

# Volunteering and National Parks in Scotland

The potential value and benefits of more National Parks in Scotland



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A paper reviewing how more National Parks in Scotland could generate an increase in volunteering – therefore benefiting the local economy, the environment and health and wellbeing of volunteers.

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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This is the 4th National Park research paper produced by the Scottish Campaign for National Parks (SCNP) and the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS). It follows on from Unfinished Business – a National Parks Strategy for Scotland published in 2013 by SCNP/APRS and subsequent papers on the socio-economic benefits of National Parks, park governance options and the benefits of more National Parks for the tourist industry in Scotland. This paper, drafted by SCNP Board member Graham Barrow, presents the case that the designation of more National Parks in Scotland would generate a valuable increase in volunteer activity, benefitting the park environment, the local economy and the health and well being of the individuals involved.
- 1.2 Volunteering is big business and Volunteer Scotland has calculated that the work carried out by all volunteers in Scotland is possibly worth some £2.6 billion per annum (2014 figures). This figure is arrived at through a simple calculation using the time volunteers have given to organisations or groups multiplied by the average (median) wage. But this purely financial calculation does not include the invaluable personal, social, health, community and environmental benefits, which are less tangible and difficult to measure in monetary terms.
- 1.3 National Parks have, since their creation in North America and their arrival in the UK in the 1950s, stimulated volunteering in a range of activities. The protection and management of the UK's finest landscapes and habitats certainly generates a strong sense of commitment in many people of all ages and the National Park Authorities and associated park support organisations potentially have the skills and wherewithal to stimulate and manage volunteers. Organising and directing volunteers have a cost, but the benefits outweigh this many fold, as this paper demonstrates.
- 1.4 This paper seeks to quantify the value of additional volunteering that a fully developed National Park system in Scotland could stimulate. This is conservatively estimated at about £500,000 per annum (see Chapters 7 and 8). But this figure represents only the volunteering that would be managed directly by the National Park Authorities and there is likely to be other volunteering stimulated in each new National Park but managed by other voluntary bodies who support park purposes.

## 2. The work carried out by volunteers in National Parks

2.1 Volunteers conduct a range of different activities in National Parks around the world and the main types are in one of six categories:

- physical construction and maintenance tasks
- interpretation and education services
- scientific research and monitoring
- mountain safety and rescue
- fundraising, and
- marketing and administration.

2.2 **Physical construction and maintenance tasks** are frequently carried out by volunteers and National Parks can often have a loyal local group or they organise specific volunteer projects, particularly in the summer months. Common tasks performed by volunteer groups include:

- Footpath construction and repair
- Wall and fence repair
- Hedge planting and laying
- Tree planting
- Viewpoint construction
- Erection of signs and way-marks
- Litter clearance
- Pond and river course clearance
- Woodland management and undergrowth clearance
- Removal of unwanted trees and bushes from wetlands.



Volunteers working on a path  
Helvellyn – Lake District National Park

2.3 Most of these tasks are organised and overseen by either the National Park's own ranger service or by a competent organisation working with the National Park Authority, such as The Conservation Volunteers.

2.4 The Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park has a Volunteer Manager and has created a range of volunteer opportunities and these have become so popular that vacancies are presently full. The Friends of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs also offer volunteer roles in the park area and there are a host of other organisations which offer conservation volunteering such as the National Trust for Scotland at Ben Lomond and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds at Ward's Farm. It is difficult to ascertain how far numbers attracted to volunteer in these places partly do so because they are in a National Park.

2.5 **Interpretation and Education services** are also regularly provided by volunteers in many National Parks. For example guided walks are organised by volunteer rangers in the Peak District National Park in England and evening talks, both within the park and at nearby clubs and societies, are regularly provided.

2.6 In the North American National Parks it is common to see the information desk in the main visitor centre staffed by a volunteer from the Cooperating Association (friend's organisation) of the National Park and events, talks and demonstrations are regularly provided by these volunteers.

2.7 **Scientific Research and Monitoring activity** is also a common volunteer task with surveys of birds and other wildlife or the recording of flora, water sampling, trapping of small mammals and meteorological monitoring.

2.8 For example the Olympic National Park in Washington State, USA has recruited volunteers to carry out a survey of the distribution and activities of marmots, whilst on Deeside in the Cairngorms National Park young people from the Brathay Exploration Group have in recent years been monitoring the water vole population, with guidance from local staff of the National Trust for Scotland.

- 2.9 **Mountain safety and rescue teams** are often staffed by volunteers and many operate services within the mountainous National Parks around the world, such as the large volunteer team based in Edale in the Peak District.
- 2.10 **Fundraising** is another regular volunteer task for National Parks. The Friends of National Parks organisations that are so active in many of the UK National Parks raise many thousands of pounds per annum for conservation and education projects.
- 2.11 A recent example in Scotland is the fundraising that took place to erect the Tom Weir statue at Balmaha, Loch Lomond. This was co-ordinated by a volunteer group and raised over £50,000.
- 2.12 **Marketing and Administration** is another volunteer activity that often suits older members of the community or those with particular office skills. The offices of the Cooperating Associations of many of the US National Parks are full of volunteers who are promoting memberships, organising events and producing promotional literature.

- 2.13 The volunteers for many of these tasks can live many miles from the National Parks themselves and whilst regular volunteers may be drawn from the local population, many others combine the voluntary tasks with weekend and longer leisure breaks.
- 2.14 Some National Parks, especially in countries with limited populations, attract international volunteers, such as the working parties that carry out footpath maintenance every summer on the Thorsmork area in southern Iceland (see case study below). These volunteers contribute to the local economy and are a type of working holiday tourist. Scotland's internationally renowned landscapes and wildlife have the potential to attract many of these types of volunteers – bringing skills, commitment and money to Scotland and in to these rural areas.

Images left to right / clockwise.

Volunteer Information Assistants at Canyon Rim Visitor Centre, USA.

The Edale Mountain Rescue team in the Peak District National Park, England.

Donors with the Tom Weir statue, Balmaha, Loch Lomond.

Volunteer surveyors at an archaeological site in the Lake District National Park.



## 3. The importance of Ranger Services for volunteers

- 3.1 Ranger services have an established role in National Parks and all the UK National Parks have them – some boosted by an active pool of volunteer rangers. Rangers are the link between the visiting and local public and the National Park Authority. Rangers have local knowledge about what to see, where to go and the wildlife and history of the National Park. Answering questions from the public and dealing with local communities are an important part of a ranger’s job. National Park rangers look out for potential problems, like stiles or signposts that need attention and then work with staff and volunteers to repair them. They also work to reduce any problematical issues between visitors and local people and farmers or landowners. Many rangers take school groups out into the National Park and work with volunteers to run events for the public.
- 3.2 A ranger service is often the focus for the creation, management and promotion of volunteering in a National Park. The costs of providing a ranger service can be offset many-fold by the value of the volunteer work that is carried out. The volunteer coordinator role is one of the most rewarding jobs that ranger services provide.
- 3.3 Full-time ranger services can also be augmented by volunteers who can themselves coordinate further volunteers as appropriate. In the Peak District National Park in England, for example, there is an active volunteer ranger force. The park ranger service in the Peak District provides a comprehensive training course that is open to people from the age of 18 who would like to become volunteer rangers. Volunteer rangers attend a series of training courses and then have to sign up to at least 20 patrols or sessions of activity per annum – many do more than this.



Schoolchildren enjoy learning with rangers and volunteers

## 4. Cooperating Associations and Friends Groups

- 4.1 Early in the history of the National Park movement in the USA and Canada the concept of the Cooperating Association emerged. After the founding of the US National Parks Service in 1916 several not-for-profit organisations were formed to support educational and interpretative programs and projects that were not covered by government funding, the first being the Yosemite Association formed in 1923. These not-for-profit organisations became known as “Cooperating Associations” by 1936, and were formally recognised by Congress in 1946 and given tax exemptions.
- 4.2 Having a voluntary organisation that supports the work of a National Park Authority has not been exactly copied in the UK to date, with many of our “Friends of” National Park Societies having their roots in the lobbying for and protection of the area that then became designated as a National Park. Their relationship with the Park Authority is therefore at times more detached than being a direct supporter of the work of the Authority. Nevertheless they can encourage a significant membership and potentially carry out a range of work that supports National Park purposes.
- 4.3 In Scotland the most successful National Park friends group is that for the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park which has a growing membership and an annual turnover of over £100,000. Recent or current projects supported by the Friends of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, many of which involved the use of volunteers, include:
- A comprehensive Park Guide
  - A booklet with the results of the first ever archaeological survey of Loch Lomond’s islands
  - Videos and DVDs on local clans and the special qualities of the Park
  - A Red Squirrel Project with the Cowal Red Squirrel Group
  - Improvements and signing on the Three Lochs Way
  - Footpaths and interpretation at Bracklinn Falls, Callander
  - Way-marking and information for walkers on the Rob Roy Way
  - Helping secure the future of the Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre
  - The production of an educational information pack for the paddle steamer Maid of the Loch.
- 4.4 Friends Groups have the potential to attract funding from a range of sources and increasingly from legacies, sometimes of significant size. This is another example of how volunteer activity in National Parks can benefit the local economy by attracting finance in to a local rural area.

## 5. Training, qualifications and career enhancement

- 5.1 Many volunteers, particularly those at the start of their careers, are looking for experience and qualifications to help them obtain paid employment. Volunteering with a National Park project is an ideal way for some to get this step up.
- 5.2 For example The Conservation Volunteers (TCV, formerly BTCV) carry out significant volunteer work in the UK National Parks in partnership with the National Park Authorities or the National Trusts. They provide volunteers with the chance to gain skills and get recognition for their work.
- 5.3 TCV run a wide range of short courses every year with experienced instructors teaching practical skills, such as building a dry stone wall, creating a pond or woodland management tasks. TCV offers courses to progress a young person's career, as part of seeking a career change into the environmental sector, as prior learning as part of a larger qualification, or just for enjoyment. Everyone completing any of the training receives an Achievement Certificate, or an Attendance Certificate from The Conservation Volunteers.
- 5.4 TCV Scotland can offer a suite of accredited learning opportunities, predominantly for young people. They are a registered centre with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Northern College for Further Education (NCFE) and with Youth Scotland, enabling TCV to deliver the Youth Achievement and Dynamic Youth Awards. They can also offer LANTRA (land based and environmental industries) accredited training to young people through their training programme.
- 5.5 It has been suggested by some in the past that volunteers can take work away from paid employees, but it is generally accepted that the types of work that volunteers carry out in National Parks would not be done without their voluntary effort. There is some indication that in times of public budget restraint there is pressure to get some tasks carried out by volunteers that were previously the role of paid staff.

## 6. Health benefits

6.1 Volunteering is good for people as well as for the environment and all serious evaluative studies have come to this conclusion. For example in 2008 a study for the Forestry Commission and Scottish Forestry Trust concluded:

*“...volunteers are not only motivated for environmental reasons but also by the personal benefits they gain from the outdoor opportunities and the social nature of environmental activities. Volunteers learn new skills and meet others while improving their health, well-being and quality of life. Environmental volunteering offers a range of opportunities to suit people with diverse interests and abilities. The environment provides a common language for all and a shared purpose independent of gender, ethnic background, age, physical ability, mental functioning, socio-economic status or knowledge of environmental management”*

6.2 The research, based on forestry volunteers in Scotland, concluded that the health benefits could be classified as follows:

- Being Outdoors – fresh air and contact with nature
- Physical – stamina, strength, fitness and weight management
- Mental – restoration, calming and reflective
- Social – meeting people, networks and feeling part of a community
- Spiritual – awe, beauty and wonder.

6.3 Focussing on recent research on environmental volunteering in Cornwall – Harrison and M. and C. Leyshon (2012) – have shown the positive mental and physical benefits of this type of outdoor volunteering. One of their key conclusions is:

*“Participation in environmental volunteerism provides a framework to produce extensive shifts in psychological and functional states. The context of environmental volunteering is paramount to this process. Through being closer to nature within constructive social interactions and actions, participation unites the dual benefits of wellbeing and environmental change in a single action. This has extensive implications for communities, places, people and politics. Our study demonstrates that environmental volunteering is vitally capable of improving lives and livelihoods.”*

6.4 It is not easy to put a financial value on the health benefits of countryside volunteering but it clearly has a significant role to play in preventing some physical and mental illnesses and helping others to recover. The rise of obesity is one obvious area where the physical work of conservation volunteering has relevance.

6.5 A recent NHS Report (2012) has estimated that for just five conditions (Post-menopausal breast cancer, lower gastro-intestinal cancer, cerebro-vascular disease, cardio-vascular disease and type 2 diabetes). in one year alone, the burden of physical inactivity in the UK caused over 35,000 deaths, 3.1% of morbidity and mortality in the UK and added over £1.06 billion to the direct health cost burden on the NHS.

6.6 More National Parks in Scotland could provide the administrative framework and stimulus for a growth in the opportunities for countryside volunteering and make a positive contribution to the physical and mental well being of the Scottish population.

## 7. The value of work

- 7.1 This paper has already shown that the value of volunteering activities in National Parks cannot be simply described in financial terms, as there are clear benefits to the environment and to individuals, which cannot easily be quantified. Nevertheless it is possible to make some estimations of the value of the volunteer activity in terms of the cost of providing the services if they had had to have been purchased.
- 7.2 DEFRA (2012) carried out an assessment of the benefits of the National Parks in England and within that study looked at the value of volunteer time. Table 1 quotes three examples with data from 2008/9.
- 7.3 There is a cost in providing the volunteer opportunities and in the Peak District this was estimated at £228,450 meaning that the positive cost-benefit ratio was about 3 to 1.
- 7.4 The Lake District National Park Authority recorded 4,669 volunteer days in 2013/14 which could be valued at least £212,440 – applying the minimum wage of £6.50 per hour. These are only the volunteers working directly to the National Park Authority and do not include the volunteer time of those working on projects in the National Park for the National Trust, Wildlife Trusts and other countryside organisations, which are extensive.
- 7.5 In addition to the direct value of the work there is also the less easy to quantify value to both the environment and to the individuals health and well-being. Encouraging active participation in countryside volunteering activity will have a positive effect on reducing costs to the Scottish health services.

Table 1

	Dartmoor	Peak District	Northumberland
Number of Volunteer days in 2008/9	2,140	10,116	1,250
Number of volunteer hours (assuming 7 hour days)	14,980	70,812	8,750
Value of volunteers using UK hourly pay rates	£165,229	£781,056	£96,518
Value of volunteers using minimum wage rates	£88,831	£419,915	£51,888

Source: DEFRA (2012)

## 8. How more National Parks in Scotland could stimulate volunteering

8.1 It is reasonable to surmise that the creation of each new National Park in Scotland would create an increase in volunteering opportunities and participation. Not all of this volunteer activity would be new volunteering, as some may be displaced from other volunteer activities in this field or in the same geographical area. But the experience of both the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and the Cairngorm National Parks indicates that a new National Park Authority will encourage an increase in volunteer activity.

8.2 There would be advantages in this increased volunteering both for Scottish people and for the local environment. The attraction of volunteers from outwith Scotland would also be of value – particularly in the remoter rural areas – as this would bring a benefit to the economy through a type of working holiday tourism.

8.3 Table 2 estimates the amount and value of the extra volunteering that could be generated by each of the proposed new National Parks suggested in the SCNP/APRS National Parks

Strategy for Scotland report (2013). The figures are conservative estimates to take into account some displaced volunteer activity. They are based on the amount of volunteer activity generated by other National Park Authorities in the UK, with a consideration of the geographical remoteness and size of the local day trip population for the proposed National Parks in Scotland.

8.4 These estimates indicate that the overall value of the volunteering created by the full development of the seven new National Parks in Scotland proposed by SCNP/APRS could be in the region of £500,000 p.a. Some of the organisation of this volunteering could be tackled centrally should a Scottish National Parks Service be created, although there would almost inevitably be the need for local supervision and organisation in each park area.

8.5 The above estimates do not include the significant value of the work to the volunteers themselves and to the environment, both of which are very difficult to quantify but could increase the true value of the volunteer activity by two or threefold.

Table 2: The Potential Value of Volunteering in the proposed National Parks in Scotland

Proposed National Park	Annual days of voluntary activity	% of volunteering involving night stays	Number of days overnight stays	Value of night stays to local economy p.a. (1)	Gross value of volunteer work. p. a. p.a. (2)	Cost of voluntary provision p.a. (3)	Total value of volunteering to the area p.a. (4)
Galloway	2000	20	400	£20,000	£140,000	£42,000	£118,000
Cheviots	750	20	150	£7,500	£52,500	£15,750	£44,250
Nevis Glen Coe Black Mount	1500	40	600	£30,000	£105,000	£31,500	£103,500
Coastal Marine	1000	50	500	£25,000	£70,000	£21,000	£74,000
Glen Affric	750	30	225	£11,250	£52,500	£15,750	£48,000
Wester Ross	750	40	300	£15,000	£52,500	£15,750	£51,750
Harris	500	60	300	£15,000	£35,000	£10,500	£39,500
TOTALS	7250		2475	£123,750	£507,500	£152,250	£479,000

(1) Overnight stays of volunteers valued at £50 a day/night to local economy

(2) Gross value calculated at £70 per day (£10 per hour) for volunteer time

(3) Costs estimated at 30% of overall gross value (staff time and overheads)

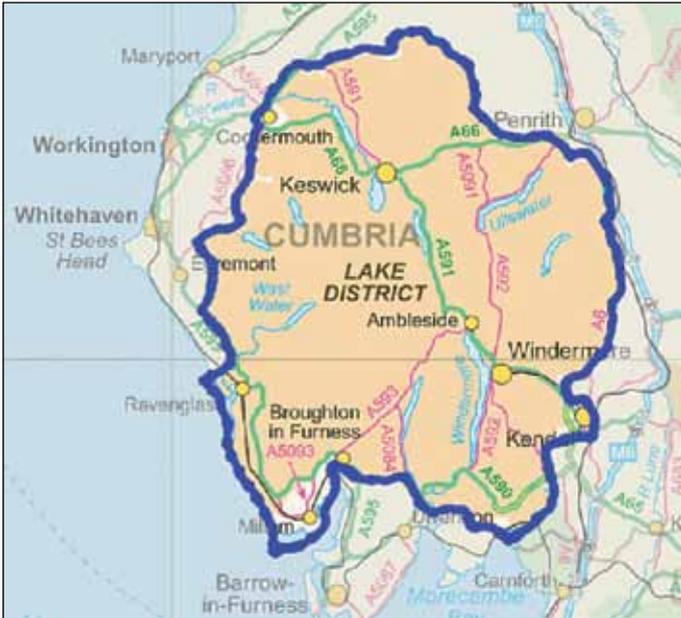
(4) Value of work plus local economic value of overnight stays minus costs of provision.

## 9. Conclusions

- 9.1 National Parks generate volunteering opportunities through the stimulus and organisational framework of the National Park Authorities. The creation of more National Parks in Scotland would create a growth in volunteering in these areas.
- 9.2 Encouraging more volunteering in the National Park areas would be of benefit to the environment, to the individuals who volunteer and to some extent to the local economy.
- 9.3 Volunteer opportunities in remote rural areas attracts a type of working tourist, bringing with them the economic benefits of their spending, especially if they stay overnight for some days.
- 9.4 This paper has estimated that the value of the work that could be stimulated by developing all seven of the new National Parks recommended in the Unfinished Business – A Parks Strategy for Scotland report could be worth around £0.5 million per annum plus the health benefits to those taking part and an associated reduction in costs to the Health Services. Additional volunteering would also be stimulated but organised by voluntary bodies in the National Park areas.

# Some experience from elsewhere

## LAKE DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK, ENGLAND



The Lake District National Park Authority has around 500 registered volunteers from all walks of life. They give their time, skills and energy to help look after the landscape, enable visitors to enjoy its special qualities and support the wider work of the National Park Authority. In 2013/14 it was estimated that these volunteers gave 4,669 volunteer days. The costs of organising the volunteers resulted in over 3 times that figure in the calculated value of their work.

Volunteers have to be aged 16 or over, and there is no upper age limit. The National Park Authority also run a Young Ranger programme for young people aged 14 to 18 who are keen to get involved with very hands on practical volunteering.

Volunteers are recruited into many different roles with varying time contributions – ranging from one day for one off activities such as marshalling events, to 20 days a year for some of the more specialist roles like Lake Rangers.

**Park Management Volunteers** are recruited when the Park Authority have tasks for them to do, and into roles that match volunteers' skills, knowledge, experience and motivation. **Volunteer Events and Guided Walk Leaders** are also used by the Park Authority. **Archaeology Volunteers** have also been recruited when there are specific projects and archaeological events.

The Lake District Young Rangers programme for 14 to 19 year olds is helping to transform the lives of future generations and helping them care for the Lake District landscape. Working alongside National Park staff, volunteers and partners, they develop a monthly programme of activities such as practical conservation tasks and recreational activities.

The Brockhole Centre and Country Park managed by the NPA also has a range of volunteer programmes. These are:

- A new **Family Ranger programme** helps families discover, explore and conserve the country park area. The volunteers are the main point of contact for all Family Ranger activities, from lakeshore litter picks to practical conservation tasks, liaising with the leaders and coordinating attendance. The volunteers may be asked to lead activities such as pond dipping or simple guided trails.
  - **Wayfinder volunteers** are based at Waterhead and Bowness Bay piers, one day a month, greeting visitors who are travelling on Windermere Lake Cruises boats and encouraging them to visit Brockhole.
  - **Brockhole Ambassadors** help out on weekends and during school holidays to ensure that visitors to Brockhole, Visitor Centre have a world class visitor experience. They welcome visitors and give them the information to make the most of their visit along with other tasks such as driving the Brockmobile and helping with crazy golf hire. The volunteers also get involved with many of the special events taking place throughout the season.
  - **Garden and Ground Maintenance Volunteers** play a key part in maintaining the gardens and grounds at Brockhole by completing tasks such as planting, painting and wall repairs.
- For more information see:  
[www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/caringfor/volunteering](http://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/caringfor/volunteering)

# Some experience from elsewhere

## TONGARIRO NATIONAL PARK, NEW ZEALAND



**Project Tongariro** (Tongariro Natural History Society Inc) was established in 1984 to promote a wider understanding of the natural processes and human history of Tongariro National Park. The Society was endowed with a substantial Memorial Fund in memory of several park staff who died in a helicopter accident on 9 December 1982.

Project Tongariro is devoted to implementing a wide variety of projects and activities which help people to understand and appreciate the special place Tongariro National Park, a dual world heritage park, has in the world.

Working in partnership with the Department of Conservation (DOC), Project Tongariro's vision is to promote a wider knowledge and understanding of the flora, fauna, geology, climate and the natural and human history of Tongariro National Park in particular and to conservation in general. A deep respect for New Zealand's wild places and recognition of the intangible spiritual values associated with them underlies this vision.

Their work focuses on four key project areas: biodiversity, history, education and recreation. Projects in the Park have ranged from ongoing pest control work, the restoration of the Hapuawhenua Viaduct, initiating the Tussock Traverse event, to the production of the Tongariro Alpine Crossing Pocket Ranger App.

The public are encouraged to support the Project by becoming a member, adopting a hectare at Lake Rotopounamu or making a donation. They offer opportunities for people to get hands on with conservation as volunteers, go on members' field trips to little-known parts of the Park or support projects by making a financial contribution. In 2013/14 the project had three full time staff with 279 voluntary members and 808 supporters. The volunteers carried out an estimated 625 person days of work which was valued at \$93,750. The organisation had an income of \$210,000 which included a grant from the DOC.

This volunteer body has many of the characteristics of a Cooperating Association as pioneered by the USA National Parks.

For more information see: [www.tongariro.org.nz](http://www.tongariro.org.nz)

# Some experience from elsewhere

## THORSMORK TRAIL VOLUNTEERS, ICELAND



A typical group of Thorsmork Trail volunteers

The Thórsmörk trail volunteer programme was established by Iceland's Forest Service in 2012. Its main role is to assist with the maintenance of the hiking trails in Thórsmörk and Goðaland. The programme was established in response to the growing need for practical maintenance work in the area. Three volunteer teams are active throughout the summer months. As well as ongoing maintenance tasks, an important part of their work is the development of new techniques for trail construction and erosion control.

Although the programme is young, the management team has over 15 years experience of maintaining hiking trails with volunteer teams on sites throughout Iceland. Volunteers work alongside staff and trainers from the Forest Service. The work is in three areas – trail maintenance, trail mapping and erosion control.

They currently host about 50 international volunteers each season. Volunteers are selected directly from applications and do not pay a participation fee. They are committed to “free volunteering” but are provided with food and camping barn type accommodation.

The majority of the volunteers come to Iceland from Europe and North America. They are on a form of working holiday and make a contribution to the local economy of Iceland. Some combine their volunteering with a longer holiday in Iceland.

For more information see: [www.trailteam.is](http://www.trailteam.is)



Volunteers being briefed at Thorsmork before a days work

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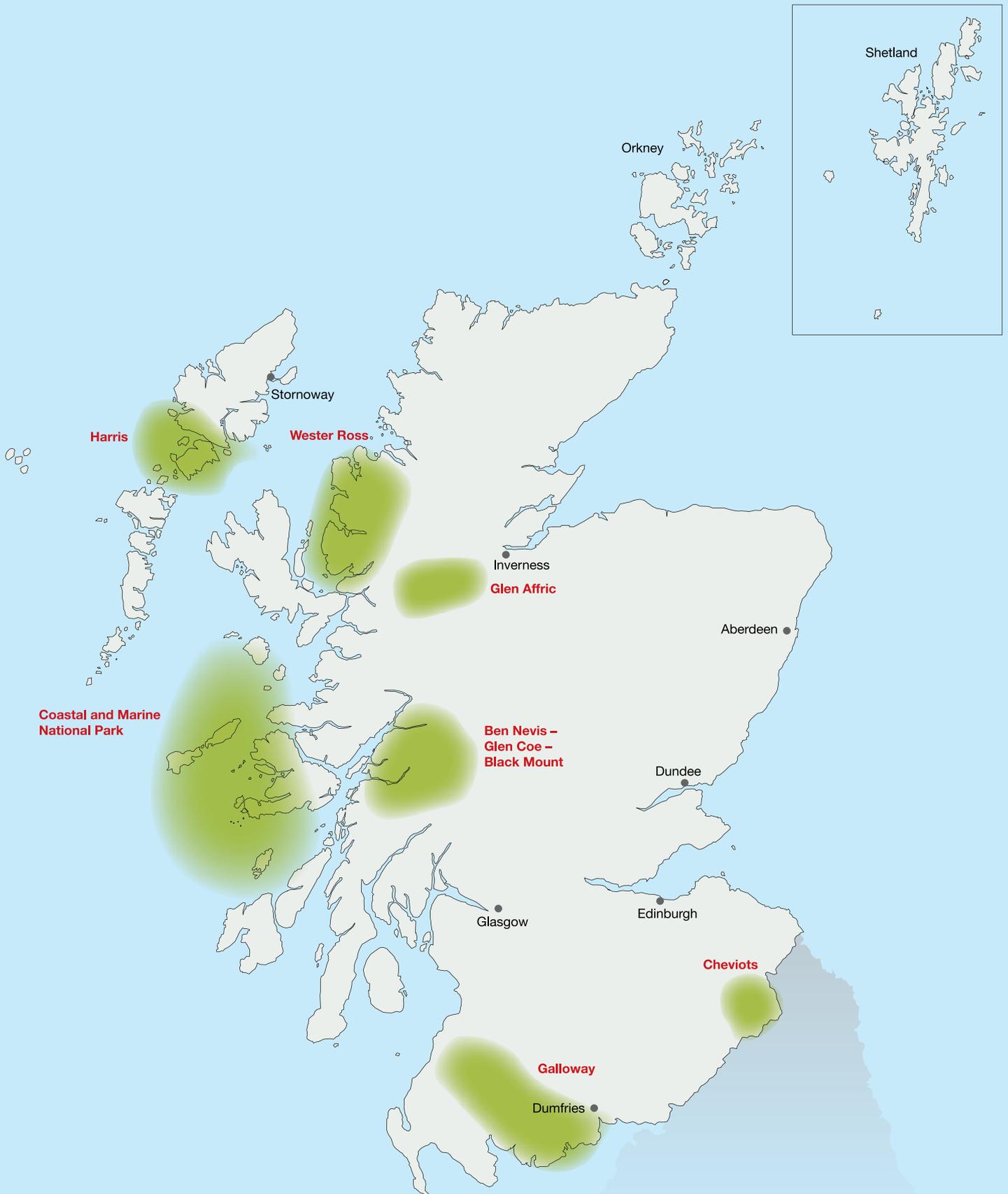
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National Parks recommended by SCNP and APRS 2013

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 \* For layout purposes the Shetland Islands are not shown in the correct geographical position.

