

**‘Nature-based tourism in the South of Scotland’
Getting It Together**

**Oswald Hall Conference Centre, Auchincruive, Ayr
Tuesday, 24th May 2005**

Event Summary

Introduction

In May 2005, the Southern Upland Partnership and Tourism and Environment Forum organised a half-day workshop to discuss the opportunities for nature-based tourism (NBT) in the south of Scotland, in particular the Ayrshire, Lanarkshire and Dumfries and Galloway areas. Over forty delegates attended. Part of the workshop involved discussion on the opportunities and barriers relating to NBT. Below is a summary of the responses. Where possible the comments have been grouped into issues.

Issues

1. Strong Leadership and a Clear Point of Contact

The group felt that a lead needed to be taken in order to move nature-based tourism forwards. Some felt that this lead should come from the centre i.e. the Scottish Executive in order to generate the political will for developing a greener tourism sector which would subsequently be reflected in policies. All agreed that there needed for local leaders and champions who could speak with one voice for an area.

In order to promote the South of Scotland as a destination, there was a need to overcome administrative boundaries. Partners would need to acknowledge that tourists are not aware of administrative boundaries. This continuity would need to be reflected in funding, with the problems of short-term funding packages also raised as a barrier.

There was a call for an independent organiser who could pull the efforts together and act as a point of contact for organisations, communities and businesses.

- Need for inclusion in Strategy
- Lead from centre – Scottish Executive - political will, policies
- One voice for an area
- Fragmentation
- Continuity of effort – short term-ism/3yr funding
- Backing from Exec not continuing (relating to Making Tracks)
- Lack of help to develop smaller scale. Clusters to fund the help?
- Access to funding through national charities (RSPB)
- Lack of resources - £££ and people
- Needs on independent organiser who can work with businesses and across the key organisations.

2. Marketing

More marketing is always welcome, however the costs were identified as a barrier to both businesses and organisations. Marketing should be joined up and consistent and there was a call for the tourist board to work more proactively across the region. The need to look at the area from a visitor's point of view was also seen as important. This may result in marketing and development partnerships across administrative boundaries needing to be formed. Organisations such as the Southern Upland Partnership have been effective in such activities.

- Market South of Scotland as a whole
- Remove local authority boundaries i.e. South and East Ayrshire to promote as one area
- Promotion of where people can go to enjoy nature
- Better provision of information on walks, guides etc
- Encourage the tourist board to be more proactive
- High costs of marketing
- Lack of information on South of Scotland and local activities
- Lack of marketing experience

3. Encouraging Businesses

The attitudes of businesses were seen as a major issue in developing nature-based tourism. A business that was enthusiastic about NBT could bring an area's nature alive for visitors. Providing the framework and information for businesses to get involved is a key element of a successful NBT sector.

- How to get the B&B and hoteliers onboard in a big way – proactive
- Linking of 'clusters' to allow opportunities for new business start up – luggage courier service, cycle hire etc
- Need buy-in from small businesses
- Attitudes of some small businesses
- Lack of motivation to change
- Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) – do they value green tourism?
- Provision of funding advice
- Lack of knowledge of the opportunities available by businesses – narrow focus
- Cost of Insurance
- Time constraints

4. Networks and Making Links

Opportunities to network and encourage businesses, communities and individuals to exchange ideas and form partnerships were to be encouraged. It was felt that collaborations should be not only between tourism businesses but also with other sectors, to foster a better understanding of how the area works.

- Networking
- Collaboration between different sectors
- Local business forums
- Tourism Partnerships
- Links with Forestry Commission Scotland
- Ayrshire Tourism Business Forum
- A Bun Fight is required!

5. Community Involvement

Lack of involvement from local communities was highlighted as a current barrier however it was also seen as an excellent opportunity. Giving people pride in their local areas and enhancing local knowledge were seen as assets which the tourism industry could benefit from. Young people were seen as a particular target group, together with local interest and user groups.

- Local interest and user groups
- Involving local community, especially young
- Involve young people – Schools/Colleges
- Increase local knowledge/Pride
- Local Champion

6. Changing Perceptions

Linking in with a number of the issues above was the need to change perceptions. These perceptions relate not only to the local area but also to the images of green tourism and other, perceived as conflicting, activities.

- Perceived conflict between different elements i.e. shooting & nature conservation
- Environment group interests vs economic interests
- Perception of poor quality of product
- Perception of green tourism as non-economic
- Self image of locals – foster pride in their surroundings

7. Firing Imaginations

The need to encourage and teach local people and businesses about the resources which they have on their doorstep and have available to them was identified as an opportunity. The Wildlife Tourism Training course was identified as one way to inspire local tourism businesses about the wildlife of their area. This knowledge can then be passed on to visitors.

- Nature Based Tourism – needs to be use. How?
- Imaginative approach/Capture imaginations
- Information on training and other groups
- Learn from Best Practice
- Education – links to business (Wildlife Tourism Training)
- Links to Schools
- History, Nature, Culture, Food – people need to know about our locality.

8. Other Issues

Other opportunities and barriers were identified which could not be categorised above. They are listed below:

- Public Transport provision
- Resource exploitation – too many people, too much development
- Appropriate access to remote areas
- Correct scale – getting it right
- Other Public Infrastructure than can be linked to.
- Midges!

9. Products waiting to be developed

A number of products were identified during the course of the discussions.

- Clusters
- Southern Upland Way - access links
- Core Path Network
- Walking Festivals
- Tours from Glasgow base to SS
- Wildlife in the Coalfields
- Ancestral Tourism
- Balloon trips
- Diversification of farming – stewardship; CCTV
- Wild places with no people
- Mini-bus/entrepreneur shuttle
- Ailsa Craig
- Forest Park Strategy
- Carrick Way
- Coastal Route
- Geology – diverse resource