Winter has arrived along the coast of Scotland - but we seem to have been, so far, spared the usual wild gales and storms. However, something else has been blown into the John o' Groats Trail, from the west coast of Scotland...

New John o' Groats Trail Manager, Kenneth McElroy

A note from the chair

Hi Stuart,
This Autumn marks a new beginning in more ways than one. Our first in-person AGM since Covid, record numbers of walkers this year, and our new trail manager has started work! Ken's arrival and full-time work means we can get so much more done for the trail, but it also has

In other news, one of our very exclusive group of 2020 walkers, Tricia Pearl, had the idea for an initiative called Keep in Touch, to stay connected with our walkers. Tricia lives in London, and I could imagine former trail walkers from all over the world forming an "alumni" network. More on Tricia's initiative in

shown how much there is to do, as Ken spends every day helping make the trail better. I hope you'll all get a chance to meet Ken in the coming weeks and months.

a future newsletter, but if you'd like to find out more about this effort, please get in touch.

Happy Trails!

Jay Wilson, Chair

Hello from Kenneth

Hello everyone, it's Ken here, the new John o' Groats Trail Manager - I thought I would introduce myself to the many walkers, volunteers, movers and shakers of the route - that's you!

I'll begin by saying that by addressing you I feel a touch disingenuous, perhaps, as since I started work on the trail in mid-September, I've only walked about 30 miles of the route!

I hope you won't mind, though, and that I can express my delight at being able to work on such a fantastic walking trail, in my home county of Caithness, where I lived for 26 years (including one year in Orkney) before heading to Glasgow to study archaeology. It's a real pleasure to be back in the region, and I have a real affection for promoting the area as a viable and sustainable tourist destination - roles with Caithness Broch Project and North Coast 500 will hopefully serve as a testament to this.

*Strolling towards the Sutherland coast with founder Jay Wilson and trustee John Whitfield (Stage 12 - to find out more about this section, click **here**)*

Of course the John o' Groats Trail is a very different offer than the NC500, and I think offers a more considered and immersive Highland experience. The very act of walking allows one to experience a place, a landscape, a way of life, in a much more thoughtful way. I am a big fan of hiking - especially to visit far-flung and "remote" historical sites - and enjoy taking in the sights and sounds, allowing what I can see and what I can perceive to influence and inspire my thoughts and conscience.

That might sound somewhat woolly to some, but I know that walking - and just being outdoors - can be such a powerful tool for improving "mindfulness" and well-being. So, aside from being an economic boost to the area, and a green one at that, the trail presents an opportunity to offer peace of mind and happiness to both visitors and locals alike.

Now, that sounds like a good thing to me!

I hope in the coming weeks, months and years, I am able to develop, promote and generally improve the trail - if you have any questions, comments or suggestions, I'd be more than happy to hear from you. Afterall, you have helped to make the trail what it is today - and some of you have even walked more than 30 miles of the route!

Until next time,

Kenneth

Latest News

Become a Member of the John o' Groats Trail!

The John o' Groats Trail... needs you!

Community organisations are only as strong as the community which supports them. The John o' Groats Trail has, for many years, been a volunteer-led organisation, dependent on the goodwill and support of local individuals, keen hikers and long-distance trailwalkers, and charitable individuals.

It is with this financial support and input that the Trail has managed to not only survive, but thrive - and now we are looking to develop on the

We are looking to expand and develop on this - and we are now looking to re-establish and expand our membership to the John o' Groats Trail.

Membership will only cost **£10 a year.** Subscriptions will be due to paid at a different date next year - maybe a little bit earlier - we're just eager to get memberships sorted out again!

Our membership entitles you to have a say in the way the Trail is operated: in particular, members appoint people to serve on the board and make decisions

on changes to the constitution itself.

Membership is open to any individual **aged 16 or over** who support the JOGT's purposes.

To become a member, simply visit https://www.jogt.org.uk/for-you/#membership **and follow the instructions on how to join there.**

A strong membership could be vital to the continued sustainability of the Trail - not only offering crucial financial support to the organisation, but it also evidences support for the trail. This is vital if the trail is to acquire larger grants and funding - **so, your £10 a year could enable us to bring thousands of pounds into the development of the Trail!**

AGM 2022

With that in mind, it's a good idea to tell you that our Annual General Meeting will take place on **November 17th** at **7.30pm**, at the Navidale House Hotel, in Helmsdale.

If you would like to attend, please email **manager@jogt.org.uk**

We will also be running this event online, via Zoom, so, again, if you would like to attend, please let us know by emailing the address above.

Of course, Volunteers are always welcome to help with the John o' Groats Trail, and we were delighted to see the hard work recently undertaken by the newly-formed Helmsdale Footpaths Group - strimming, clearing, improving the Trail

north of Helmsdale.

So If you would be interested in the more physical and practical side of things, just give us an email, and we can sort you out with volunteer groups across the Trail. Of course, you might be interested in setting up your own group - again, we'd be delighted to help with that too, and get you going in the right direction.

Trail Audit Completed!

Ron on the trail near Latheronwheel (Stage 10)

Having completed a 147-mile traverse of the JOGT, trail auditor Ron McCraw has now completed his report on the condition of the trail.

The comprehensive document he has produced will serve as a routemap for our next steps, and has pinpointed where we need to focus our attention. It is an incredibly useful document, and one we are very pleased with.

It should come as no surprise that bridge-building figures prominently on Ron's suggestions for development: we hear from several walkers that the burns such as those at Gills in Caithness, and Loth in Sutherland, can be somewhat daunting to cross.

Over the next few weeks we will work with one of our funders, the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland (OATS), to fine-tune Ron's report, and make sure the suggested costs are accurate. With the increasing costs, we have to make sure that any future funding applications based on the report are accurate and up-to-date.

Trail walker's update

This year 2022 was the first time we tried to keep the trail open all summer by strimming. We were mostly successful, and learned many lessons. We now think that on a budget of about £5000 per year (which will require fundraising), we can keep ahead of the bracken and other weeds, making the trail much more walkable. So if you're planning to come walk, you should plan to come any time of the year that suits you. Please notify us of any adverse conditions on the trail.

Volunteers Corner

Helmsdale Volunteers on the path to Success!

Helmsdale Footpaths Group helping to keep the JOGT looking good!

There are myriad ways to support the Trail. Whether you just give us a "like" or follow on our Facebook, Twitter or Instagram pages, sharing our posts and commenting, or donating to our cause - it's all hugely appreciated, and helps to make the trail stronger.

We're also looking to develop our membership section - so watch out for that. Not every "Friend" is a "Member", but becoming a member really helps to not

only financially support the Trail, but also aids us in showing demonstrable support for the route. Being a member, of course, brings you closer to the Trail, and means you can have a say in what we do.

Over the next few weeks, we'll be looking at ways to bolster and streamline our membership - as we would really like to grow this part of the JOGT.

If you have any questions about walking the trail, volunteering, or donating, please don't hesitate to reply to this email or contact us via the information below.

Contact us:

Email: manager@jogt.org.uk

Telephone: 07528675774

Website: www.jogt.org.uk