

# News vol. 9 no. 1: New Beginnings

It's ur first newsletter of 2023!

We're looking back on December and January, and what we got up to over the last month. Stormy spells didn't stop us from keeping busy - so enjoy seeing what we got up to over the last couple of months

## *A note from the chair*

The new year starts with a ski holiday for myself, more enjoyable for the knowledge that Ken is in post, carrying forward improvements, fundraising, (and this newsletter!) for the trail.

So, a shorter message from me this month - but to everyone...

Happy Trails!

Jay Wilson, Chair



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## Trail Notes from Ken

Hello everyone, and welcome to your first newsletter of 2023.

I hope you all had a lovely festive period, wherever you spent it and with whomever you spent it alongside. I am hoping that at least some of you took the opportunity to walk a little bit of the Trail - always a good way to work off those excess mince pies!

Unsurprisingly, given the fairly inclement weather at this time of year, I've only been able to get a couple more miles under my belt over the last few months:

Keiss Beach > Wester Burn - 2.3 miles

John o' Groats > Stacks of Duncansby - 3 miles



*My progress on the JOGT so far - more to be completed over the coming months.*

Getting out and about has allowed me to identify where and what needs to be improved on the Trail, and I'm pleased to say that with the help of Ruard of [Far North Fencing](#), we've been able to build some important bridges and stiles along the Trail, which you can read about below.

Ruard is wonderful for these 'small' jobs, providing quick, sturdy, professionally-built means of traversing the Trail.

However, a recent visit to Wester Burn on the Keiss/Reiss beaches highlighted the need for some \*big\* infrastructure improvements. I had only visited the burn in summer previously, when it was easy to wade across. On the day I visited, in mid-Jan, the burn here was deep and wide, and flowing fast with the meltwater from the recent dumping of snow.

This is evidently a place which needs urgent attention, and will require a serious bit of engineering expertise. And with great engineering expertise comes great big funding applications, of course!



*A frosty but bonny day on Keiss Beach - the Burn of Wester is located just to the right of the photo.*

Building (and funding) something like this, however, is only part of the challenge - we also need support from the local community.

Thankfully, over the last few months, we've been working with Alan Jones Associates to produce a Community Engagement Report, which will demonstrate the weight of support behind the continued promotion and development of the Trail.

And this is especially useful - tourism can be viewed as a somewhat harmful or unwelcome addition to an area. Certainly the [North Coast 500 has generated some ill-feeling](#) over the last few years, with complaints over overtourism, wild-camping and litter coming to the fore. But one should bear in mind that this venture has also had a number of positives for the area, with millions of pounds injected into the region through tourism. These ventures ought to be viewed on balance.

But the JOGT is not the NC500, and it never will be; it is low-impact, environmentally-friendly, and encourages a slower, more thoughtful way of exploring the far north - all the while helping to financially bolster shops, businesses and organisations.

So, we shouldn't shy away from highlighting the Trail as a tourist venture. I am keen to highlight the Trail as way to improve lives for everyone - both local and wider communities. But is only with the blessing of a local communities (and of course landowners!) that we can enact projects: no matter whether it's Ruaird knocking up a wee stile, or a £300,000 bridge!

So, here's looking forward to a year of projects, big and small. We'll update you on these next month.

Kenneth McElroy  
JOGT Development Manager

## **YOU can help support the Trail - why not join our growing [membership](#)?**

**Or perhaps, if you're on the Trail, could you volunteer as a Trail Warden, and keep a close eye on parts which might need our attention?**

If the latter is of interest, then please do get in touch - you can contact me on [manager@jogt.org.uk](mailto:manager@jogt.org.uk), or give me a ring on 07528675774.

All of this will help the keep the Trail alive, and continue to be an attractive proposition for all those looking to take on the quintessential Scottish adventure...

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## ***Latest News***

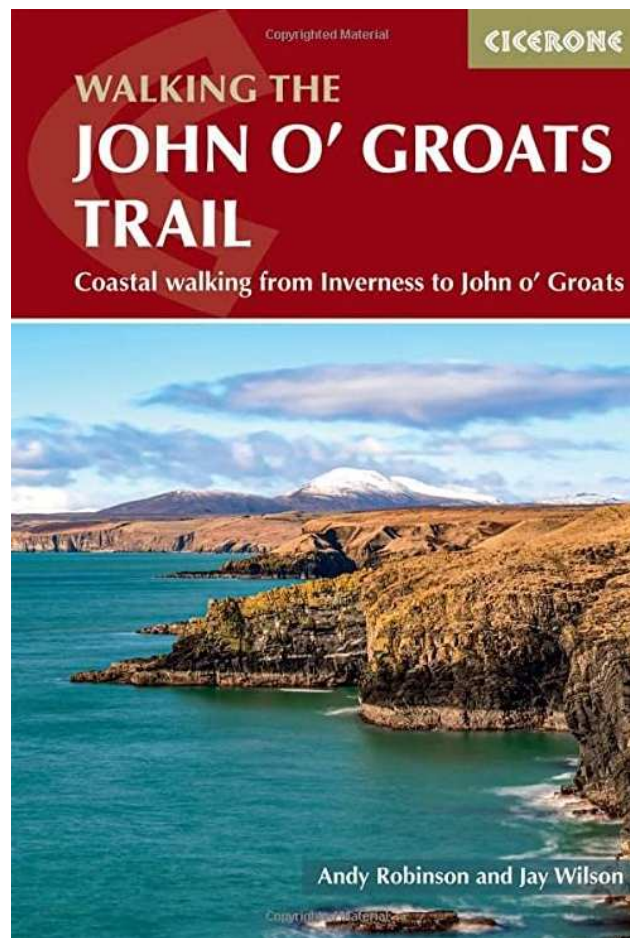
### **PRE-ORDER OUR NEW GUIDEBOOK!**

We are SUPER EXCITED to unveil our new guidebook - written by Andy Robinson and Jay Wilson, and published by renowned international book sellers [Cicerone Press](#)!

This brand new guidebook is a detailed, glossy, picture-filled celebration of all things JOGT - the route is described in 14 stages, each of which includes: an overview map; step-by-step route description illustrated with custom mapping; details of accommodation, facilities and transport links; and information on local

points of interest. While the main route description is from south to north, notes are supplied for southbound walkers. Also included is a bonus route linking the trail with the Great Glen, for the benefit of walkers undertaking the Land's End to John o' Groats challenge. There is a wealth of information to help you plan for the John o' Groats Trail, including advice on transport, weather, hazards and kit, and background notes on geology and wildlife.

The story of our new guidebook was recently covered by the Caithness Courier and John o' Groat Journal - [which you can read here](#).



Cicerone describe the Trail as a

*"...Challenging route crosses a part of the country that not many walkers are familiar with. There are plentiful opportunities to spot wildlife and seabirds, with grey seals, common seals and ospreys a common sight. There are ruined medieval castles on the cliff edges, as well as many sea arches and stacks. John o' Groats is renowned as mainland Britain's most northeasterly village and the John o' Groats Trail offers a chance to experience this fascinating and beautiful corner of the country."*

To pre-order this fantastic resource, please visit the link below:

PRE-ORDER THE GUIDEBOOK NOW

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🎁🎁🎁 JOGT Merch 🎁🎁🎁



With merchandise firmly in the mind, we'd love to hear from YOU if you had ideas about trinkets, souvenirs and keepsakes related to the John o' Groats Trail.

Aside from being a brilliant way to generate funds for the Trail, it's also a lovely way to remember your experience - or encourage people to explore the Trail, too.

If you're a maker, crafter, or just had some fun ideas, we'd love to hear from you - **just email [manager@jogt.org.uk](mailto:manager@jogt.org.uk)**

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😊 **Join 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!**

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## 👏The Keep in Touch Initiative👏

This month we're unveiling a very special new project, started by one of our newest trustees, Patricia Pearl, which aims to bring together walkers and JOGT-ers from around the world - through the Keep in Touch (KIT) initiative!



*Chair trustee Patricia Pearl*

As Pearl remarks:

*"The aim of the 'Keep in Touch' group would be to tap into the support of people living in Scotland and beyond who support the aims of the Friends and in particular want to support the maintenance of the Trail and secure its future."*

*The low population density in the vicinity of the Trail raises obvious difficulties with sourcing local volunteers to support the charitable work of the Trail. We discussed how to make the most of the friendships and contacts the Trail has with people who have walked all or part of the Trail and do not live locally in Sutherland and Caithness.*

*This can be achieved by use of technology – if there is anything we have learned in the last 18 months it is that you don't have to be 'in the room' to be able to take part! This could include administration, arranging promotions (e.g T-shirts and collectibles), fund raising, newsletter support and completion certificates, anything that allows the Trail to thrive.*

*People walking the Trail will also be an obvious source of anecdotes and accounts of adventures which have made their time on the Trail both enjoyable and memorable. We would love there to be a social side as well but that is a little way off just for now!"*

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## **Keep In Touch #1**

### *When Tricia Met Tim!*



**When Tricia spoke to Tim (via zoom)**

**Where's home?**

*Ottawa, Canada. We are expecting 30 inches of snow in the next few hours.*

### **What draws you to walking in the UK**

*Many reasons, including that my family is English and Irish and my wife is British. The rights of way are unparalleled (except perhaps in parts of Scandinavia), the landscape is varied, the distances manageable, the history fascinating, and the walking culture is strong. I like the remote aspects of parts of Scotland, the particular friendliness of the people and the right to roam of course.*

### **When did you walk the Trail**

*I walked the Trail between 23 May and 03 June 2019. It was part of my longer (three months) Land's End to John O'Groats (LEJOG) walk. It was the unexpected highlight of the bigger walk. By the time I had reached Inverness I was anxious to finish. So, much to my surprise, I started to slow down and enjoy my surroundings the further I went north along the coast. It was a bit more challenging than I expected, but it was absolutely stunning in many places!*

### **Any mishaps?**

*Yes! My maps for the route didn't arrive at Fort William as planned but I contacted Jay and he lent me maps to get me along the route. I dislocated my shoulder making an over ambitious traverse of a stile somewhere to the North of Wick. For a few days it was agony putting my back pack on and taking it off.*

### **Best Bits?**

*It was all good. I was elated by the last few miles approaching Duncansby Head. It was a dry and breezy day. I was alone, with fantastic views of the windswept land and sea and surrounded by nature. Fantastic.*



**Will you be back?**

*Yes, I hope so. In 2024 I am walking from the South of England by a different route and will definitely use the JOGT to finish that adventure*

**Thankyou for your time! will you give our Trail a mention in your local walking group newsletter?**

*Yes, I shall!*

***If you would like to share your own JOGT story with Tricia, please get in touch! Just email [viakeepintouch@jogt.org.uk](mailto:viakeepintouch@jogt.org.uk)***

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## 🔨 TRAIL DEVELOPMENTS 🔨



**Above:** *One of the three new stiles at Corbigoe ([Stage 12](#))*

Haven't you heard? Stiles are back in style!

We've been working through the year to ensure that the Trail remains safe and accessible - fundraising towards path improvements, as well as getting hands-on with strimming, clearing the path of bracken and gorse, as well as installing bridges and stiles.

It's a year-round job, but one we're committed to - and we're very thankful to have the talents of Ruard Erridge of [Far North Fencing](#) helping us out. Ruard has been brilliant at getting down to the sites at short notice, knocking up stiles and bridges quickly and efficiently - in all sorts of weather!



The above stiles were put in at Corbigoe, just south of the impressive 'The Needle', the impressive sea arch a wee bit north of Sarclet.

We didn't stop there, however - with two new bridges installed just south of Nybster. This was after we had been contacted by a local farmer, Willie, who had found his fence had been cut down!

This certainly wasn't something we were responsible for - we install stiles or gates wherever possible. Regardless, it's not nice to see someone do this; our business is to ensure safe passage for trail walkers, but also to make sure landowners on the Trail aren't impacted by the John o' Groats Trail.

So, in January we arranged for Ruard to pop across and re-wire the fence, as well as add in a stile and bridge (below). We're grateful for the support of Willie in this, and for the Trail.



We're also really pleased that his northerly neighbour Alec was happy with the installation of a new bridge just south of Nybster Broch (below). We know someone cut through the fence here too, so we'll arrange to fix that, too, very soon.



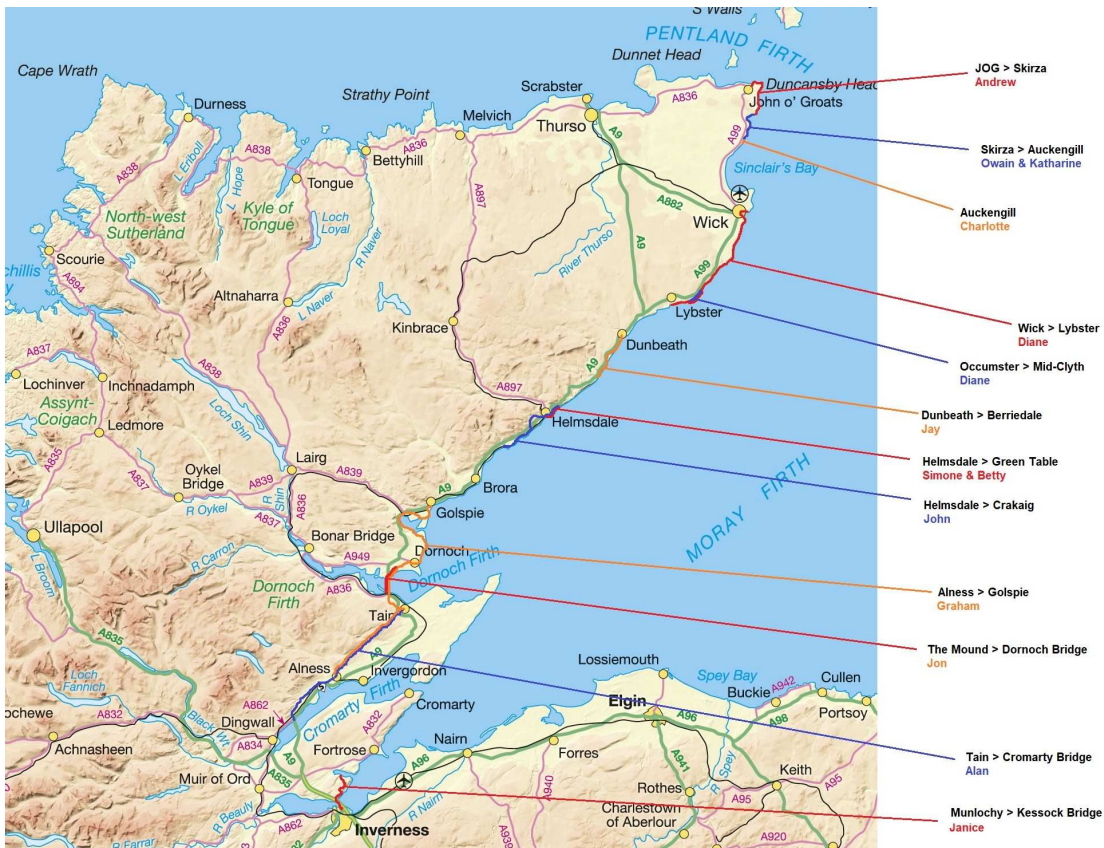
We think that the JOGT offers something special for the area - something both the local community and tourists to the region can enjoy. It's thanks to the landowners that people can continue to enjoy what the Trail offers, and we're appreciative of this.

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## 👑 **Could you be a TRAIL WARDEN?** 👑

But perhaps you'd like to go a step further, and ensure that our Trail is kept looking its best at all times - with this in mind, we're looking for TRAIL WARDENS who can take 'guardianship' of sections of our 147-mile long Trail.

We've already accepted 13 Wardens across the length of the Trail, who, together, cover roughly 85 miles of the Trail, which is a fantastic number!



**Above:** *Our volunteer Trail Wardens have covered most of the Trail!*

As you can see, there are still a few gaps which we'd love to have covered

- **Munloch and the Cromarty Bridge**
- **Golspie to Brora**
- **Helmsdale to Berriedale**
- **Dunbeath to Lybster**
- **Wick to Auckengill**

So, could you take on the role of a warden, or do you know someone who might be interested in covering the above stretches?

This is an ideal position for someone who enjoys walking or lives near the JOGT - you can look after any stretch of trail, whether its a full stage or just a short stretch of the route. You'll just need to be able to walk the trail every now and then to give it a wee health check-up, and report any issues to us. A great way to ensure that the Trail is looking swell and safe for your local community and visitors alike!

**If you're interested, please just email [manager@jogt.org.uk](mailto:manager@jogt.org.uk).**

## The JOGT has Star Potential!

Amazing to see the John o' Groats Trail flash up in UK poster George Ezra's 'End to End' documentary, which showcases the singer's epic 1,200 mile journey from Land's End to John o' Groats.



**Above:** George (centre) completed the walk in 2021

Ezra undertook the adventure he undertook with 2 pals across 95 days in 2021, and his film offers a remarkable look at what the journey took to complete, as well as the personal reflections and insights it offered to the award-winning musician.

You can watch the full documentary by clicking [here](#)



**Above:** *We're famous! Our marker makes an appearance*

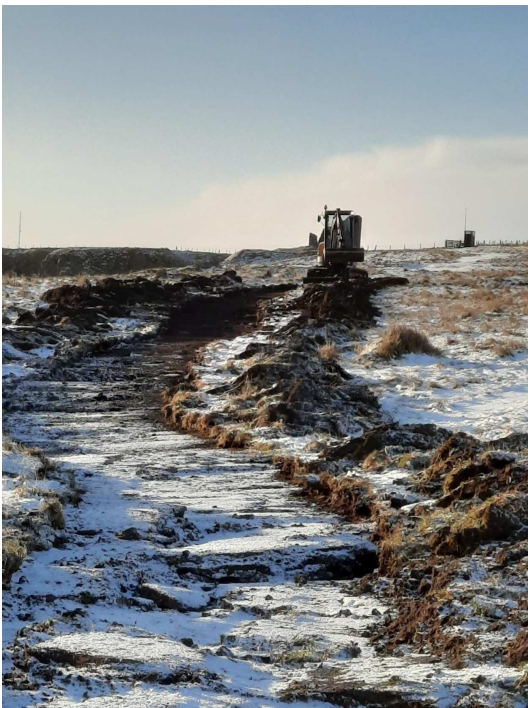
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## 👏 Volunteers Corner 👏

### ***Wick Works Well!***

Have you ever heard of the phrase 'Dirty Wicker'? Normally used as a bit of cheeky bantz from their Teanawbowlie counterparts, the phrase is actually something of a misnomer - with dirty being derived from 'Dirdie', meaning busy or industrious.

Well, [Wick Paths Group](#) have come to exemplify the original expression - and have just created a new accessible path through the 'Grey Bools' field to the castle, just south of Wick, meaning that this part of the John o' Groats Trail is made even safer and more accessible!



**Above:** *Snowy conditions didn't deter these path-builders*

Huge credit to GMR Henderson and The Highland Council, who undertook the work snowy and dampy conditions - but we think you'll agree this is a most wonderful early Christmas present for all you Trail walkers!

### ***Helmsdale Volunteers Keep The Trail Tidy!***

🏃 You've heard of jogging.

🚫 You've might have even heard of plogging...



But have you heard of GORTRIPLOGGING?!?!



Ok, that's a word we just totally made up - but it seems that the crafty Swedes\*\* penchant for the conglomeration of silly words to make even sillier words\*\*\* has caught on over here on the John o' Groats Trail.

We were delighted to see that Helmsdale Paths Group volunteer Betty Grieve was able to combine a wee morning jog with a bit light gorse trimming AND some litter picking thrown in for good measure as well. Great to see that the path had been strimmed recently by the Highland Council's access team, too!



***Above: The Fruits of Betty's Labour!***

Many hands make light work, and so having the support from a range of organisations - from government right down to local volunteers across the Trail really means that the JOGT can continue to stay safe and remain open.



**Above:** *A before and after from Euan's efforts.*

We'd also like to note a great effort by local Trail resident Euan Mackay, who you might remember from the last newsletter, in clearing pointy and prickly gorse bushes on the John o' Groats Trail in snowy conditions (above).

This is really 'ice' to see (*sorry*)

We're feeling very much encouraged by how everyone is pitching in - long may it continue.

*\*A combination of jogging with picking up litter (merging the Swedish verbs plocka upp (pick up) and jogga (jog)).*

*\*\*As in Ikea crafty, not devious crafty, just in case there are easily-upset Scandi-types following.*

*\*\*\* We apologise profusely for upsetting all Scandi-types.*

**If you'd like help with the Helmsdale Group, or you'd like to support the trail, please just get in touch - email [manager@jogt.org.uk](mailto:manager@jogt.org.uk)**

*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](mailto:manager@jogt.org.uk)

**Telephone:** 07528675774

**Website:** [www.jogt.org.uk](http://www.jogt.org.uk)



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