



Ben Nevis Management Plan 2020-2022



JOHN
MUIR
TRUST

Vision

Our vision for the Ben Nevis Estate is one where the integrity of the wild landscape has been safeguarded not only for future generations to enjoy, but also for the sake of wildland and the rich diversity of the wildlife it supports. It is a vision where human manipulation of the landscape is minimal (only replacing natural processes where necessary) and where nature is given a largely free rein to develop a natural mosaic of wild landscapes and habitats.

Our vision is for all those who visit the summit to be touched by the sense of wildness that this high-altitude mountain environment can convey. Those living in the vicinity of the Ben Nevis Estate will have an increased awareness and understanding of the value of the wild landscape on their doorstep and the biodiversity it supports. The Trust will seek to work in close co-operation with neighbours and partners to engage in collaborative projects that enhance the biodiversity and encourage people to enjoy wild places.

Key objectives (*with link to John Muir Trust Corporate Strategy Priorities in italics*)

1. Promote participation in the John Muir Award and volunteering on the property (*IC06; 3&9) & (IC16; 1,3&10)*
2. Provide interpretation, information and opportunities for the local community and visitors to engage more broadly with the property and the Trust's work (*IC11; 1,9&10*)
3. Use the property as a platform to enable Partnership working and pursuit of joint projects with local organisations and initiatives (*IC17; 2,4&5*)
4. Work to restore natural processes, particularly those that will contribute towards the protection and management of designated features (*RR01; 10,11&12*)
5. Expand native woodland on the property, including the restoration of natural treelines (*RR02; 10&12*)
6. Engagement in partnerships to facilitate path restoration and repair, habitat and landscape enhancement (*RR03; 9,11&12*)

Facts and figures

The Ben Nevis Estate covers an area of 1,761 hectares (4,351 acres) in the Western Highlands lying to the south-east of Fort William.

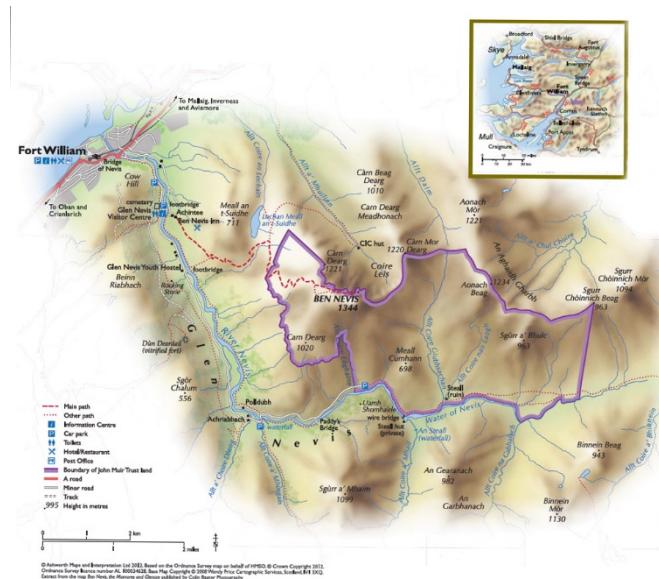


Figure 1 – Ben Nevis Estate boundary

Management agreements

Nevis Landscape Partnership: Ben Nevis Estate lies within the area covered by the Nevis Landscape Partnership (NLP). The NLP has a main board with ten representatives holding voting rights. John Muir Trust nominates one of these directorships. The NLP was formed with the express intent to 'guide future policies and actions to safeguard, manage and where appropriate enhance the environmental qualities and opportunities for visitor enjoyment and appreciation of the Nevis area'

Ben Nevis Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Steering Group: John Muir Trust actively participates in the Ben Nevis SAC Steering Group with the aim of delivering the habitat objectives associated with the Ben Nevis SAC

Statement of significance

"This is a landscape of massive proportions, breathtaking grandeur and great variety. It offers the highest altitude and greatest vertical relief in Britain."

(Extract from: Scottish Natural Heritage (2010). The special qualities of the National Scenic Areas. SNH Commissioned Report No.374. (see SNH Sitelink)).

Ben Nevis and Glen Nevis are key iconic locations both in landscape, habitat and recreation terms. The exceptional visitor pressure that this area experiences could have significant detrimental consequences upon its wild land status and ecological value. John Muir Trust have a great opportunity to demonstrate and communicate exemplary solutions to maintaining core wild land values, protecting ecological diversity, enabling responsible access and communicating our values to both the local community and visitors to the area. This will be carried out by working in partnership at a community and landscape scale in the area to develop solutions to both protect and enhance our wild landscape and natural processes and communicate and enable access and involvement for a wide range of people to connect and contribute to the care of this area.

Landscape description

Located in the core of Lochaber, Ben Nevis (1345m) is considered one of the most iconic mountains in the British Isles. Named "Beinn Nibheis" in Scottish Gaelic, suggested translations include "venomous mountain", however the most widely accepted translation is "the mountain with its head in the clouds" or "mountain of Heaven".

The Trust's property includes the upper part of the southern and western flanks of Ben Nevis. The northern boundary stretches eastwards following the Lochaber traverse taking in the Munro summits of Càrn Mòr Dearg and Aonach Beag until the summit of Sgurr Choinnich Beag is reached. The Trust's land slopes southwards down the flanks of these peaks to the southern boundary marked by the Water of Nevis where the river plunges from the grass flats at Steall through the Nevis Gorge, a densely wooded cleft with rich native woodland and remnants of Caledonian pine forest.

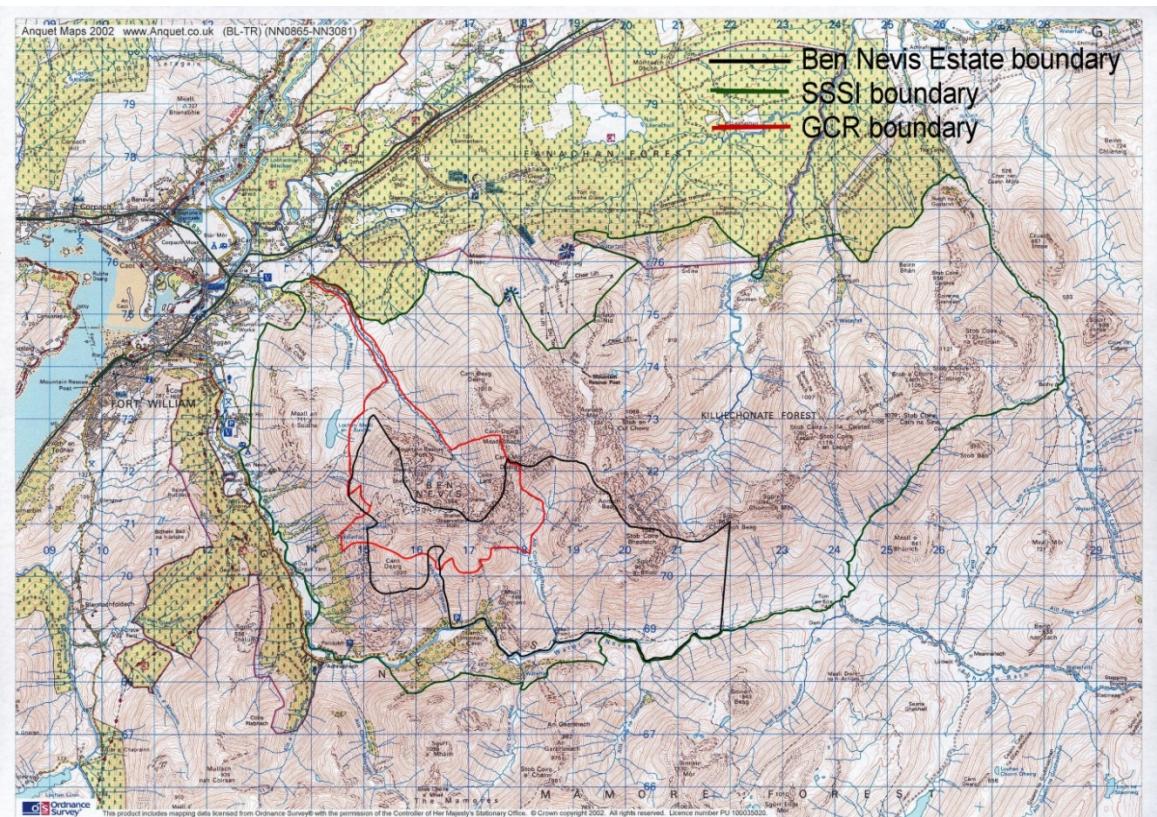


Figure 2 – Statutory Designations

The entire Ben Nevis Estate lies within the Ben Nevis and Glencoe National Scenic Area and possess many of the “special qualities” outlined within the designation:

- A land of mountain grandeur
- A land of classic highland vistas
- The impressive massif of Ben Nevis
- The wild Mamores and secretive Glen Nevis.

Geology

The formation of Ben Nevis and the surrounding mountains are largely attributed to the Caledonian Orogeny around 420 million years ago. Many of the metamorphic rocks associated with Ben Nevis started as marine sediment which formed around 700 million years ago and were later folded, heated and fractured during the Caledonian Orogeny resulting in examples of impure metamorphic limestones, Mica schists and fine-grained quartzite. Ben Nevis itself consists of intrusive and extrusive igneous rocks including Caledonian granites and andesite lavas.

Habitats

At higher altitudes mossy grasslands predominate, which give way to montane *Racomitrium* heath and sedge heath. The summits of Ben Nevis and Aonach Beag support extensive lichen cover, patches of snowbed vegetation and some small areas of lichen heath. Areas of diverse rock, screes and snow beds offer refuge for many nationally rare arctic alpine plants.

Many of these species are on the southern edge of their distribution and rarely found elsewhere in the British Isles.

At lower altitudes a mosaic of *Erica* dominated wet heath and grassland are predominant above the woodland. This is interspersed with many vegetation types such as drier *Calluna* heaths and various grass and rush heaths. Towards the base of the Glen there are areas of carbon rich blanket bog and some small areas of herb rich grassland and base enriched flushes.

Woodland

Montane woodland species benefit from the limestone and calcareous schist of Meall Cumhann, Coire Giubhsachan and Sgurr a'Bhuic, here areas of prostrate juniper and significant stands of downy willow are found.

The remnant ancient woodland in Steall Gorge benefits from the extensive limestone outcrops within the property and is dominated by silver birch alongside several other tree species such as ash, scots pine, oak, hazel, wych elm, aspen, holly and rowan.

Species

Notable mammal species within the Ben Nevis Estate include: Water vole, pine marten, pipistrelle bat, mountain hare, fox, and red deer. Furthermore, relatively recent historic records indicate the presence of both the Scottish wildcat and red squirrel. A variety of upland and woodland breeding birds are found on site including snow bunting, ring ouzel, skylark, golden eagle, merlin, spotted flycatcher, tree pipit, and redstart.

Many of these species are listed as 'red' or 'amber' under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. The site is home to several vascular plants that have been recorded as nationally rare or scarce in Britain by BSBI. Changes to the populations and habitats of several of these species are monitored on a yearly basis. Further information can be found in the Ben Nevis Estate background document.

Natural heritage designations

The significance of some of the habitat and species present are recognised by various designations. The entire Ben Nevis Estate sits within:

- Ben Nevis Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Ben Nevis Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Ben Nevis and Glen Coe National Scenic Area (NSA)

As well as the above, approximately 450 hectares of the property lies within the Ben Nevis Geological Conservations Review area (GCA)

History of settlement and land use

There is a rich history of settlement on the Ben Nevis Estate, with evidence of human activity from the Neolithic period to the present day. The discovery of a Neolithic arrowhead close to

the property indicates early signs of human activity near the site. From the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century, the woodlands of Glen Nevis were utilised to create charcoal to feed industrial scale iron works. This resulted in charcoal burning platforms, several of which can be found on the Ben Nevis Estate. Livestock farming, particularly sheep, has been a characteristic feature of the Nevis landscape for several centuries. Tenanted grazing took place within the Ben Nevis Estate up until 2000 but is no longer present. Ruined farmhouses and enclosures are present within the Steall area and are now reminders of the families who once lived there. As well as livestock grazing, from the eighteenth century the property was used for deer stalking, however this was not a major aspect of land use in the area. On the summit of Ben Nevis there are several examples of ruined Victorian buildings which are remains of a weather observatory and hotel.

Contemporary land use and pressures

Recreation is the primary land use on the Ben Nevis Estate. With the prospect of uninterrupted views, Ben Nevis draws around 150,000 summiteers a year and as a result plays a pivotal role in supporting the Scottish tourism and hospitality sector. As well as Ben Nevis, visitors are attracted to Upper Glen Nevis where they are met by Steall Gorge and Waterfall. Here visitors are offered a “Himalayan” landscape which is rarely experience in the British Isles.

Visitors within the Ben Nevis Estate create many opportunities, their large numbers play a very important role within the local economy by supporting the tourism and hospitality sector. Their presence also creates many challenges throughout Glen Nevis across several land holdings. In response to increase visitor pressures the Nevis Landscape Partnership (originally Nevis Working Party Group) was established in 1999. The partnership was created to enable all Glen Nevis landowners and stakeholders to collectively care for the Nevis landscape and reduce our impact on nature whilst securing the social, economic and environmental future of the area.

Both the historical impact of sheep and deer grazing are a defining characteristic of Ben Nevis Estate. High grazing has altered the biodiversity and aesthetic of the site. Moving forward, a primary objective is to reverse this trend. With the conservation objectives on the Ben Nevis Estate, year-round employment is possible with a property manager, conservation office and several local contractors who manage deer and the path network

Statutory designations

Entirety of the property lies within the **Ben Nevis Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**, **Ben Nevis Special Area of Conservation (SAC)** and the **Ben Nevis and Glencoe National Scenic Area (NSA)** (**See figure 3 – Ben Nevis Estate background document**)

The SAC has been identified for 17 habitats which are of international importance. As of 2020 16 of these habitats are in ‘favourable maintained’ or ‘unfavourable recovering’ condition, due to present management plans being executed by landowners across the whole SAC. Currently one is classified as ‘unfavourable declining’; species rich grassland with mat grass in upland areas due to it requiring a high level of grazing which is counter to

the recovery needs of the seven recovering habitats. One further habitat - Caledonian Forest - will be reclassified shortly as unfavourable due to high levels of browsing.

The SAC is of particular importance on account of its wide range of geological conditions, altitude and topography giving rise to a diversity of semi-natural and natural habitats from lowland woods to mountain cliffs and semi-permanent snow beds. The site is of international and national importance for a range of upland habitats and nationally important for upland birds, insects, vascular plants, mosses, liverworts and lichens. The SAC is considered to be one of the best areas in the UK for a number of these particular habitats.

(http://gateway.snh.gov.uk/sitelink/siteinfo.jsp?pa_code=8204)

Additionally, within the property a **Geological Conservation Review Site (GCR)** covers the upper part of Ben Nevis. The site is of national importance for the Caledonian Igneous Exposures, which were formed around 425 million years ago.

Recreation and visitor management

Ben Nevis and Glen Nevis are extremely popular visitor destinations. This puts very high visitor pressure on the single track road in Glen Nevis to access the paths on the Estate and on car parking and visitor toilets. John Muir Trust do not own the car parks to access the land or locations for toilets but will work with the Nevis Landscape Partnership to develop solutions.

Footfall on the path on the Ben Nevis path and through to Steall gorge is very high with up to 150,000 persons ascending Ben Nevis every year and at least 60,000 using the Steall gorge path. It is of highest priority to maintain these paths in good condition while maintaining the wild nature of the environment. The paths will be maintained where possible using hand build techniques with materials sourced in the immediate vicinity. If major repair work or rebuilding is necessary materials and machinery will be considered both with collaboration and consultation with neighbouring landowners and the Nevis Landscape Partnership.

In addition, the Trust will work with NLP to develop and promote visitor guidance through interpretation and transport solutions to reduce pressure on and damage to the wild nature of this landscape.

Consultation and review

The revision of this plan, following the previous (2018-2028 version), has been informed through consultation and engagement with the local community, neighbouring land-owners, and wider Trust membership and staff teams. It is the Trust's intention that consultation remains an ongoing process with opportunities provided for input and feedback throughout the plan's three-year timeframe.

Operations

1.0 Management planning

1.1 Audit existing state and condition

- Information gathered previously and available in the plan's appendices

1.2 Establish survey and monitoring programme

- Continue habitat monitoring programme; dwarf shrub heath, marked seedlings survey,
- tree transects, woodland toolkit, Blanket bog, juniper, tall herbs
- Incorporate montane scrub (see below) into the monitoring programme
- Conduct species monitoring programme: moorland and woodland breeding bird surveys, Mountain ringlet, Bats, Water voles, UK Biodiversity Action Plan butterflies
- Incorporate any other species and habitat monitoring if pertinent and time allows
- Link with NLP to record species and habitat monitoring in wider Glen Nevis area if pertinent and time allows e.g. mink raft monitoring
- Maintain species records of birds and mammals identified on the estate
- Weed, photograph and record marked seedlings in mini exclosures
- Take fixed point photographs of woodland edge
- Continue to monitor people counters and car park usage with NLP
- Link with NLP to review visitor impact in Glen Nevis and on Ben Nevis to identify and implement solutions

1.3 Develop SMART actions - Within updated Management Plan

1.4 Consult stakeholders

- Share Management plan and actions with NLP, MWDMG, & the SAC Steering Group
- Share Management Plan and actions though public events eg. Fort William Mountain Festival
- Local staff always available for any concerns, suggestions and comments

2.0 Soil, carbon and water

2.1 Maximise water table on peatlands

- Review peatland restoration grant application and reapply, smaller scale restoration may be undertaken by staff and volunteers

2.2 Minimise exposure, burning and grazing – no muirburn undertaken on the property

2.3 Minimise pollution- remove any litter when on site and arrange volunteer work parties to assist.

3.0 Biodiversity and woodland

3.1 Maintain in favourable condition

- Review Site Condition Monitoring (SCM) and Habitat Impact Assessment (HIA) of SSSI and SAC and adjust management actions if needed
- Maintain favourable condition of nine designated features within the SAC.

- Deliver deer management as agreed by the SAC Steering group to enable Blanket bog and Wet Heath designated features to continue as ‘unfavourable recovering’ moving to ‘favourable’ in due course.
- Work with neighbours and SAC Steering Group to return the Caledonian Forest from recent ‘unfavourable’ review into ‘unfavourable recovering’ leading to ‘favourable’ condition in due course
- Carry out habitat monitoring in the interim to ensure management continues to deliver recovery of designated habitats.

3.2 Maximise native habitats

- Monitor existing montane scrub and explore options for expansion
- Review riparian woodland areas and explore options for expansion and connectivity with neighbouring landowners

3.2 Biodiversity species management

- Remove any non-native plants as found
- Continue to monitor Mountain Ringlet, Water Vole and Bats

3.3 Restructure woodland

- Maintain mini enclosures
- Support Nevis Landscape Partnership schemes for woodland planting in Glen Nevis and explore options for greater woodland connectivity with neighbouring landowners.

3.4 Re- introductions-consider where appropriate as part of national programmes

4.0 Deer and livestock

4.1 Minimise deer impacts

- Ongoing deer cull according to Deer Management Plan (DMP) for the purpose of recovery of SAC/SSSI designated habitats and encouraging native woodland regeneration.
- Liaise with neighbouring landowners over joined up approach to deer management where possible.
- Engage with the SAC Steering group to deliver agreed plan needed to achieve favourable condition of designated habitats on SAC
- Collect and collate data on occurrence, distribution, recruitment and mortality of deer through observation and targeted surveys to contribute to the SAC Steering Group and DMP

4.2 Leave deer carcasses for eagles

- Due to challenges and impacts of deer carcase extraction, up to 50% of culled carcasses are either butchered on the hill or left in their entirety for eagles
- Install camera traps on deer carcasses where possible

4.3 Minimise livestock impacts

- Monitor incursions and liaise with owner/grazier

- Work with neighbours and SAC Steering Group to develop solutions to prevent stock incursions onto SAC.

5.0 Facilities & heritage

5.1 Staff training plan

- Plan developed, with a variety of refresher courses and needs identified

5.2 Infrastructure and heritage maintenance

- Ensure archaeological remains of meteorological station and charcoal burning platforms remain stable
- Support NLP/Friend of Nevis Work Parties where possible
- Work with NLP to develop Glen Nevis Heritage Trail and links to access from neighbouring properties.
- Work with NLP to develop and support access and infrastructure development in Glen Nevis to address visitor needs and reduce impacts on key access facilities e.g. shuttle bus, ebike infrastructure, improved information, car parks, paths and toilets.
- Investigate increasing visitor impact trends in Glen Nevis and on Ben Nevis with NLP and develop mitigation measures for these
- Support NLP in the development of Ben Nevis Fund to fund access and infrastructure maintenance and development

5.3 Reduce, re-use, recycle

- Trust wide audit being undertaken through 2020, with actions to be incorporated into this plan thereafter.

5.4 Minimise carbon footprint

- As above. In the interim seek to reduce vehicle use, explore options for an electric vehicle and utilise technology to enable online meetings.

5.6 Explore local renewable energy

- if / where appropriate

5.7 Remove redundant structures

- Continue to remove all unnecessary memorials from summit of Ben Nevis
- Continue to remove unnecessary cairns from Ben Nevis and wider property

5.8 Sensitive new build techniques

5.9 Sensitive footpath techniques

- Continue path maintenance contract on Ben Nevis and Steall paths and develop further path contracts for repair if necessary
- Deliver work parties for basic path maintenance on Ben Nevis and Steall Path including hiding of/camouflage of shortcuts and unnecessary paths on Ben Nevis

- Carry out regular safety checks and maintenance on Ben Nevis and Steall paths including man-made structures e.g. wooden bridge, handrail and Steall wire bridge
- Record and share path conditions/navigation features annually in April-May with Ben Nevis Visitor Centre

6.0 Communities, visitors & awareness

6.1 Provide responsible access

- Meet with organisers and develop agreement for access with large scale events

6.2 Meet responsibilities to local people

- Liaise with Highlife Highland Ranger, BNVC staff, residents and landowners in Glen Nevis
- Liaise with communities of interest e.g. local or national mountaineering and wildlife organisations where appropriate e.g. Lochaber Fisheries Trust, Mountaineering Scotland
- Attend relevant local meetings e.g. LBAP,
- Share our work with public via events e.g. Fort William Mountain Festival
- Hold open meetings as appropriate and share work plans through community platforms and existing membership groups and online

6.3 Joint project work

- Retain nominated position on NLP board and contribute to attend board and ongoing subcommittees where appropriate
- Support and contribute to projects in Glen Nevis with NLP which complement and enhance our vision for Ben Nevis Estate

6.4 Maximise interpretation

- Maintain and update 'on the ground' interpretation on Ben Nevis Estate to reflect new challenges and opportunities, to encourage access to wild land and guide appropriate behaviour to reduce negative impacts
- Link with and contribute to wider interpretation and pre visit guidance in Glen Nevis with NLP
- Consider opportunities to share cultural interpretation of area

6.5 Maximise educational opportunities

- Deliver summer children's Nevis Explorer events
- Deliver tutoring on UHI Degree programs where appropriate
- Deliver training in partnership with NLP on UHI NQ Countryside Skills with Ranger Training
- Deliver guided walks, talks, school visits as requested
- Support local schools/groups with John Muir Award
- Develop Junior Ranger programme with local secondary school
- Deliver Wild Poetry Comp and presence at Fort William Mountain Festival
- Target for delivery of John Muir Awards on/in conjunction with the property: 20 per year

Targets for delivery

WLMS HEADING	TARGET / INDICATOR	UNIT	Ben Nevis	
			Target	Actual
Management Planning	Baseline Data Surveys	No. identified and achieved	2	
	Habitat Monitoring	No. identified and achieved	4	
	Species Monitoring	No. identified and achieved	5	
Soil, Carbon & Water	Peatland Restoration	Ha of peatland restored	0	
	Minimise pollution	No. of litter picks undertaken	6	
		Tonnes / no. of bags removed	12	
Biodiversity & Woodland	Designated Features	Features in favourable condition	16	
	Designated Sites	Site status improvement	1	
	Native Woodland	ha of native woodland planted	0	
	Native Woodland	ha of native woodland maintained	12	
	Native Woodland	ha of native woodland regen	2	
	Plantations	ha of conifer plantation felled	0	
Deer & Livestock	Cull targets	Stag target achieved - Y/N	15	
	Cull targets	Hind target achieved - Y/N	30	
	Leave carcasses	no. left on the hill	15	
Facilities & Heritage	Path maintenance	kms of path maintained	6.5	
	Path repair/upgrade	kms of path repaired/upgraded	0	
	Conservation volunteering	no. person days of volunteering	7	
Communities, Visitors & Awareness	Public meetings held	no. of meetings held	1	
	Projects / Partnerships	no. projects / p'ships engaged with / deliver	5	
	Interpretation	no. of new panels/leaflets/virtual tours	2	
	Engagement	no. of guided walks / events	5	
	Education	no. of school groups hosted/engaged with	3	
	Education	no. of college groups hosted/engaged with	1	
	John Muir Award	no. of JMAs facilitated	25	
Other - JMT General	Communication	no. articles / updates written	5	
	Local Employment	no. of staff days per property	300	