



Brecon Beacons  
**DARK SKY RESERVE**  
**GWARCHODFA AWYR DYWYLL**  
Bannau Brycheiniog

# Brecon Beacons National Park International Dark Sky Reserve

**Update Report 2018**



# The Brecon Beacons National Park International Dark Sky Reserve

## Update Report 2018

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 have increased our efforts to work collaboratively with partners who now 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:

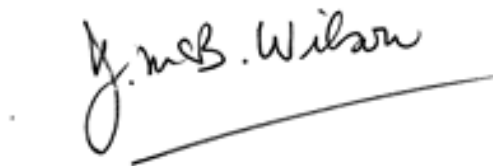
- Public Engagement
- Marketing of our IDSR status
- Collaboration
- Lighting Improvements

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 5.22 million visitor days each year. Of this, we have had over 3000 directly involved in stargazing activities in the last year, double that recorded in 2017. In addition through social media and editorial coverage it is estimated that over 100,000 have been reached with news about the Brecon Beacons ISDR.

The Brecon Beacons National Park continues to enjoy a growing reputation for its dark skies and this past year we have sought to build up on the Rough Guide's 2017 award of being the world's number 1 stargazing destination.



This year we have had no less than 500 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. These have a combined capacity of 660 and are sold out each year.

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.

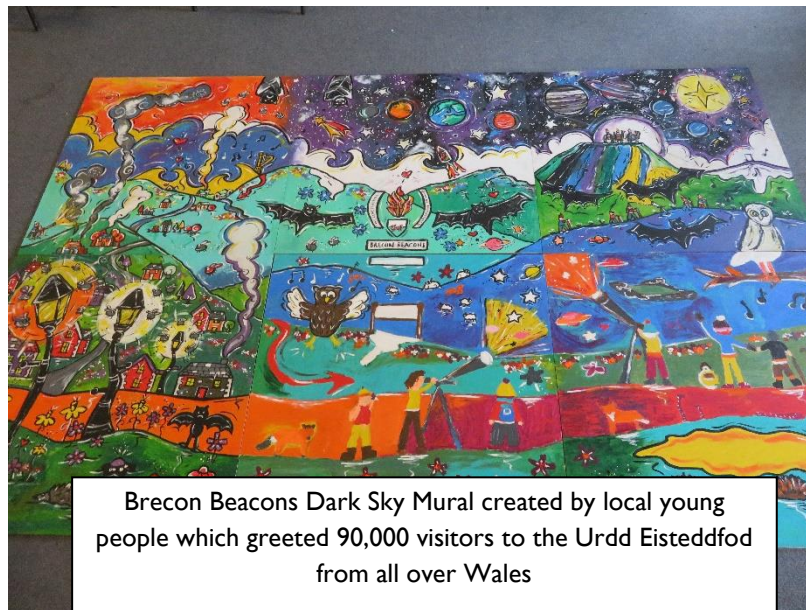
In addition, from August 2017 to August 2018, 924 persons have used the observatory and auxiliary telescopes to enjoy the night skies and to take photographs of the Milky Way and other objects. However, it is estimated that this number is much closer to 2000 when the several Astronomical societies that use the BBNP for stargazing activities are included.

Specific additional highlights this year have included:

- On April 13th the Brecon Beacons National Park hosted a national conference for the staff from all the UK National Parks. Over 100 delegates attended the conference where they received training sessions on the value of the night sky and enjoyed the wonders of the skies with the Dark Sky Wales Planetarium, followed by stargazing.
- On the 28th May, professional astronomer and observatory director Martin Griffiths lectured to an audience of 180 people at the internationally famous Hay Literary Festival on the subject of Celtic Skies, featuring the ISDR and his book of Celtic sky legends written for the Year of Myth and Legend here in Wales.



- Abergavenny and Usk Astronomical Societies led stargazing activities at the region's largest music festival – the Green Man which attracts 25,000 attendees.
- Following on from our National Eisteddfod presence last year (which attracts a Wales wide audience 160,000), this year the Brecon Beacons National Park education team led a project at the Urdd Eisteddfod (an annual Welsh-language youth festival of literature) promoting the importance of our IDSR to young people. Through listening to a talk and by creating story boards the pupils started to appreciate why we want to preserve our night skies for the future and how this can have an effect on our wildlife and saving energy. This culminated in a fascinating mural to depict the Dark Skies in the Brecon Beacons National Park which then greeted all 90,000 attendees from all over Wales.



- New stargazing events have been developed by the Three Cocks village community and also with our national heritage organisation Cadw, the latter bringing together the night sky with some of the area's most iconic landscape features.
- 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 79 qualified ambassadors. These people are often the first point of contact for visitors arriving at the Dark Sky Reserve. As 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'.

Dark Sky Wales, a company based in South Wales one of whose employees is a founder member of the BB IDSR Management Board, 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 and organising private stargazing experiences.

## 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 increased its following by 230 540+ likes 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.

The IDSR has featured in all the major UK broadsheet papers in the past year with journalists undertaking visits specifically to feature our night sky.

## Collaboration

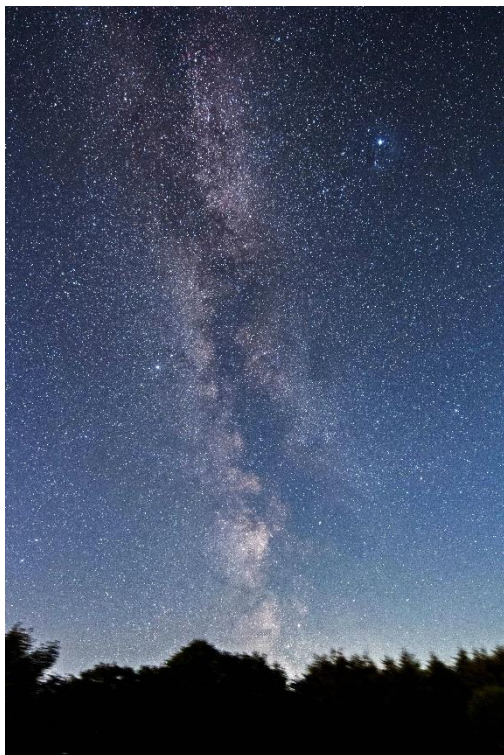
Our reserve board members continue to be very active in speaking to other regions and during this past year have provided advice to Anglesea AONB, Elan Valley DSP, Clwydian Range AONB, County Mayo, Powys County Council and the Lake District with developing their plans to develop forms of protection for their night sky. We have also been in discussion with Mackenzie Dark Sky Reserve in New Zealand to draw parallels between the two IDSRs and find ways in which we could benefit one another.

We have been promoting the guide we wrote 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. Again working with these two organisations, we have been collaborating to identify ways in which we could increase the range of stargazing activities we could make available to residents and visitors. In response to this, we have developed an £117,800 funding application to create two dedicated part time officers to develop the dark sky offer in Wales' designated landscapes. This includes not only the two national parks but also four Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

In addition, in recent months the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, together with eight other organisations, has submitted an application to the European Union Interreg Fund for a £1,480,000 project to develop new technologies in our dark sky offer. The project partnership comprises of organisations based in Scotland, Ireland, France, Spain and Portugal. The organisations include those representing the largest Dark Skies Reserves in the North Atlantic, three candidate reserves in the Southern Atlantic and three expert Higher Educational/Research institutions. This together with the strong focus on working with tourism businesses, makes it an exciting collaboration with benefits across a number of sectors.

## Lighting Improvements



The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority Special Planning Guidance document has now been applied to over 180 planning applications in the region and enabled developers to create plans which do not damage the dark sky reserve.

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 National Trust with a major new development in heart of the core zone of the IDSR to ensure there is no adverse impact on the reserve. We have also improved lighting at our main visitor centres to ensure it conforms with the latest IDSR criteria.

We continue to engage with wider policy initiatives in general, in particular the Welsh Government's consultation on a proposed new version of Planning Policy Wales. This policy statement has to be adhered to by all Planning Authorities in Wales and is the top level statement of planning policy for the country. The draft policy being consulted on is a considerable improvement on the current edition, and specifically refers to Wales' dark sky reserves directing all Local Authorities in Wales to take their characteristics into account in their policies and decisions. This means that Local Authorities need to take account of any impacts on reserves outside of their own geographic areas.

“Dark sky reserves can contribute positively to an area in economic and environmental terms and their characteristics should be taken into account when preparing development plan strategies and policies and when considering individual development proposals.”

Additionally, the draft policy states that (all)

“Planning authorities should adopt policies for lighting, including the control of light pollution, in their development plans.”

The direction of travel in this proposed new planning policy for Wales is supportive of our dark skies and the control of light pollution but it is only one more step and we will be continuing to endeavour to persuade the Welsh Government to strengthen its policy further in the future.

We have also engaged with a regional government strategic initiative entitled Growing Mid Wales, making the case for dark skies to be considered in relation to any new development.

Despite rises 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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