



Photo courtesy of Cream o' Galloway

Nature Based Tourism Clusters

Collaborative marketing for rural attractions

Over recent years the Southern Uplands Partnership has been promoting the sustainable use of natural resources to generate jobs for local people. The information in this guide, based on research projects commissioned by The Southern Uplands Partnership on behalf of South Lanarkshire Council, East Ayrshire Council, South Ayrshire Council, Dumfries & Galloway Council, Scottish Borders Council and SNH, is a general introduction for those considering setting up a NBT cluster. The case studies illustrating NBT cluster development in this guide are outside the commissioned research projects and are included to show different types of cluster working. This guide has been produced with the support of VisitScotland.

One of the main resources of the south of Scotland is a high quality natural environment. Through careful development and marketing of the local wildlife, landscapes and historical sites – and the many ways of enjoying them – a range of nature based tourism (NBT) attractions can be developed. NBT has the potential to provide additional income for existing rural businesses and create new jobs, as has been seen in other parts of Scotland and elsewhere in the world. Even in the more remote parts of southern Scotland, visitor numbers of 40,000 – 70,000 per year are possible. Visitor numbers of 20,000+ can sustain one full time job and can be achieved by fairly new, low key enterprises.

A nature based tourism attraction is one where the main reason for visiting is to appreciate nature, the countryside or the natural heritage. Archaeological and historical sites, National Scenic Areas or landscapes with natural heritage designations, wildlife, plants and birds in their natural habitats all come under the heading of nature based tourism attractions. Walking, cycling, riding, guided visits, walks and trails, and some traditional cultural activities can all qualify as nature based tourism.

Most nature based sites in the south of Scotland are small scale attractions, unlikely to be a significant draw on their own. Marketing individual attractions is expensive and can be unsustainable. Several businesses with a shared focus or locality can work together to develop a project and share marketing costs. This type of grouping is known as a 'cluster'. Most visitors are looking for a variety of quality experiences, so there is scope to link NBT to traditional attractions, such as gardens, buildings and visitor centres. By working together to hold visitors in the locality the amount of spend within the community is increased.

WHO ARE THE VISITORS?

Most people who visit NBT attractions in the south of Scotland will be travelling by car and are self-guided. Around half will stay with friends and family, about a third stay in hotels or guesthouses. The average stay of four days means that visitors have ample time to explore the area.

Some visitors will be elderly, and they and others with extra needs may require assistance with access. This includes infrastructure design (gates, toilets, etc) as well as marketing care (easily-read print). All such considerations are now becoming mainstream as a result of law. Many visitors will be walkers, cyclists and outdoor enthusiasts and will require accommodation with facilities for storing boots and drying clothes. These needs are well catered for through the Welcome Walkers and other such schemes. VisitScotland can advise.

IMPORTANT TRENDS

- People approaching retirement now are more affluent and more active than previous generations and focus on "experience" rather than destination.
- People are taking more short holidays and choosing destinations with a short travel time.
- There is a growing number of people with no dependents and high disposable income who choose holidays based on their own specific interests.
- Television creates an awareness of wildlife watching, walking and exploring. Internet access means that people of all ages can research holidays and hobbies on line.

These trends suggest the demand for nature based tourism will grow.

HAVE YOU A POTENTIAL CLUSTER?

If you feel that there may be opportunities for you to develop an NBT cluster these are some of the questions you should ask at the start.

1. Is there something shared that will give your cluster an identity?
2. Are there established attractions, activities and accommodation nearby that will add to what your cluster can offer?
3. Does your cluster marketing idea link into local tourism strategies? Contact your local VisitScotland office for advice on this.



Photo © Jim Wilson

4. Is essential major infrastructure in place (roads, access, etc)?
5. Will the partners in the cluster have the experience and leadership skills required to develop the project? Is help available?
6. Will your ideas have a positive impact on your business and your community? Will it protect or improve the environment and support an existing job or new job(s)?

If you decide to go ahead the first steps might be:

- Find a project leader. This could be a motivated person from the community or from a participating business, or an officer based at a local authority, agency or partnership with experience in local tourism and nature.
- Establish the group of stakeholders/cluster members.
- Identify the outstanding issues facing the cluster.
- Encourage members who run tourism businesses to make a financial contribution towards immediate costs.
- Access grant aid and match funds to undertake necessary minor infrastructure improvements such as signage, seating and path creation.
- Get the improvements made.
- 'Sell' the location as a nature tourism destination.
- Request further financial contributions from members for publicity and leaflets as required (e.g. for website development).

MARKETING

It is key to the success of the cluster that tourists find information on where to go and what they might see.

- Focus on experiences – natural, cultural, local.
- Remember women usually arrange family holidays and group outings.
- Involve local community initiatives and encourage local participation.
- Aim for year-round business, think of seasonal interest such as autumn colours, migration of birds, etc.
- Don't overlook local marketing, local people have visitors to entertain.
- Promote your regional individuality – local foods, customs, architecture, etc.
- Take advantage of wildlife, nature and regional website promotional listings.
- Investigate special interest magazines or walking publications likely to be read by your market.
- Consider leaflets, booklets, maps and labels as possible promotional materials, as well as websites.



Photo © Jim Wilson

■ CASE STUDY 1 GALLOWAY KITE TRAIL

Launched in October 2003, The Red Kite Trail is a community based NBT initiative created by RSPB Scotland in partnership with Forestry Commission Scotland and a local farmer. Local hoteliers, restaurants, pubs and a post office are involved as associate members. Start up funding for the project was provided by Making Tracks, (50%) a Foot & Mouth Disease recovery grant scheme, SNH, (25%), with the balance from RSPB Scotland, Forestry Commission Scotland, Dumfries & Galloway Raptor Study Group and the participating businesses on the trail.

The trail follows a route around Loch Ken providing viewing opportunities to see red kites and other wildlife. Facilities include footpaths, viewpoints, sculptures, information points, and CCTV, as well as the original release cages. Interpretation boards at key points on the trail are highlighted in a promotional leaflet and map that forms a fold-out guide of the trail. The map indicates the locations of the supporting businesses which provide accommodation, meals and services – as well as unique information and regular updates on kites and the local kite population - to visitors.



Photos courtesy of RSPB Scotland

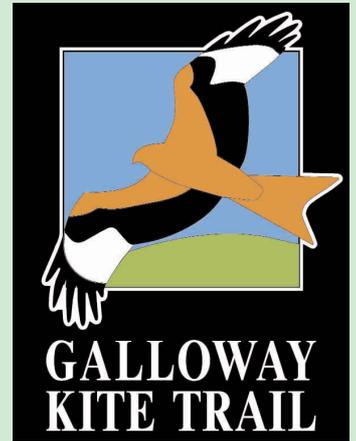
Open all year round, the kite feeding station established at Belymack Hill Farm is a popular attraction. As many as 30 kites can be seen together in the late winter afternoons, but kites can generally be seen at the station at any time of day, all year round. The farm also offers good views of raven and buzzard. The feeding station is just 10 minutes drive from RSPB Scotland's Ken-Dee Marshes Reserve and around 30 minutes from its Mersehead Reserve, sites well known for wintering geese

and attractive for breeding birds in spring and summer. Keen bird watchers can comfortably visit the trail and both reserves within a good day's "birding" at any time of year.

Each of the local businesses supporting the trail has a unique information board on various aspects of the kites' history and biology and is kept updated with information on the kites. A special 'kids' trail' has also been developed to encourage participation.

The feeding station alone reported 6,000 paying visitors in its first year of operation and there has been an extension to the viewing hide and creation of a disabled viewing car park since. All of the businesses involved have reported increased trade to some degree as a result of the trail. The excellent winter viewing opportunities have attracted group business to the local hotels during the off-peak season. Numbers visiting the local reserves have also shown a marked increase since the trail opened.

Chris Rollie of RSPB Scotland explains, "One of the key outputs of this project is the formation of the Galloway Kite Trail Trust, which will comprise of the trail businesses and partner organisations such as RSPB Scotland and Forestry Commission Scotland, but with increasing onus on the businesses themselves to continue to develop and market the trail. There are good early signs of this through linkage of businesses to the Galloway Kite Trail website. Beyond that there may be scope for CCTV on a live kite nest during the spring and summer or the development of communal roost viewing in autumn or winter. In many ways, now that the trail is in place, its future in terms of marketing and promotion is limited only by the imagination and drive of the partners. In addition, the trail has really helped to give community ownership of these wonderful birds, by giving locals and visitors alike opportunities to view and find out about kites, which were already generating much interest and enquiry. The local communities are justifiably proud of the kites and the fact that they now have a visitor attraction of such distinction."



Learn more about the Galloway Kite Trail: www.gallowaykitetrail.com

The cost of marketing is an important consideration. Some public grants are available, for example the VisitScotland Challenge Fund.

Web marketing can represent the cheapest means of promotion and the easiest way of marketing nature tourism sites to non-locals. Websites have the advantage of being easily updated if things change or if you have seasonal offers.

Leaflets can be worthwhile, but they must be well

distributed and displayed in appropriate places. Large print runs are cheaper to produce, but mean that a lot of print needs to be stored and can become out of date. Updating print frequently is costly.

Media coverage (press, radio, television) is valuable, but achieving it can be difficult unless one of your group has experience or contacts in that area. Involving nature tourism leaders like the RSPB can work well as they generally have a press office who can help or advise.



■ CASE STUDY 2 CLIFFTOP DISCOVERY TOURS

Seven Berwickshire farmers near the village of St Abbs on the south-eastern coast have come together to form Clifftop Discovery Ltd. This collaboration provides access to one of the most dramatic stretches of coastline in Great Britain. The cliffs are not accessible by road, so the Land Rover trail provides comfortable, secure 'safari-style' access over rugged terrain.

The partners identified a range of natural assets to attract visitors. The cliffs are the highest along the east coast of mainland Britain and form part of a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Protection Area (SPA), which is of national importance for its fauna and flora. St Abbs Head is one of the largest and most important mainland seabird nesting colonies in Britain providing the opportunity to observe vast numbers of cliff-nesting seabirds and, on occasion, the chance to see whales, dolphins, porpoises and seals. Roe deer, red squirrels, foxes and a wide variety of migrant birds are also seen regularly from the trail. The deep, clear water off St. Abbs Head supports a diversity of marine life. Along the trail there are spectacular geological

formations culminating in Hutton's classic 'unconformity' at Siccar Point. There are also prehistoric hill forts, settlements, and the ruins of an historic castle that can be visited.

The Clifftop Discovery idea was conceived and Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability helped to facilitate the project. Funding was secured through a Making Tracks grant and investment from the partners. Tour routes were agreed, gates were put into boundary fences, and access improvements planned. Tours started in spring 2002. A self imposed code of practice was drawn up by the partners and submitted for approval to SNH and the National Trust for Scotland. VisitScotland Quality Assurance was also obtained. To make the appeal as broad as possible specialist tours are available. These include ornithological, botanical, archaeological and geological excursions, an historical visit to Fast Castle and, in season, a visit to an Atlantic grey seal breeding colony. Clifftop Discovery Tours have an access license from National Trust for Scotland so that tour participants can visit the St Abbs Head as part of the trip. Good links have also been formed with the Scottish Seabird Centre at North Berwick and the Voluntary Marine Reserve at St Abbs Head and Eyemouth. Special trips for artists and photographers are arranged on request. The farming families involved offer additional services – self-catering holiday cottage accommodation, clay pigeon shooting and fly fishing tuition, archery and child-care – all marketed in conjunction with Clifftop Discovery Tours.

Ted Wise, Co-Director and Clifftop Discovery Guide explains: "At present we have a small business taking out about 300 visitors a year in small parties, visitor numbers are growing gradually. Working together has generated very positive links between the seven farms and there is potential to grow off-shoot enterprises for the individual farmers. There is work locally to develop a James Hutton Trail focusing on the geology of the region and when this opens it will offer another opportunity to expand our range of tours."

Learn more about Clifftop Discovery Tours - www.clifftopdiscovery.co.uk

For more on what's special about the Southern Uplands and nature based tourism

The Southern Uplands Partnership – www.sup.org.uk
 The Southern Uplands Partnership nature site – www.sup.org.uk/naturebasedtourism
 Wild Scotland – www.wild-scotland.org.uk
 VisitScotland – www.wildlife.visitscotland.com
 The Tourism & Environment Forum – www.greentourism.org.uk
 Green Tourism Business Scheme – www.greentourism.org.uk
 VisitScotland Challenge Fund – www.scotexchange.net
 Scottish Natural Heritage – www.snh.org.uk

A summary of cluster mapping research projects and other useful reports can be found on the Publications page of the Southern Uplands Partnership website www.sup.org.uk

The Southern Uplands Partnership is a registered charity started by local people, keen to maintain healthy communities and countryside and to see a vibrant economy in the south of Scotland. If you would like to know more, or join, visit the Southern Uplands Partnership website.

