



Brecon Beacons
DARK SKY RESERVE
GWARCHODFA AWYR DYWYLL
Bannau Brycheiniog

Brecon Beacons National Park International Dark Sky Reserve

Update Report 2019



The Brecon Beacons National Park International Dark Sky Reserve

Update Report 2019

We are proud to write this update to the International Dark Sky Reserve Update as we celebrate five years of enjoying the prestigious International Dark Sky Reserve status.

We hope this update will again show that we are continuing our determined efforts to maintain our status and raise awareness of the importance of dark sky conservation.

We continue our efforts to work collaboratively with partners who still include Northern and Southern Ireland, Scotland, England as well as Wales. In addition we have made new contacts in the Atlantic Area of Europe this past year.

We see this work as the logical next step for dark sky conservation in the UK and believe that, by sharing best practice and creating a stronger voice for dark sky conservation, we can begin to see significant progress not only in raising awareness but in achieving reductions in light pollution.

Our report contains updates on the following areas:

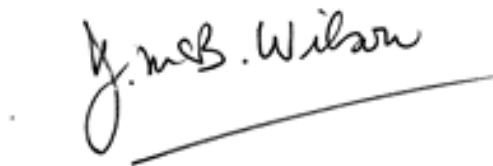
- Public Engagement
- Marketing of our IDSR status
- Collaboration
- Lighting Improvements

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, according to the latest statistics, attract just over 5.38 million visitor days each year. Of this, we have had over 6235 directly involved in stargazing activities in the last year, double that recorded in 2018 and an overall 76% increase in activity since 2017. In addition through social media and editorial coverage it is estimated that over 150,000 have been reached with news about the Brecon Beacons ISDR, again an increase since 2018.



This year we again welcomed 600 people attending two Astrocamps and traveling from all over the UK to do so.

We continue to run five stargazing events each year from our main visitor centre. We increased attendance at these to over 700 and they continue to grow in popularity.

There is continuing evidence that attendees are travelling great distances to attend these events, including

London and the SE of England. Through conversations with accommodation providers and their business associations we also see evidence of attendees staying overnight in the area when they are attending the events and we know the numbers of overnight stays has increased by 3.6% in the past year. This is a real boost for the local businesses as tourism has previously been dominated by people traveling just for one day and therefore not investing in all areas of our tourism economy.

In addition, from October 2018 to September 2019, 2015 members of the public have used the observatory and auxiliary telescopes to enjoy the night skies and to take photographs of the Milky Way and other objects. That is an 80% increase since 2018!

Specific additional highlights this year have included:

- We have secured £95,000 in EU funding to create 6 new community based stargazing events which feature observing, night time wildlife and learning about the importance of the night sky. A new guide to stargazing will also be produced as part of this project.
- Abergavenny and Usk Astronomical Societies led stargazing activities at the region's largest music festival – the Green Man which attracts 25,000 attendees. We have also now been invited to be a part of the annual Hay Festival which attracts a global audience of over 273,000 people.
- New stargazing events have been developed by the Llyswen community and also we have successfully continued our collaboration with our national heritage organisation Cadw, the latter bringing together the night sky with some of the area's most iconic landscape features.

- We have worked with our national tourism agency, Visit Wales, to promote our dark skies and they have commissioned a video to market our night sky. This can be viewed here - <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=650230642065901>.
- Outreach work has continued with observatory director Martin Griffiths and Usk & Abergavenny Astronomical societies focusing on inspiring local Scout and Brownie groups plus primary school children and giving them the opportunity to gain the astronomy badges.

We continue to run our Dark Sky Ambassador Course with businesses and now have over 80 qualified ambassadors.

Marketing of our night sky

Our communication team continue to focus heavily on the wonders of our night sky through our social media channels which continue to share stunning images of the night skies above the Brecon Beacons. Each post is averaging around a reach of 3,500 from a wide demographic. The main Brecon Beacons facebook page now has 25,000 followers and our twitter feed 10,000 followers. In addition to this we run two Instagram pages which regularly feature our dark skies.

The [Brecon Beacons Observatory Facebook](#) page now has doubled its following since 2018 and now has 997 followers and continues to reach over 1000 people with each 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 have also facilitated journalist visits focusing on the night sky. Please see Appendix I for examples of this.

Additionally, the travel guide company Lonely Planet are developing a book on astrotourism/dark sky tourism. In recognition of their success of in this activity the Brecon Beacons IDSR were approached to give input to the book, which we duly did.

Collaboration

Our reserve board members continue to be very active in speaking to other regions and during this past year have continued to provide advice to Anglesea AONB, Elan Valley DSP, Clwydian Range AONB, County Mayo, Powys County Council and the Lake District with developing their plans to develop forms of protection for their night sky.

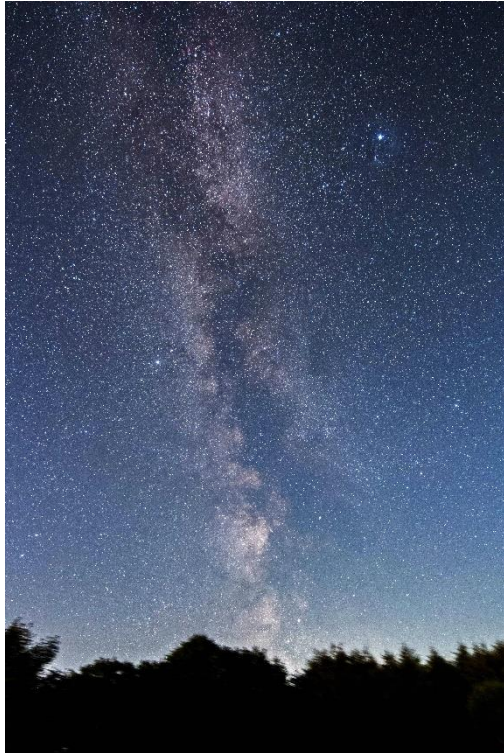
We also play a role in communicating with all dark sky protected areas in the UK, led by Dan Oakley of the South Downs National Park Authority.

Sadly, our application focusing on sustainable dark sky tourism experiences to the European Union Interreg Fund was not successful. However, we are now a part of a similar sized EU project which seeks to create and promote intangible cultural heritage experiences. Our night skies, together with their myths and legends, are a perfect fit and we will be looking to create additional experiences specifically for the Brecon Beacons National Park.

We continue to work to help those who are creating a new dark sky industry sector within our area. As is frequently discussed, dark sky tourism is one of the most sustainable forms of tourism.

We have the benefit of visitors coming out of season and staying longer and investing more. By supporting this new industry which helps to deliver experiences to our visitors, not only are we contributing to the economic wellbeing of our area, but also increasing the number of people who develop and affection and affinity to the night sky which, we hope, will lead to more dark sky conservation advocates.

Lighting improvements



The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority Special Planning Guidance document on dark sky protection has now been applied to over 250 planning applications within the IDSR and enabled developers to create plans which do not damage the quality of the night sky within the IDSR.

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 have encouraged Local Authorities to put in place their own policies to counter light pollution. They have in fact done so, and additionally all Local Authorities are required to have regard to the special qualities of National Parks in their decision making.

However, even with these policies in place there has been a rises in adverse lighting just outside the National Park (IDSR) boundary (in the Peripheral Zone to the

IDSR where the National Park have no direct control over development.

As part of our plans to take forward the IDSR status we will be proactive in meeting with adjacent local authorities (and their planning teams) remind them of their responsibilities to ensure their lighting schemes are changed / developed to address the negative impact their current LED schemes are having on the reserve.

Despite this rise in adverse lighting on the edge of the National Park boundary, light pollution levels have remained stable and the IDSR is still averaging Bortle 3.

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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