create sustainable economic development through a technologically sophisticated cultural venue in a remote location. As a case study, St Kilda offers the opportunity to focus on issues shared by all interpretation professionals working to create remote access to sensitive sites.

This international Conference will maximise opportunities for collaboration and knowledge-sharing between sites, where a balance needs to be found between enabling remote-access and encouraging visitation, between attaining sustainability, fostering communities involvement & opportunities, whilst preserving and conserving sites' unique value.

Building on the experience gained at World Heritage properties, the Conference aims to create a network (both physical and remote) of interpretation specialists, curators, conservators and custodians facing the challenge of creating remote access to sensitive, hard-to-access or other trans-national sites. It will bring together Sites directors and heritage practitioners- both tangible and intangible- in the UK and abroad, but also policy makers and technological innovators, and will seek to break down conventional sectoral divides between heritage practitioners and technological innovators, in order to debate remote access.



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