

JOHN O' GROATS TRAIL

Coastal walking route from
Inverness to John o' Groats



News vol. 10 no. 3: It's all water under the bridge!



A note from the chair

It may come as no surprise, as this happens every year, but we've just recorded our best summer walking season ever, with a 40% increase in

As always... Happy Trails!

Jay Wilson, Chair

team working together for such great results!



You might recall that last year, after Storm Babette, our bridge at Culgow Burn, found between Helmsdale and Brora, was latterly found somewhere out in North Sea! When in spate, this crossing could always be tricky, and had the unfortunate habit of collecting lobster creels which would push and pull at the previous bridge.

We decided to 'build back better' - and so in early October under a blazing sun, led by local contractor Anthony Urquhart and ably assisted by John, Laura, Ken and Matt, the JOGT team erected a new means of crossing the burn - this time, a much sturdier (and crucially higher) crossing, which should allow water - and any flotsam and jetsam - to flow through, leaving the structure untouched.

We were delighted to meet Daniel from Germany (*pictured below*) walking the Trail too - he was just a few hours too early to be the first person to walk our bridge!



A huge thank you to:

★ Anthony for his tireless efforts, and showing Ken how to saw (who really should have known better aged 35)

👤 Our volunteers John and Matt, for their hard work. In particular thanks to Matt for his wellies!

👛 [North Highland Initiative](#) who provided funding towards these works.

🚚 [Gow Groundworks](#) for co-ordinating, delivering and dropping off the telegraph poles, and big thanks to Steven Lowe and Liam Elder of SSE for allocating the poles to us.

👉 We could not have done this without the support from the landowner Garry Macdonald, who helped to install the supports with Anthony. Landowners make the Trail, and Garry went above and beyond the call of duty here!

👷 Finally, a big thank you to [Edward Mackay Contractor Ltd](#) who donated materials for this job - very much appreciated.

Next stop... Loth Burn Bridge!

👟 Walkers Report 👟

👉 Safe Access Never Goes Out of Stile! 👈

In the past few weeks we added four more stiles in Occumster to our ever growing infrastructure list.

With permission and support from the landowner to construct the new stiles, we have made this section of the trail safer.

Previously some of the section was pretty tight to the cliff edge. This all helps to make the trail more accessible to more people. Even on a dreich day like today, getting out for some good coastal air can do you the world of good. Thank you to the Latheron Lybster & Clyth Halsary Fund for helping fund this, and of course to Andy Pope for doing the hard work!



Andy has also been out at Latheronwheel making some improvements, he has built a much needed walkway over a burn which previously had been eroding the path and making it slippery to walk on.

We are sure you will agree this will make a huge improvement to access in this area. A big thanks to The Latheron, Lybster and Clyth Halsary Fund, funded by ScottishPower Renewables (SPR) community benefit funds, administered by

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**](#)

North Coast Trail Update



straight into winter with the dark nights looming. Since we last spoke, the community consultation period came to an end, we got some brilliant feed back from communities and good constructive feedback. What I enjoyed most, was hearing stories and memories from along the North Coast, meeting some 'well kent' faces was a highlight!

In September we had Charlie Hawkins up to visit, who has a wealth of path building experience and is helping us create a survey for possibly routes for the trail, and give us advice on infrastructure or maintenance that may be required to make them as a safe and as accessible as possible. Over the month we walked the North Coast of Caithness in every which way- thankfully it was *mostly* dry! There was a few moments reminiscent of the children's book 'We Are Going On a Bear Hunt' - 'We can't go over it. We can't go under it, Oh No! We have got to go through it!'. An unfortunate gorse bush situation springs to mind!

😊 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!

Celebrating Two Years of Trail Development!



Since September 2022, Kenneth McElroy has been employed as the Trail Development Manager John o' Groats Trail, the far north's premier long-distance walking Trail.

the Caithness North Sutherland Fund, and a private donation from Caroline Pickard, in memory of her husband Rob.

Caroline and Rob were keen walkers, and amongst some of the first to walk the John o' Groats Trail in 2017, completing the walk in 2018. Rob passed away in July 2018, and Caroline made a £10,000 donation towards the Trail, observing that *“Rob would have been so pleased the Trail is progressing and honoured to have a donation given in his name to help in keeping this beautiful walk accessible for as many people as possible.”*

Over the course of the last two years Kenneth has identified and tackled a number of issues and obstacles along the Trail. Kenneth himself been responsible for over £200,000 towards Trail development, from a variety of funders, all of which has gone towards the development and improvement of Trails in the north of Scotland: between October 2022 and September 2024, the John o' Groats Trail have added 52 stiles, 8 walkways and 12 bridges to the route, largely in the Caithness sections of the Trail.





Other notable additions and improvements to the trail include a series of steps was built at Forse, and steps at Whaligoe – the latter improvement attracting the attention of BBC Scotland with a short news bulletin featuring the Trail. This was the second time that the Trail featured on the telly, after their 2023 appearance on BBC Landward.

All of this has meant that 2024 was a record-breaking year for trail walking in the north highlands. Since 2022 the John o' Groats Trail has seen a 65% increase in walker numbers, and praise for the Trail has flowed in from all corners of the world, with Kenneth encountering walkers from Germany, Italy, USA, Israel and even Keiss!

Funding was also utilised towards the development of a new trail – The North Coast Trail (NCT), which will run westwards from John o' Groats. Funds acquired by Kenneth were utilised towards the appointment of a new Trail Development Manager, Laura Gray, who has been in position since June 2024.

Kenneth notes that the best is yet to come – with £90,000 raised towards the construction of Loth Burn Bridge, which will be by far the most expensive infrastructure development along the Trail.

Trail founder and ANTS chairman Jay Wilson has praised Ken's efforts:

"It has made a huge difference to the trail and the charity to have Ken's youthful enthusiasm and energy to develop the trail the past two years. A big thanks to our funders for his position."

The success of the Trail points towards the north highlands as becoming the premier 'slow tourism' destination in Scotland, and perhaps one of the most famous walking routes in the world. Kenneth cheerfully comments – *"It just takes one step at a time."*

Contact us:

Email: walk@jogt.org.uk

Telephone: 07528675774

Website: www.jogt.org.uk

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