

# JOHN O' GROATS TRAIL

Coastal walking route from  
Inverness to John o' Groats



## Merry Christmas!



*A note from the chair*

Greetings to all friends of the trail!

For myself, it's been a truly  
wonderful year with my girlfriend

great things that have happened.

Laura has told the story of many of them below. What she won't mention is that she's responsible for most of them!

Unfortunately, we did have one setback on the trail this year. We lost our longtime trail manager Ken McElroy, who has moved on to new challenges. As our first trail manager, Ken helped us grow and take our first steps as a more stable organisation. Thank you Ken!

Bridge in April, and in November she joined me in Cornwall to walk the first days of my long-awaited trip from Land's End to John o' Groats. It was ten years ago, in planning to do that walk, that I first discovered the joys of what was to become the John o' Groats Trail.

In 2026, I hope you'll join us in celebrating ten years of trail-building!

Happy Trails!

Jay

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 **Trail Reflections** 

With Ron McCraw



*Ron, photographed above with Trail Development Manager Laura, joined us as a trustee in 2025, bringing with him a wealth of experience in trail development. Below, he reflects back on his time surveying the trail in 2022 and the progress that has been made on the trail in this time.*

I had the good fortune to be asked to conduct a path condition survey along the entire 147 miles of the JOGT. So in 2022 between May and August I completed the route in several stages on successive trips to the far north, and not necessarily in a logical order!

I arguably saw the trail from a different perspective compared with the usual end to ender or day tripper. My focus was the path corridor: path surface and width, drainage, incline, cross slope, vegetation encroachment, erosion, whether suitable stiles, gates, bridges, signposts and waymarkers existed or not, their condition, and what was needed. Above all, I had to assess the trail for public safety and accessibility.

My recording devices were mobile phone, GPS for locations and survey tracking, and old fashioned clipboard and paper. You can perhaps imagine my survey walks were

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knock back the subsequent days plans with consequences for future logistics.

The south section from Inverness through the Black Isle, Easter Ross and Sutherland were largely easier to survey with fewer issues to record and easier terrain to pass through. Indeed, some was done by bicycle, something that is not really feasible north of Helmsdale. Fortunately, I was able to cycle much of the southern quiet road and cycle way sections, good for me but noting that alternative off-road paths would be appreciate more by walkers.

In contrast, the northern section from Helmsdale had many more issues to report: encroaching vegetation, missing bridges and stiles, and route alignment issues where the path ran close to the cliff edges.

Three years on, and now as a Trustee, I have revisited many trail sections and it is clear to see where ongoing improvements have been made and where they are still needed. But progress has been significant: more structures on trail, better vegetation management, effective signage, and evidence on the ground of many more feet as the trail becomes more and more popular.

The survey wasn't all a conscientious slog wrapped up in measurements and indexes. I also had the opportunity to appreciate the landscape and nature, and experience the changing geographical nature of the trail - from easier flatter sections in the south to more rigorous wilder sections in the north. The south feels like good steady conditioning for the harder miles in the north.

It is in the north now where I feel the greatest affinity when I visit the trail, and indeed really look forward to returning on Trustee business. It's quite hard to explain why, but I love the simplicity of following that narrow green grassy trod as it undulates along cliff tops, along geos, passed sea stacks, arches and castles, taking in the cacophony of seabirds, especially the springtime chattering of fulmars and screeching kittiwakes, and viewing the massed ranks of guillemots, razorbills and others on the cliffs.

**For me that's a fabulous reason to go to the trail, just to BE in that environment, whether a day walker or end to ender. Follow the green trod!"**

*Thanks Ron!*

## Trail Updates



*Above: Jay Wilson and Caroline Pickard on "The Rob and Caroline Pickard Bridge"*

Incase you missed it, in April we completed our biggest infrastructure project yet. Walkers now no longer have to get their feet wet, or go for a swim, to cross Loth Burn when heading to Helmsdale or Brora- at time of writing 1254 pairs of feet have been kept dry using the crossing. This has been a monumental achievement for the trail, and we were delighted to have Caroline join us on a snowy day in November to unveil its official name and a lovely shiny new plaque!

*With thanks again to: ★You, the fantastic public who donated to the 'The Big Give' ★Peoples Postcode Lottery ★North Highland Initiative ★SSE Sustainable Development ★SSE Gordon Bush ★Gordon and Ena Baxter Foundation ★Kilbraur Wind Farm Community Benefit Trust*

*And of course, our super engineer Frank McCulloch of Arvika Consult and Landower, John Billet*



*Above: Scott Webster (landowner), George Shearer (contractor), William Munro, Maisie Calder (both of Sinclair Bay Trust) and Laura Gray (Trail Development Manager) at Keiss Castle by David Scott*

In October, we saw the completion of a super project to improve safety on the trail at Keiss Castle. The collaboration of Sinclair Bay Trust, tenant farmers, Scott and Douglas, and ourselves allowed us to make some much needed improvements to access around the castle, making the experience more safe and enjoyable for both locals and visitors alike. As I am sure everyone involved will say, this collaboration has been a true testimony as to how local collaborative effort can be of benefit to everyone.

By building walkways, fenced paths and a fenced viewing areas, people are able to take in the spectacular views of the castle and cliffs while have the assurance both themselves and the surrounding livestock are safe from the cliff tops.

We are absolutely delighted this project is now complete and able to be enjoyed, a huge thank you once again to George Shearer for carrying out this work, it was no easy job!

*With thanks to Sinclair Bay Trust (SSEN) for funding this vital project*

### **Other Trail Improvements**

This year has also seen us focus on packages of work in various locations across the trail to upgrade, replace or build new infrastructure.

*Left: Bridge over Occumster Burn given a 'facelift', the previous bridge had been built by the*



We have been completing a lot of work in the Lysbter - Whaligoe area, which so far has seen the completion of 9 bridges and 8 stiles with many more to be completed in the coming months. These improvements have made such a difference to walking conditions in a popular part of the trail!

*Left: Moved in fences at Freswick to give more walking space*



At Freswick, with gracious permission from the landowner, we moved in 3 sections of fencing, built several new walkways and 4 stiles. This beautiful part of the trail previously had been close to the cliff edge, with the new improvements the trail can be enjoyed with plenty room to safely walk.

*With thanks to our landowners, CVG Halsary Caithness Community Fund , CVG, Halsary Fund- Latheron, Lybster, Clyth and NHI.*

All of this infrastructure building takes time and effort - but also... 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](#)

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♥ Give The Gift of Membership For The Year ♥

Perhaps your friend or loved one walked the trail? If so they will know and appreciate all the work that goes into making this experience possible. Memberships are 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!



### 👕 Give the Gift of Style 👕

Our recently released line of t-shirts, designed exclusively for the trail by local designers, would be a great gift for someone who has completed the trail, has the ambition to, or even just enjoys what the coast has to offer. Walk 150 miles of smiles in style. Click below to see our range of designs available.

[View Our Range of Merchandise](#)



### ■ Give the Gift of a Great Walking Experience ■

Our detailed guide to the John o'Groats Trail would be a super gift for anyone looking to take on the challenge, or even for the local who wishes to explore their own coastline. The walk is broken down into manageable sections, with helpful advice and tips for along the way. A must have for any walker! Click below for more information.

[Buy Guidebook](#)



★ Give the Gift to Celebrate the Achievement ★

by the Trail Manager and Trail Founder Jay Wilson, this is a great way to celebrate a wonderful achievement, and help support the John o' Groats Trail. Click Below for more information or email us on [walk@jogt.org.uk](mailto:walk@jogt.org.uk) .

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