



Brecon Beacons
DARK SKY RESERVE
GWARCHODFA AWYR DYWYLL
Bannau Brycheiniog

Brecon Beacons National Park International Dark Sky Reserve

2017 Update Report



The Brecon Beacons National Park International Dark Sky Reserve

Update Report 2017

Following on from our much valued designation in 2013, we are pleased to report that we are continuing to embrace our status as one of Wales' and the UK's Dark Sky Reserves.

We hope this update will show that we are continuing to work hard to maintain our status whilst also raising awareness of the importance of dark sky conservation.

We continue to work with our partners in Wales, the rest of the UK and in Southern Ireland to share best practice and create a stronger voice not only in terms of promoting the importance of our night sky but also providing a stronger combined voice to our politicians.

Our report contains updates on the following areas:

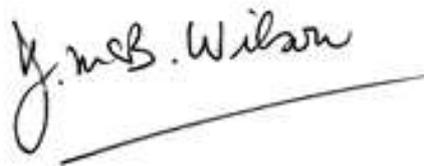
- Public Engagement
- Work to promote importance and protection of Dark Skies
- Collaboration
- Lighting Improvements

We are, as always, grateful for the IDA's support and would be happy to answer any additional questions that you have.

All best wishes,



Ruth Coulthard
Brecon Beacons National Park Authority



Jim Wilson
Brecon Beacons Park Society

Public Engagement

We have 33,000 residents in the National Park and just over 3 million visitors to the area each year. Of this, we have had over 1200 directly involved in stargazing activities in the last year.

Astronomy continues to play an increasing role in attracting visitors to the national park. The Brecon Beacons Observatory continues to draw people in and between August 2016 and this date, 492 people have used the observatory and a further 757 have come to astronomical events across the park which do not include the additional numbers that attend Abergavenny Astronomical society, Heads of the Valleys astronomical society and private events at local businesses.

We continue to run our Dark Sky Ambassador Course with businesses and now have over 65 people qualified as ambassadors. These people are often the first point of contact for visitors arriving at the Dark Sky Reserve and attending a two day training event is mandatory to become an ambassador, we now have a strong network of dark sky ambassadors who tell the story of the National Park's dark skies as well as making improvements to their own business to ensure they are 'dark sky friendly'.

Our twitter and facebook social media channels are alive with images of the stunning night skies above the Brecon Beacons and we continue to work with local photographers to share these images with our 3000 followers on these channels. Dark Sky Wales, a company based in South Wales and one of their employees is a founder member of the reserve status, work regularly with our visitor centre and are working directly with local photographers such as Alyn Wallace in promoting the park and running astrophotography workshops.

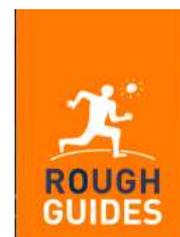
People continue to flock to the observatory for daytime solar work and night time tours and plans are being prepared to initiate monthly talks and open nights/events on a more permanent basis – currently we have run these with 4 seasonal sessions open to the public.

The Brecon Beacons Observatory Facebook page now has 540+ likes and over 1000 people look at the site after every post. A regular monthly sky notes newsletter goes up on the page in readiness for the month's beginning and this post is shared with the Elan valley DSP and with Snowdonia IDSR. It also goes up on the BBNP Ambassador's site too and is shared by the Brecon Beacons National Park.

We were delighted earlier this year when the Rough Guide named the Brecon Beacons as the top stargazing destination in the world! It is recognised there are other places which are 'darker' than our reserve but they cited the combination of landscape, culture and welcome as the combined reason for this accolade!

1. Brecon Beacons, Wales

Wales's first "Dark Sky Reserve" has effectively minimised light pollution with the involvement of local communities, creating conditions clear enough to view meteor showers, nebulas and, more rarely, the Northern Lights. City-dwellers from nearby Cardiff and Bristol can bring their binoculars to Hay Bluff or to the atmospheric ruins of medieval Llanthony Priory to experience truly starry nights.



Two books written by local astronomer and observatory director, *Dark Land, Dark Skies* by Seren Books and *Observing Nebulae* for Springer publishing in New York have been a feature of this year. *Dark Land, Dark Skies* will be published to coincide with the national parks 2017 year of Myth and Legend. *Observing Nebulae* was released in December 2016 and features images taken at the observatory.

There have been 8 activities during 2016/17 that were arranged by the BBNPA and 11 additional activities arranged by Dark Sky Wales. In addition, we had the bi-annual Astrocamp in Cwmdru, public observing events by Cardiff Astronomical Society, Abergavenny Astronomical Society and Usk Astronomical Society.

In all, these events have attracted over 2000 visitors to the park specifically to do astronomy and enjoy the IDSR. The Dark Sky Reserve has also featured highly at many high profile events that take place in the reserve such as the Crickhowell walking festival which attracts 500 people, The Abergavenny Food Festival 45,000, The Green Man Festival (10,000), and the Eisteddfod which attracted a record 130,000!

This year we will work with 300 young people from the youth Eisteddfod and welcome 150 delegates from the UK's 15 national parks to engage their staff on dark skies.

We continue to run our education programme which works with local schools to raise understanding of the various negative effects of light pollution and encourage people to make their communities more dark sky friendly.

A growing number of stargazers continue to approach the National Park due to its status with a number of large starcamps now finding their home in our reserve especially the aforementioned one at Cwmdru which attracts of 300 people. This year, in particular, we worked with a local astronomical society to host an afternoon and evening of stargazing activities for 50 visitors from the Germany.

We have developed a guide for businesses in the National Park to host more events and encourage them to adopt a range of dark sky friendly practices. This was developed in conjunction with Pembrokeshire National Park Authority and Snowdonia National Park Authority. In addition we are meeting next month with the Elan Valley Dark Sky Park managers to develop a Wales' dark sky forum.

In addition, we have installed an all sky fish eye camera which acts as a web cam and have produced a guide to our dark sky reserve which is available across the park in information centres.

Work to promote importance of Dark Skies

We have been very keen to support others and encourage where possible, other destinations to seek an additional layer of protection for their Dark Skies. Our reserve board members have been very active in speaking to other regions and have already assisted the Peak District, Snowdonia, Anglesea, Elan Valley, New Forest, South Downs, Clwydian Range, County Mayo, Kerry and Cranborne Chase with developing their plans to gain International Dark Sky status. Personal visits by members of the dark sky board have been made to six of these destinations which demonstrates our proactive approach to promoting dark skies.

We have also been involved in a UK research strategy led by an educational charity in Oxford to develop a much larger study in relation to the harmful effects of light pollution..

This month we attended a dark sky conference in Galloway Forest Park again demonstrating our commitment to the wider dark sky cause.

More locally we have engaged with a number of communities in the Brecon Beacons National Park to gain dark sky discovery site status and signed an official research partnership with the University of South Wales to explore a variety of research areas including those focused on light pollution.

We helped secure £39,000 to help develop Dark Sky tourism and public engagement in the South West of Wales and developed two business toolkits, ran three business workshops and developed our own dark sky business accreditation course. This project also led to the creation of a Wales Dark Sky Places website which has regular blogs, details of the night sky in that month and stresses the importance of night sky conservation.

We continue to engage with the media and have had two articles published this year about the park and the importance of dark sky conservation.

Lighting Improvements

The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority Special Planning Guidance document has now been applied to over 100 planning applications in the region and enabled developers to create plans which do not damage the dark sky reserve.

We have published an online guide to good lighting practice and given this to all of our tourism ambassadors. We are currently compiling a guide to dark sky friendly lighting for domestic homes and small businesses as the availability of dark sky friendly lighting is limited at major stores.

We have worked with the Welsh Government to ensure all Trunk Roads Agency roads (major roads) in the National Park have the correct CCT LEDs, the first commitment, we believe, in the UK.

We continue to work with larger institutions and in the last year helped the Ministry of Defence, Welsh Water, the local health board and two outdoor activity businesses change their lighting on their estates to meet our criteria. A report carried out last year showed a 5% decrease in light pollution overall. Whilst this is a small improvement, in relative terms it is huge as light pollution in the national Park was increasing rapidly. We recognise this needs to be much higher and the Dark Sky Board are working on plans for a larger awareness campaign.

Up to date contact details

Please see below the main contact details for our International Dark Sky Reserve. We would be grateful if both names could be added to the mailing lists and contact points so both the Authority and the Society are contactable.

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