

JOHN O' GROATS TRAIL

Coastal walking route from
Inverness to John o' Groats



News vol. 9 no. 5: Strimming Keeps Trail Open



A note from the chair

I can't believe it's the end of July!
What a busy first half of the year it
has been, more than enough already
for most entire years! Volunteers
and contractors are slashing and
strimming, to keep the trail open for

The Berriedale hostel has made
great strides in the six weeks since it
was purchased. A coat of paint,
strimming the garden, and a few
minor repairs have brought it from
"very rough" to "merely rough"

(pictured above, Gill is next to yours truly). Read below the excellent interview, by volunteer/trustee Tricia, of trail walker/member Martin Luethi.

Janet who feature in a short message below.

As always... Happy Trails!

Jay Wilson, Chair

Walkers Report

Ken our trail manager, our contractors, and volunteers have all been busy strimming and slashing the trail all summer. It's an aggressive campaign, the most strimming we've ever done, and the aim is to keep all of the trail walkable and pleasant during the summer months. Bracken can grow more than a foot (30 cm) per week, so it doesn't take long before it needs it again!

If you find parts of the trail difficult to walk, or a broken stile or bridge, or missing signage, please report this to us, with location. (OS Coordinates, What.Three.Words, or landmarks.) We get reports sometimes without locations, which is frustrating because we know there's a problem, but we don't know where!

With the Berriedale hostel open, there is now accommodation at or near the end of every stage of the trail. Though there isn't a restaurant in Berriedale, you can order a meal from the River Bothy cafe before 2pm for takeaway by closing time of 4pm.

To support our strimming efforts, please donate here:

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

Berriedale accommodation improves and welcomes first visitors

The Halfway House Hostel in Berriedale saw its first visitors in late June and July. The first guests didn't seem to mind the decorating and repairs taking place around them. A marked improvement has taken place.



For example, see above, there's three nice sofas forming a conversation circle in the lounge now, and maps on the walls, whereas before it was looking pretty bare! Plus all the rooms have been painted, the bedrooms have nice beds in them, and lots of wonderful people have donated items such as furniture, sheets, pillowcases, dishes and utensils. We even have a distinctive landmark to help you navigate your way to the hostel from the trail.

Please book the Halfway House in advance. You can call, text, or WhatsApp Jay on 07526281088 or email halfwayhouse@jogt.org.uk or contact us through the trail web site. We're also on Facebook, search for "Halfway House Berriedale". Income from the Halfway House will go to help build the trail.

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



**YOU DON'T NEED A POT OF GOLD
TO SUPPORT YOUR COMMUNITY.**

(...I MEAN, THAT'D BE NICE.)

**BUT WITH JUST £10,
YOU CAN HELP TO
ACHIEVE SPECIAL
THINGS!**

**VISIT WWW.JOGT.ORG.UK TO
JOIN AS A MEMBER TODAY AND
HELP SUPPORT THE JOHN
O'GROATS TRAIL!**

Keep the trail open all summer! Direct link to donate to our summer strimming campaign: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/jogt-summer-trimming>

💛 **Keep in Touch... with Martin Luethi** 💛

We're keen to keep in touch with walkers and hear their memories and experiences. Our trustee Patricia Pearl has been gathering stories from Trail walkers, and this month Patricia has been in touch with Martin Luethi of Bern, Switzerland, who walked the trail before Covid.

Patricia: When did you walk the Trail?

Martin: I walked the trail in May 2019.

Martin: Near Bern, Switzerland (here's a picture below, near where I live)



Patricia: Wow! When you live near such spectacular scenery, what motivated you to walk the John O'Groats Trail?

Martin: It all started with a popular Swiss comedy show Divertimento; they did a three part show about the West Highland way and this motivated my wife and I to walk the West Highland Way. We enjoyed that experience so much we decided to try another Scottish walk and found the John O' Groats Trail on the Walk Highlands website. The Trail had not been walked often at that point and we thought it looked like a bit of an adventure .

Patricia: What did you like about the Trail ?

Martin: Walking by the sea, especially the stretch North of Brora to John O'Groats. I liked the adventure of walking along the cliffs, especially where it was pretty exposed. It all worked out – the burns did not flood, and we accepted the bad weather as part of the experience

Patricia: Did anything go wrong ?

But you just have to inform yourself...

Patricia : Can I have a photo of you ?

Martin: Here's a photo of me finally arriving at John o' Groats!



Patricia : Did you take any photos when you were walking the Trail which you would like to share for the newsletter?

Martin: Yes, here's one of my favourite areas, just south of the Clyth lighthouse, which you can see in the distance. Such a pretty part of the trail, and easy walking with plenty of room along the low cliffs.



Patricia: Anything else?

Martin: I am currently recovering from a hip operation but dreaming about trips to come. Maybe the South West Coast Path or the Pennine way. I would like to walk the Northern half of the Trail one day

Patricia : Thankyou for your time ! Please stay in touch with us and let us know when you come back. You will find that the Friends of the Trail have built some new bridges and stiles so there is hardly any barbed wire to navigate these days, and there is now hostel accommodation available for Trail Walkers near Berriedale



Keep in Touch; our Trustee Patricia has been keeping in touch with people from far and wide who have walked the Trail. Email her if you'd like to tell your story.

keepintouch@jogt.org.uk

Musicians settle into the Halfway House

The third ever set of guests at the Halfway House was Mike Higgins and Janet May from Shropshire. Both musicians, they had first walked most of the trail in 2018, but had encountered the limits of our work that summer, when they had to deal with bracken and gorse in a remote area. They recently returned, basing themselves at the Halfway House, and filled the gap. Mike is pictured here practicing his trumpet, and they wrote the following words themselves.



Five years ago we decided to stroll from where we were living near Fraserburgh to John o' Groats. Having discovered this wonderful trail, we joined it. The JOGT enabled us to walk up the east coast to John O'Groats, and not have to walk on the very busy A9. What a treat it was, until we left Helmsdale and couldn't force our way through the gorse and bracken. Stumbling through the summer growth, which was way above our heads, on top of the cliffs for 3

However, this year, we went north to fill the "hole" in our walk, with no problems. It was SO worth it. We've been desperate to complete the Helmsdale to Dunbeath section for all these five years. The work done by marvellous volunteers over that time has enabled walkers to go over the sort of terrain that in 2018 completely defeated us. And the recently opened Halfway House Hostel was a big help as well. We were confident throughout that we were on the trail, and the foot bridges and steps down the very steep bits were brilliant. Thank you, all you wonderful volunteers, very very much.

Volunteers and AGM Date

Finally, thanks are due to all the trail volunteers, including the wardens who are our eyes and ears on the trail. In the summer especially, we need as many reports as possible of what's going on along the trail, especially how high the vegetation is. Email Ken at manager@jogt.org.uk to update us.

Our volunteer day on Sunday, 16 July was a success. The Caithness Environment Volunteers joined us at Bruan (south of Whaligoe) in gorse cutting and building about 30 metres of boardwalk through a boggy area. Many of our walkers will remember this brief stretch for its bog and gorse. Thank you volunteers, and thanks Ken for organising it! See the photo below, with volunteers from left to right Phil Davey, Ian MacDonald, Keith O'Brien, Alyson Gorrie, Hamish Moodie, and Iain MacLean.

Also, please save the date for our AGM, which will be at the Norseman Hotel in Wick (and online) on Thursday, 26 October at 7:30 pm.

All members welcome! (Follow any donation link to give £10 and become a member.)



Happy Trails!

Thanks for reading this. Now go outside!

-Jay

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.

Donate today to help keep the trail open this summer:

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

Contact us:

Email: manager@jogt.org.uk

Telephone: 07528675774

Website: www.jogt.org.uk

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