



**OUTDOOR
ACCESS
TRUST FOR
SCOTLAND**



*OATS VOLUNTEER
COORDINATOR EVA KUPKA
IN ACTION ON AN TEALLACH*

2025

STAC POLLAIDH CAR-PARK

IT'S UP TO US

SKYE PROJECTS

MEALL A' BHUACHAILLE

PATH VOLUNTEERING

DORENELL COMMUNITY PATH

IMPACT REVIEW

MAKING PATHS WORK

WELCOME TO THE OATS IMPACT REVIEW 2025 - WE ARE A SMALL CHARITY DEDICATED TO IMPROVING HILL AND OTHER PATHS AND DEVELOPING TRAILHEAD FACILITIES.



With just five full time staff, and a board of six trustees, we believe OATS punches well above its weight in delivering a positive impact for visitors and communities.

Our pioneering access models and projects outlined in this review show how OATS has stepped into challenging environments as a force for good.

Visitors, and critically, host communities benefit from managed sites which now generate local employment and income alongside amenity improvements.

Our income comes from a range of sources, with car-parking being a major component.

By using our resources wisely we make a little go a long way, using our own money as seed funding to help attract the grants that pay for many major projects.

DOUGIE BAIRD

Our Chief Executive is steering the ship while travelling thousands of miles to survey sites, driving forward projects and negotiating deals, permissions and funding.

EVA KUPSKA

Our Volunteer Coordinator shows what a difference volunteers can make when it comes to path-building and maintenance (p6).

EWAN WATSON

Our Projects Manager, is driving forward a web of schemes to help hillwalkers, communities and land managers (p10).

ALI CAMPBELL

Our Facilities Manager, is leading the carparking team, helping access takers and communities, while securing vital revenue to keep OATS running (p8).

PETER WINTERBOURNE

Is our new Car Parking Supervisor.

£1.32m

OATS FUNDING 2024-25

£1.076m

OATS EXPENDITURE 2024-25

INCOME INCLUDES

£795,000

GRANTS

£33,000

DONATIONS

£22,000

CONSULTANCY

MORE THAN A PATH BUILDER...

The work of OATS is not just a matter of getting to work with muscle, heavy tools, and lots of stones and gravel. That's a big part of what we do, but we undertake much more complex projects.

They include building car parks and off-grid toilet facilities at environmentally sensitive sites, and ongoing staffing. All that needs complex preparation and management, involving a wide network of staff and contractors.

But in return for our efforts our projects can bring wider benefits. Communities and local authorities see problems taken off their roads.

Our path-building professionals benefit from consistent well-managed work.

Other contractors, often in remote areas, get to do what they do best. And of course our visitors benefit from a vastly improved experience, enjoying the countryside without having to worry about parking and facilities.



Only when we're confident the project will go ahead can we appoint contractors who do the work on the ground and who depend on us to provide the projects they work on.

COLLABORATIONS

Working with communities and councils to solve problems

NEGOTIATIONS

Land ownership, leases and community asset transfers are legally complex

APPLICATIONS

Projects often need planning permission and must comply with environmental rules in places such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest



BRANCHING OUT ON SKYE

OATS volunteers recently worked alongside Mountaineering Scotland and BMC colleagues in the Cuillins for two days clearing drains and ditches. In challenging weather they could watch the drains working straight away!

Their third day was spent planting 200 native trees, from local nursery Drumfearn Trees, at the Fairy Pools car park. The nursery's Phill Knott has pledged to monitor them.

STACS OF HELP

WALKERS & COMMUNITIES WIN IN COIGACH - THE NEW OATS STAC POLLAIDH CAR-PARK AND TOILETS ARE UP AND RUNNING

The 78-space car park and off-grid loos and waste treatment, which should cope with 55,000-plus visitors a year, used £490,000 from the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, cash from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Highland Coastal Communities Fund, and £173,800 from OATS' coffers.

It will stop the huge disruption caused to local people, businesses and emergency services by cars left on verges and in passing places on the lifeline single-track road from Drumrunie to Achiltibuie. Habitat damage, litter, and fouling in this Site of Special Scientific Interest should also be ended.

OATS co-ordinated efforts involving the local community to sort the problems, working out lease arrangements with Highland Council and Inverpoll estate, and project-managed the build.

People wanting to walk this striking "inselberg" mountain, which also lies within the Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area, the North-West Global Geopark, and the Wester Ross UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, will of course benefit from hassle-free parking and toilet facilities.

The trust will now run the facilities, with surpluses going to path maintenance.



£837,000

TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET, WITH £490,000 FROM THE RURAL TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

55,000

VISITORS PER YEAR

114

VOLUNTEER HOURS ON STAC POLLAIDH PATH

JOB DONE WITH THE POWER OF THE SUN

Faced with a hefty charge from SSE to connect power to the Stac Pollaidh site, OATS opted to power toilets and ticket machines with solar energy, using battery storage for low-sun spells.

A bore-hole provides water and complex filtration systems ensure it is drinkable, and that water returned to nature is not contaminated.

THE ROAD TO RELIEF FOR COIGACH

The Coigach community has long hoped that something could be done to alleviate the seasonal congestion problems when the car park overflows into passing places along our single-track road.

The road is the lifeline for our small but active community, and it is vital to allow clear passage for all vehicles.

There have been delivery vehicles stuck and having to wait for walkers to come down the hill and there have been longstanding problems with litter and fouling.

We are pleased OATS, the landowner, the Highland Council and NatureScot have reached a sensible solution.

We trust any eventual profits will be ploughed back by OATS into upkeep of the paths around this iconic and much-loved mountain.

**Ann Macleod, Secretary
Coigach Community Council**

235

**VOLUNTEERS REGISTERED WITH OATS.
THIS YEAR 96 VOLUNTEERS TOOK PART,
DELIVERING 1,214 HOURS WORTH OF WORK**

*THIS WAS MY FIRST VOLUNTEERING
AND I WAS KEEN TO DO SOMETHING
OUTDOORS AND A LITTLE PHYSICAL.
THIS WAS THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY
FERGUS CUMBERLAND*

HELPING WITH THE WILDFIRE MENACE

When wildfire ripped through the mountainside around Stac Pollaidh last April, the new car park was immediately called into service as a base for 14 fire crews and other emergency services, providing another level of benefit in this difficult environment.



WHEELY GOOD

Bikes take the hike out of pathwork

In the season 2025, we set to deliver more volunteering opportunities including maintenance of upland and lowland paths as well as other conservation activities. Thanks to a long-term partnership with Crown Estate and Glen Tanar Estate, our volunteers have been helping rangers of both estates with repairs of community footpaths and removal of non-native invasive plants.

Most of the upland path maintenance days take place within the Cairngorms National Park (CNP) and it's great to see the ongoing support from the CNP and the individual landowners. Often, OATS volunteer parties have been accompanied by the CNP Volunteer Rangers and rangers from RSPB, Forestry and Land Scotland or Balmoral Estate.

Outside of the CNP, we continued to run multi-day trips to An Teallach and Stac Pollaidh. OATS also visited the Cuillins on Skye. Here, together with Mountaineering Scotland and British Mountaineering Council volunteers. We did two days of path work and a day of tree planting at the Fairy Pools car park.

I am particularly pleased that we managed to reach more locations this season. Using bicycles to access remote upland routes where we couldn't get on foot previously proved effective. And most importantly, our amazing community of volunteers keeps on growing!

Eva Kupska
Volunteer Coordinator

1,214

VOLUNTEERING HOURS

£48,000

VALUE OF WORK BY VOLUNTEERS

1,520km

WALKED BY VOLUNTEERS

57km

CYCLED BY VOLUNTEERS





ADOPT A PATH SCHEME

The Adopt a Path scheme is a key to the annual path maintenance volunteering programme. Those who are passionate about Scotland's mountains can become custodians of a hill path, carry out regular surveys and report on the path's condition.

The scheme currently includes 40 mountain paths within the Cairngorms National Park. This season, we had many new recruits and all routes have been adopted. Our 'path adoptees' are provided with appropriate training and ongoing support.

Their surveys are viewed by OATS as well as landowners and ranger services, allowing the maintenance tasks to be targeted to best effect.

100%

OF 40 AVAILABLE PATHS ADOPTED

33

PATH ADOPTEES

22

SURVEYS COMPLETED BY VOLUNTEERS

BREAKDOWNS ARE BEHIND US...

The experience for visitors and staff at the Fairy Pools has been transformed, thanks to Highland Council's repair of the Glen Brittle road.

With long passing places, bollards, line markings and signage, the nightmares of 2024 with staff here until all hours managing traffic and breakdowns are a thing of the past!

Cameron Campbell left the supervisor's job to join the Scottish Ambulance Service in January and was replaced by Peter Winterbourne, a well-kent face to us as the former school bus driver.

Seasonal staff were Megan Campbell and Kenny MacKenzie, on their second summers, and new starts Sam Mayor and Abi Thomas, with numbers boosted in the school holidays by Charlie Rees and Becky MacLean.

Helping, advising, cleaning and fixing are all part of the team's work but all say the best part is the people: staff frequently bump into our visitors elsewhere and are treated like old friends.

The toilet treatment tank got two new lids due to winter wind damage, with new straps on steel ratchets. We're planning concrete anchors for the straps...

The tank was emptied twice and jet cleaned, and maintenance contractors are now in: cattle-grid cleaning, ditching, and installing rock armour. It's beautiful but it's a tough environment!

Ali Campbell
Facilities Manager



254,249

VISITORS TO THE FAIRY POOLS

8

FULL-TIME AND SEASONAL
JOBS FOR SKYE RESIDENTS

OATS CARPARKS

OATS is developing the model of setting up car parks, with the income from them going to support our vital work of building and maintaining mountain paths.

We now have four car parks: Fairy Pools, Muir of Dinnet, Beinn a' Ghlo and the new one at Stac Pollaidh. Owing to the difficulty of finding staff in remote areas, we are now planning the rollout of ANPR systems – automatic number plate recognition – to ensure parkers pay their fair share.

All these car parks now fall under the watchful eye of Ali Campbell as facilities manager.



196

FREE COMMUNITY PASSES
AT ALL CAR PARKS

27%

PARKING INCOME
TO PATH PROJECTS

BRIDGING DRAINS FOR BIKERS

MEALL A' BHUACHAILLE

58 tonnes

STONE AND AGGREGATE FROM QUARRY

96m

OF OLD PITCHING REMOVED AND REPLACED

10

WATERBARS BUILT

Meall a' Bhuchaille is an easily reached hill close to Glenmore Lodge, with lots of traffic on the path, meaning it needed a thorough overhaul. Coping with cyclists means innovative design of drainage.

Bridging stones give cyclists easy passage and avoids them causing erosion by dodging around drains.

The well-battered path needed 64m of aggregate building with an outside revetment, and we used 18 tonnes of stone in the build.

The end product should cope with the level of traffic this hill is subjected to.



ALL YOU SURVEY...

Audits of paths were made, with several sites needing priority repair. Climate change and rising footfall are likely speeding deterioration.

At Glen Tanar, we found a footbridge in danger, with the bank eroded under the abutment.

Temporary measures allowed it to be reopened, but the long-term solution may involve stabilising the bank with "green engineering" such as tree planting.

Contractors undertook maintenance and repairs for OATS on paths at: Chalamain Gap, Sron na Lairige, Braeriach, Carn Ban More and Mount Keen. This work included rebuilding stone features, securing loose pitching stones, blocking braids, ditching and landscaping.

105km

PATHS SURVEYED

26

PATHS AUDITED

2

STAFF CARRYING OUT SURVEYS



MOUNTAINEERING
SCOTLAND
WALKCLIMBSKI

I LOVE HILLWALKING AND CYCLING, SO IT FEELS GREAT TO PLAY A SMALL PART IN MAINTAINING THE PATHS I ENJOY USING
PATH VOLUNTEER.



IT'S UP TO US

BUILDING A PATH TO THE FUTURE

482 tonnes

STONE AND AGGREGATE MOVED

777m

STONE PITCHING &
AGGREGATE PATH BUILT

120m

STONE REVETMENT BUILT
TO STABILISE EDGES

With more than £287,000 raised for the main An Teallach path repairs under the It's Up To Us banner, alongside Mountaineering Scotland, work should be finished on the path by March next year.

The team from Cairngorm Wilderness Contracts have so far built more than a kilometre of new mountain path, with some great help from OATS volunteers.

UK Hillwalking magazine and national newspapers have covered the project, and an episode of BBC TV's Landward was filmed on site.

OATS is now working on the next big thing: North by North-West will be a multi-million pound project seeking Heritage Lottery Fund cash to fix iconic mountain paths in the far north and north-west, including the Coire Lagan trail in Skye.

PATH NETWORK TURBINE CHARGED

The Dorenell Community Path Links project in Moray was started in 2024 and paid for by the EDF Renewables Dorenell Wind Farm Community Benefit Fund, and other fundraising. This is creating an integrated network of paths linking communities in the wind farm area, using and improving existing paths where possible.

- Dufftown to Aberlour route completed April '25 – vegetation cleared, bridge installed, signage, path and drainage improved. Work done by ACT Heritage.
- The next section is Dufftown to Glenrinnes, with work started on a 1km stretch of new footpath and planning permission awaited to before starting another stretch
- After that, Dufftown to Auchindoun, Auchindoun to Bridgehaugh, and Bridgehaugh to Glenrinnes.

IT IS FANTASTIC WORK YOU ARE DOING AND WILL MAKE A MASSIVE DIFFERENCE TO THE MORAY AREA

LOCAL RESIDENT

8km

PATH DUFFTOWN TO ABERLOUR SUBJECT TO OATS IMPROVEMENTS

1,120m

PATH BUILT - BEINN RINNES CAR PARK TO RECLETICH

170m

NEW PATH CONSTRUCTION TO DUFFTOWN



OATS INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

As a low-staff, Scotland-wide charity, OATS must keep up with the latest technology to get the best value for every pound.

Much of this is what you would expect: we use distance working tools – online meetings and social media – to keep in touch, and our website, social media and YouTube attract volunteers and supporters.

We keep track of site users with remote visitor counters, and our car-parkers using solar-powered ticket machines find out more about nature and heritage via QR codes.

Our toilets use sophisticated tech to make water safe, and state-of-the-art treatments deep-clean waste water before returning it to nature.

But we are also raising our game in response to the challenges we face.

In remote areas where we can't recruit local car park staff, OATS is investigating using Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR).

At Stac Pollaidh, power connection issues drove us to come up with a system using solar panels to provide all the power for our new toilets.

An innovative vegetated wall system called FLEX MSE, which should outlast concrete and steel with 3% of their carbon, now supports a prominent Cairngorm path. Costs in time and cash were nearly halved.

We've come up with "soft engineering" techniques, such as buried tree stumps and root plates used to protect footbridge abutments at risk from growing rainfall.

And while we still use boot leather, pens and paper maps, now our surveyors can use mobile technology and aids such as camera-carrying drones. OATS is exploring using LiDAR to produce complex 3D plans, enabling better path design and costing.

15KWh

SOLAR PANEL POWER AT STAC POLLAIDH

4

SOLAR-POWERED TICKET MACHINES

11

HIGH-TECH LOOS ON OATS SITES

LENDING A HELPING HAND

We're working with the Bailies of Bennachie group, founded 50 years ago to protect the popular Aberdeenshire hill, on possible path improvements.

I have carried out a survey, produced a contract which has gone out to tender, and I'm liaising with Forestry and Land Scotland over licensing the work. It is hoped that the work will go ahead in early 2026.

Ewan Watson
Projects Manager



A BIG THANK YOU!

We would like to thank all our staff, trustees, the OATS path maintenance volunteers, community groups, funding and contracting partners, and private donors.

Delivering quality projects is possible only when we collaborate - when people with diverse skills combine forces to solve access challenges for the wider good.

At the Fairy Pools, Cameron Campbell, who spent two years on seasonal staff and a year as a Facility Supervisor, has moved to the Scottish Ambulance Service.

Peter Winterbourne, a Skye resident for twenty years, is the new Supervisor and is proving a huge asset.

After several years running the Fairy Pools car park, Ali Campbell is now Facilities Manager and manages the four OATS car parks across Scotland; Fairy Pools, Skye, Stac Pollaidh, Beinn A' Ghlo, and Dinnet in Aberdeenshire.

Ewan Watson, promoted to Projects Manager, has managed a number of schemes and has stepped up consultancy work, path surveying, and fund-raising work.

Volunteer Organiser Eva Kupska continues to build and develop the charity's mountain-path maintenance programme. Having focused on the Adopt A Path Scheme, the 40 available paths in the Cairngorms National Park have now all been adopted.

Finally, our Trustees have as ever done sterling work behind the scenes to steer our decisions and keep us on the right track.

£250k

RAISED FOR COMMUNITY FUNDS

DELIVERING QUALITY PROJECTS IS ONLY POSSIBLE WHEN WE COLLABORATE - WHEN PEOPLE WITH DIVERSE SKILLS COMBINE FORCES TO SOLVE ACCESS CHALLENGES FOR THE WIDER GOOD

OUR SUPPORTERS

OATS can only carry out the level and standard of work it does with financial support from a wide range of organisations, public bodies, NGO's, private companies, charitable trusts and individual donors. Thank you to all who support our work.



THE LONG PATH TO A NEW CHALLENGE...

OATS had a successful year in 24/25. Staff and Board worked hard to improve OATS sites, engage with communities, visitors, landowners and volunteers, and prepare new and exciting projects. Our financial position is secure.



2026 is shaping up too: North by North West (NbNW), our big goal, is the project to watch. It's a major OATS-led initiative in Sutherland and Skye to deliver community and visitor benefits plus training and volunteering opportunities through access works, with grants sought from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

From previous multi-million pound OATS projects, we know a multitude of community consultations, surveys, meetings, funding applications and contractor engagements await.

We'll be helped by the community's North West 2045 Call to Action, which is tackling the area's stark social and economic challenges.

Discussions are under way to align our plans with their aspirations. The path to NbNW will be long, but because OATS gets large projects done, the legacy for people and place will be rewarding.

The OATS hallmark is efficient and effective use of charitable funds. Our values extend beyond path, car park and toilet construction.

We solve community challenges and improve experiences for 500,000 worldwide visitors, who pay to use our facilities, with more than £250,000 of their money going to community funds. Even more of this cash supports local employment, contractors, services, and volunteering.

The main motivation for 85% of visitors in our £10 billion tourism industry, according to VisitScotland, is experiencing Scotland's spectacular natural outdoors.

Most just want somewhere to park securely, toilets, a safe path and a drink of water on their return. Sounds simple – but that drink alone means UV, manganese, iron or aluminum filters are needed to make the water safe.

Then there's gaining funding and consents; finding contractors for remote sites; terrain challenges... the list goes on, and we are the experts in handling it all.

Dougie Baird
OATS Chief Executive

Duncan Bryden
OATS Chairman



85%

OF VISITORS IN SCOTLAND'S ANNUAL
£10 BILLION TOURISM INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE
OUR SPECTACULAR NATURAL OUTDOORS

THE OATS HALLMARK IS EFFICIENT
AND EFFECTIVE USE OF FUNDS. OUR
VALUES EXTEND BEYOND PATH,
CAR PARK AND TOILET CONSTRUCTION

OATS IS A GROUND-BREAKING ENVIRONMENTAL CHARITY PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC ACCESS

We develop, build and repair paths, mountain habitats and trailhead facilities to help the public, landowners and communities, protecting the country's natural heritage in popular, remote and fragile places.

OATS carries out anything from surveying and planning to full-blown campaigns and developments, all to help people to enjoy the outdoors, while protecting the environment.

Our access infrastructure is built sustainably, in partnership with others. We train conservation workers and volunteers of the future.

All our work is firmly focused on our four key charitable objectives that are highlighted in our Annual Impact Review:

- Path networks for public benefit
- Promoting skills and experience
- Promoting responsible use
- Promoting good health



**OUTDOOR
ACCESS
TRUST FOR
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