

# JOHN O' GROATS TRAIL

Coastal walking route from  
Inverness to John o' Groats



## News vol. 10 no. 2: Laura joins the team!



### *A note from the chair*

The Highland Summer has started... and some would say ended! The walking season is well under way, and we are setting new records in trail numbers so far, up 67% over the same period last year. But that's not

I was out for a wee walk on the trail just a couple evenings ago, and it has never looked so good.

Strimming and so many recent works projects have steadily improved it, no wonder more and

newest trail manager, to work along with Ken. (Photo below, already proselytising about the North Coast Trail at the Canisbay Show on Saturday.)

Thanks for your support and I hope you all have a great summer.

As always... Happy Trails!

Jay Wilson, Chair



The Association of Northern Trails Scotland (that's us!) are delighted to introduce our NEW Trail Development Manager - Laura Gray!

We received several very strong applications for this post, but Laura really shone through in the interviews, and we are so excited to welcome her on board.

Laura will be working alongside Ken in Caithness helping to develop not only the JOG Trail, but also the North Coast Trail (NCT) - which will extend westwards from John o' Groats along the stunning shores of Caithness and Sutherland.

We invited Ian Ellis, who walked the North Coast Trail in 2014 in memory of his

by Ian to realise this ambition.

Of course, developing a Trail takes time, money and effort - and it takes the right people to take on such a challenge - like Laura! In her own words:

"When I moved up to Caithness from the Central Belt, I was so excited to explore the coastline and all it had to offer. Being one of those outdoorsy types, whether it be hiking, running or walking the dog, I felt like I had arrived in paradise! The more things I ticked off my list, the more I seemed to be adding on to it. Very quickly I discovered the John o' Groats Trail, which gave me access to the coast from my house - the dream! It was only natural I then wanted to get involved in volunteering for the trail, which somehow brought me to this point- having the very exciting role of being a Trail Development Manager.

"Alongside Ken, we will continue to develop the existing John o' Groats trail and make it more accessible for walkers while retaining the rugged raw nature of the trail. I will also start to establish and develop the North Coast Trail, along with the great team at ANTS and the communities along the way. My hope is that we can provide a trail that the Caithness community can be proud of and shows off this absolutely spectacular coastline whether it's a nice short evening stroll or seasoned hikers wishing to take on the whole challenge."

A huge thank you to Foundation Scotland's Stroupster Wind Farm Community Benefit Fund, and to the The Highland Council's Community Regeneration Fund for making this happen. Please welcome Laura to our organisation!

And here is an update from Laura:

"Since joining the organisation a few weeks ago, I have been busy meeting lots of the great people involved in making the trail happen- whether it be trustees, landowners, volunteers or contractors, they all have the same enthusiasm for the part they play and great pride in the JOGT. Behind the scenes, I have started to organise the community consultation process and hopefully should have dates for you all soon. I have also met up with Ian Ellis, who is the brains behind the North Coast Trail and using his previous maps, we have made a start to map out how the North Coast Trail will look for walkers. You may even

## Walkers Report

Our contractors have continued to be busy working on improvements to the trail.

One big highlight has been the construction of better access to the viewpoint area at Whaligoe Steps. This was much needed - due to its popularity, the path to the viewpoint was turning into a muddy and slippery hazard, with steep banks either side.

With the blessing of the landowner and kindly funded by [Foundation Scotland's Tannach & District Fund](#), and with the hard work of Andy Pope, we've made the viewpoint south of the Steps much easier to get to. While this route is part of the trail, it will also have enormous benefit to all people visiting the Steps.



Indeed the Trail has been busy down this way - with Andy Pope again central to getting bridge and stiles built. And also a sort of bridgey-stiley-stone-steppy construction at Whaligoe too (below), which has made a noticeable difference to the safety of the Trail.



Meanwhile, Ruard Erridge of Far North Fencing has been busy at a couple of sites, installing infrastructure where we need it - at Latheron Burn, for instance, where we've a new bridge:



But also just north of Keiss - generally a fine area to walk, but there's always improvements to be made. We installed new stiles and a bridge after a landowner suggested that it was becoming a little tight on the other side of her fences for walkers. It's always super to hear supportive landowners, so Ruard was on the case straight away.



We were also able to meet with Frank Stephen (below), a well-kent face in the county, and a former vet - and one of the first walkers to use Ruard's stiles and bridge!

just a few weeks after Frank's walk.

Frank was walking the Trail in May, and if you would still like to donate to his fundraiser, please use the link below:

[Donate to Frank's Fundraiser](#)



All of this infrastructure building takes time and effort - but perhaps most importantly of all... money.

So, donations towards Trail infrastructure improvements are very much welcome - if you can spare a few pennies, then please donate towards trail improvements on the link below:

[\*\*DONATE TO THE TRAIL\*\*](#)

## 👣 Let's Keep In Touch... with Catherine 👣

**Trustee Patricia Pearl spoke to Catherine Shields about her walk which started on Good Friday this year – her walk along the Trail in bad weather was especially challenging**

**Patricia:** I saw your entry in the signing in book on the Trail near Berriedale on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2024; you are from Tasmania and this was only a week after Caithness had been battered by Storm Kathleen. What is your story?

**Catherine:** I was brought up in Lancashire and settled in Tasmania 25 years ago where I work as a garden designer.

I was back in the UK to meet up with family and friends and planned some wilderness walking. Together with my friend, we started at John O'Groats on Good Friday – we were carrying tents – as you have realised, we experienced some extraordinarily strong winds and for some nights retreated to B&Bs. We planned to go slowly, not bothering about stages but just going at our own speed. The weather conditions added an extra layer of difficulty. The recent rains meant some of the burns were higher than usual.

**Patricia:** Were there any other problems?

**Catherine:** My friend's ankle gave up somewhere near Dornoch and I decided that I would not continue south on the Trail on my own. I then continued my walking adventure as a solo walker on the Great Glen Way.

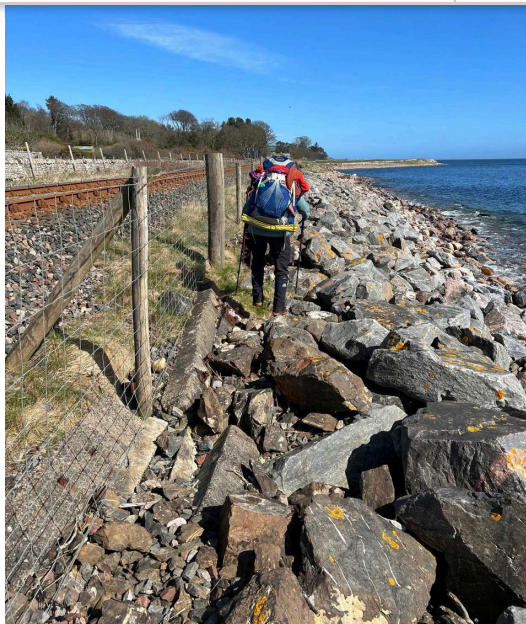
**Patricia:** What did you take away from your experience of the Trail?

**Catherine:** I loved the isolation and the stunning scenery of the Trail. I took hundreds of pictures. We were close to nature, and I found places for contemplation. It was wonderful to see the kittiwakes and fulmars on the cliffs, I connected with myself, and the thought that you have to take one step at a time to meet a goal.

**Patricia:** Thank you for sharing your experience on the Trail and safe journey back to Tasmania. We are doing our best to build more bridges to help with crossing those burns, but there is nothing we can do about the weather!

Here are some photos of Catherine's adventure:





Let's Keep in Touch; our Trustee Patricia has been interviewing people from far and wide who have walked the Trail - we'd love to hear from you! Please email Patricia if you'd like to tell your JOGT story.

[keepintouch@jogt.org.uk](mailto:keepintouch@jogt.org.uk)

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👏 **New Trustee!** 👏



We are delighted to welcome a new trustee to the Association of Northern Trails Scotland - Sally Crowe!

You might be familiar with Sally's work on [The Croft](#), offering insight into her crofting life at Keiss in Caithness, and so we are delighted to have her on board. (In layman's terms, a croft is a small Highland farm.)

Here's a wee introduction from Sally herself:

*"I'm Sally Crowe, crofter from Keiss. I love being out in nature and enjoying all that the Caithness coast has to offer.*

*I joined ANTS as I feel its important that local land owners get behind the trail,*

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*I'm delighted to be involved in a small way in a trail that equals the best in the world."*

Please welcome Sally to the Trail!

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## 😊 **Join the John o' Groats Trail!** 😊

Membership is crucial to the survival and sustainability of the Trail. It allows us to demonstrate support for the Trail to funders - and so it means our applications for larger pots of money are stronger!

Your £10 a year can help us access £10,000! Just click on the link below.

Join as a member! Just visit our [Membership Page](#) and join for only £10 a year!

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Donate today to help keep the trail open this summer:

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/jogt-summer-trimming>

**Contact us:**

**Email:** [walk@jogt.org.uk](mailto:walk@jogt.org.uk)

**Telephone:** 07528675774

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

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