

Branding of Carron Valley Forest – Alan Chalmers Aug 06

CVDG members, Rena Tarwinska, and Alan Chalmers met one evening in February 06 to discuss trails branding in advance of opening the mtb trails. AC took notes on the feelings and thoughts on CV. It was agreed that he would help develop a Brand for the forest as a whole, before settling on any particular brand for the trails.

This discussion paper develops the input given at the meeting.

How do we move ahead?

To start with we need to be clear what we (FCS) are trying to do at Carron Valley (CV) and how the MTB trails fit into this.

One description of CV that night in Feb was the 'Lost Valley', and in many ways that captures perfectly what I feel we are trying to do at CV.

One of the main objectives, as I see it, is to re-discover this 'Lost Valley'. How? Implement a strong, clear identity which communicates directly the whole destination and doesn't dilute this with disconnected, potentially confusing sub-identities. As opportunities to improve access and public enjoyment at CV are revealed over the next few years, we need to future proof it and put in place an identity that is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of all the relevant stakeholders. We don't want to find ourselves in a situation where a 'sub-identity' has been so well established that it becomes difficult to overlay a more holistic CV identity as an after thought. CV has really been 'lost' since the 70's with little or no investment in recreation provision and I see this identity exercise as potentially helping with the re-discovering CV as a destination in itself.

The strengths of CV as a destination, for all users, came through quite clearly at the meeting and strangely not just as a draw for bikers. Its location so close to the central belt and the follow on to that of accessibility to open space and recreation opportunities, which in turn feed into the various agendas of health, accessibility and inclusiveness would seem to make it an ideal candidate for wider marketing.. Obviously there are resource implications, but looking at it purely in terms of identity I feel the name *Carron Valley* is an irresistible primary name. It's a unique name and opportunity, the majority of FCS locations are usually named 'something forest', but where we have a more evocative location name (Glentress, Glen Affric, etc), it seems counter productive to dilute this by un-necessary invention.

The name, to me, is strong, evocative and has an engaging resonance, especially given its location. Having the word 'valley' in the name offers an enticement and draw to an urban population that are increasingly looking for recreation opportunities and especially opportunities within easy reach. CV can be marketed not only as a weekend and day-out destination, but crucially an 'after work' destination as well. The name CV can only be a positive in helping to develop and promote this. It evokes images of remoteness, freedom and space more often associated with destinations you have to travel further afield to find. It's a name that sits outside the normal urban language of parks, playing fields and walkways, and adds to the feeling of the outdoors right on your doorstep.

I see the overall brand of Carron Valley, possibly with a strapline promoting 'the great outdoors on your doorstep' as the way forward for the whole site. This geographically locates it, provides evocative imagery and promotes its unique selling point (USP). The implication of this to the elements that make up Carron Valley then seem to

cascade down from this. If we recognise that we are indeed looking to establish (or re-establish) the 'Lost Valley' then it's vital that the name CV is paramount in the identity. We don't have the luxury of unlimited resources to support a CV identity and then unrelated sub-identities below this. Identities are all about clarity; clarity of product and clarity of communication so the last thing you do is add confusion, more especially when you have a product with limited or indeed no recognition.

How does this leave the MTB trails?

I think it leaves the trails in a very strong position within any identity development for Carron Valley. The work of the trails team has effectively kick started this, and for me provided all the input into getting to where we are in terms of identity. What I am suggesting is at odds with the 'Kelpie Trails' name. However, the underlying themes, concepts, tangibles and intangibles that kept emerging from our meeting that evening all kept pointing to the same conclusion, this idea of ease of access, big country right on your doorstep, landscape, space and freedom. These should be the drivers for the identity, these are its essence and its USP.

The MTB trails can't be seen in isolation to any future development of the whole, but as an integral part of it. It's an exciting time to be in at the start of creating an identity, and the MTB trails are critical to this in terms of being a facility that already exists on the ground, helping to give us something tangible to promote.

The MTB trails could sit as a sub-identity or a piece of the jigsaw that makes up the whole picture of CV. I can easily see something like Carron Valley - The Great Outdoors Right on Your Doorstep or The Great Outdoor just Outdoors or even The Great Outdoors Outdoors, etc as an overall identity and then Carron Valley Biking - Big Country Biking/Biking under Big Skies/Blue Sky Biking/Biking on your Doorstep as a sub-identity. In the same way we could have Carron Valley Walking, etc. The visual development of the identity would share the same styling and could even be a set of parts that plug together. A main treatment for the Carron Valley overall identity and a set of parts that plug into this for biking, walking, etc all to give flexibility and importantly individuality within an overall identity.

In reality like all good communications simplicity is the key. I said at the start of this,

"To be successful the brand should be an expression of the product's positive and real elements, not simply an attempt at manipulating the public. In other words the brand should reflect the real nature of the product. Being clear about what your brand is and keeping focused on it and its delivery is crucially important."

I've thought a lot about this, and we would be missing an opportunity if we overlook what is staring us in the face - Carron Valley. It is a gift of a name and a gift of a location, it doesn't need anything invented to give it resonance. A strap line will give it purpose and context, which combined with the name gives it a clear proposition, a clear meaning and communicates its usp.

The MTB trails can then fit easily into this and still have a degree of individuality within a strong, honest, robust and hopefully effective piece of communication that re-discovers the 'Lost Valley'.