

UKGAP Theme 5: Inspiring people to value and care for our geodiversity

UKGAP Indicator 12: Visits to sites – the number of people visiting a selection of geodiversity places

Relevance

Outdoor recreation is not only healthy, but provides people with the opportunity to come into contact with UK heritage, including its geodiversity. Reporting on the popularity of specific places with a particular geodiversity interest could reveal something about the inherent value placed on geodiversity by society. It could also provide information about the promotion and potential for life-long learning about geodiversity, as interpretative materials, fieldwork and outdoor study greatly enhance knowledge.

Data Sources

Visitor numbers at four popular geodiversity places are used as the source data for this indicator. Visitor numbers were collected by different means as identified below:

- *Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre, Dorset*: Data recorded by site staff.
- *Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve, Dudley, West Midlands*: Data estimates from site staff.
- *Knockan Crag, North West Highlands*: Data sourced from three footfall counters across the site (or estimated through use of a more limited number of these footfall counters) and also available from Visit Scotland's Visitor Attraction Monitor.
- *Giant's Causeway, County Antrim*: Data recorded by site staff and also available from Northern Ireland Tourist Board's Visitor Attraction Survey.

Annual visitor attraction survey data for each of the four UK countries were obtained from:

- Visit England;
- Visit Scotland;
- Welsh Assembly Government for Visit Wales; and,
- Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

An additional survey for Giant's Causeway provides information on the purpose of visits:

- Bill MacNeill Consultancy (2009) *Giant's Causeway Visitor Profiling and Counting* for the National Trust.

Background to the Data

The selection provides a representation of the different sorts of geodiversity places that can be visited across the UK. The places vary in the area they cover; in geodiversity interest; in educational activities on offer; and, in their national and international promotion. Each place is described in more detail below. It is also likely that people will deliberately visit these places for their geodiversity, rather than experiencing geodiversity as a by-product of visiting a well-known landscape, such as a National Park or popular 'beauty spot'. Finally, the four places were selected as: either, historical records of visitor numbers are readily available; or, staff employed at the geodiversity places have the means to attempt realistic estimates of visitor numbers.

Visitor attraction data are collected and reported annually by each of the four national tourist bodies through inviting all country visitor attractions to take part in an annual survey and reporting on the survey sample that respond. These data were used to provide a benchmark against which to compare the data for the geodiversity places.

Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre was set up in 1985 to encourage safe and sustainable collecting of Jurassic fossils from the local beaches. The Centre provides information on fossils, fossil hunting and the local coastal and marine wildlife and runs many educational events.

Wren's Nest was declared as a National Nature Reserve (NNR) in 1956. More recently, *Wren's Nest* and *Castle Hill* were declared a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM). *Wren's Nest* was formerly quarried and mined for limestone, and the former rock faces of the quarries provide opportunities for field geology and geological research and are rich in marine invertebrate fossils. Way-marked geological trails throughout the area establish a 'green geological haven' in the midst of a developed urban area.

Knockan Crag is also an NNR but situated in the remote northwest of Scotland. The rocks at, and around *Knockan Crag*, record the geological history of the landmass now known as Scotland, and show how the landscape of the region was formed. Various rock trails help explain the geological story and include pieces of rock art and poetry set in stone, and, a 'rock room' provides a venue for interactive learning.

Giant's Causeway is the UK's first internationally recognised natural World Heritage Site, inscribed in 1986 and also declared a NNR in 1987. Beautifully formed volcanic polygonal basalt columns (colloquially known as 'the stones') are exposed in the coastal cliffs and foreshore. A new visitor centre is currently under construction.

Data

Table 12a below shows the annual number of visitors to each locality. Table 12b shows the percentage growth in visitor numbers to visitor attractions year-on-year for each of the four UK countries.

Table 12a: Number of Visitors to Geodiversity Places

Site / Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre	67,007	66,422	61,993	75,665	85,083	79,333	84,708	92,304	81,704
Wren's Nest NNR - Lower Estimate	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000
Knockan Crag	10,887	17,900	14,765	12,923	10,506	11,028	10,000	10,000	No Data
Giant's Causeway	406,801	398,977	445,327	464,243	553,063	712,714	751,693	714,612	No Data

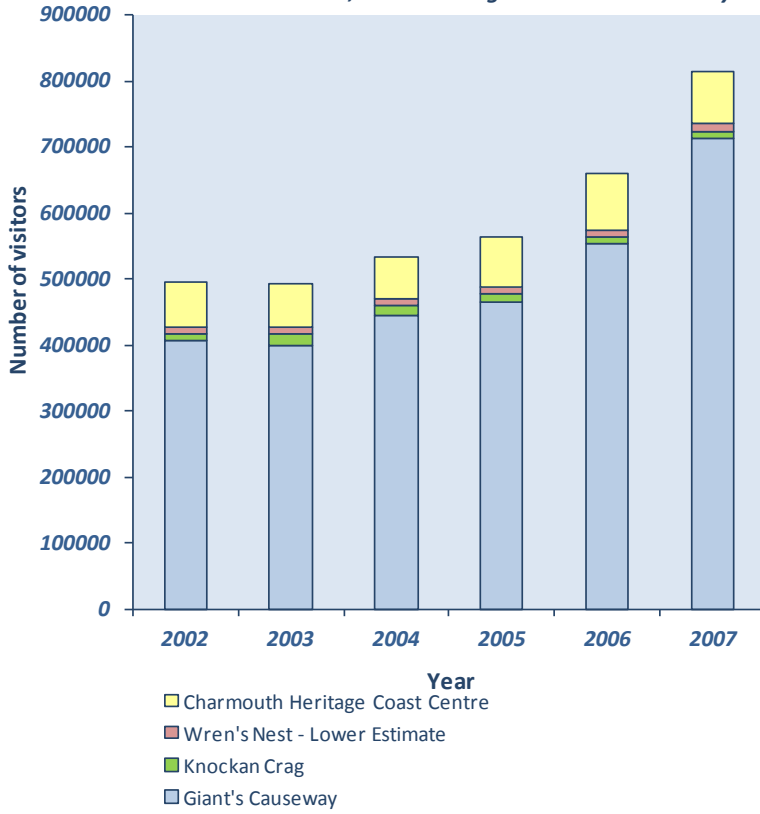
Table 12b: Percentage Growth in Visitor Numbers from Previous Year

	% growth from previous year								
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	
Visit England	8	2	1	-0.5	3	3	2	5	
Visit Scotland*	4.7	2.2	2.0	2.8	6	1.8	-4.5	3.5	
Visit Wales	8	0	0	1.1	0.8	7.0	0.7	10.5	
Northern Ireland Tourist Board	9	11	4	3	8	8.0	1.0	8.0	

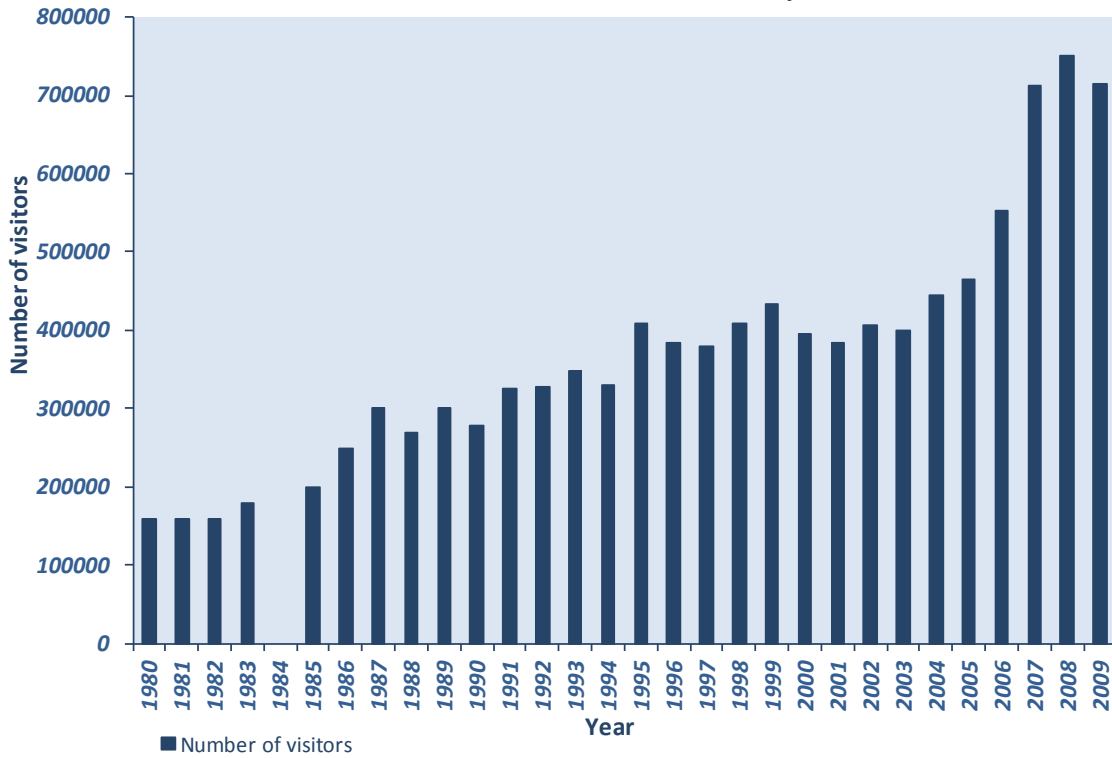
*Includes Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum Data

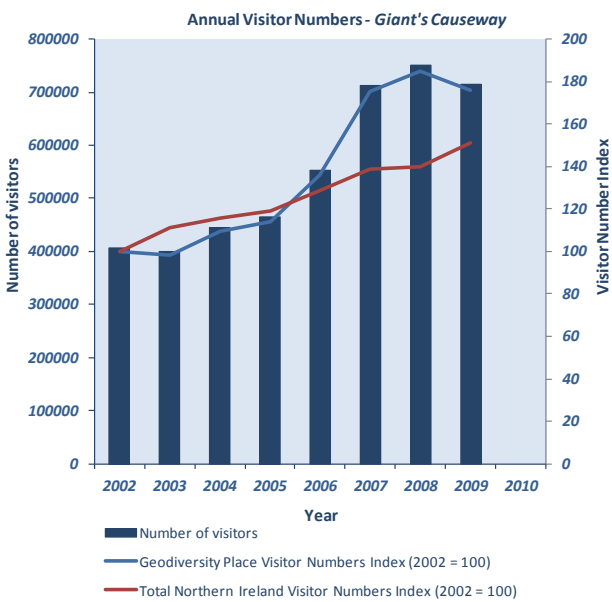
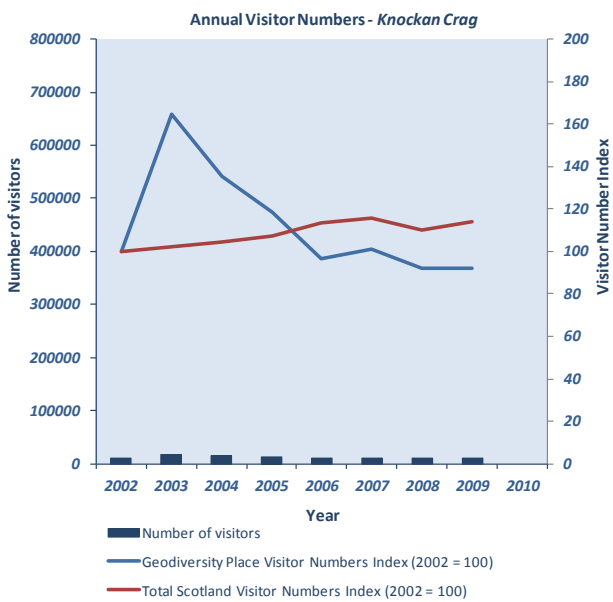
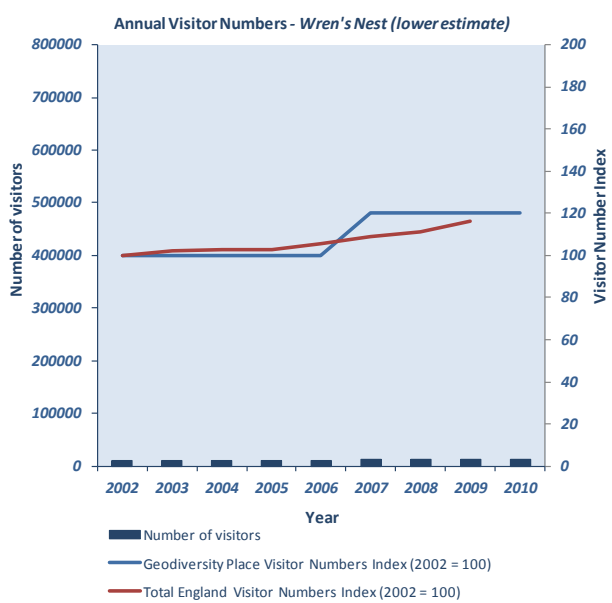
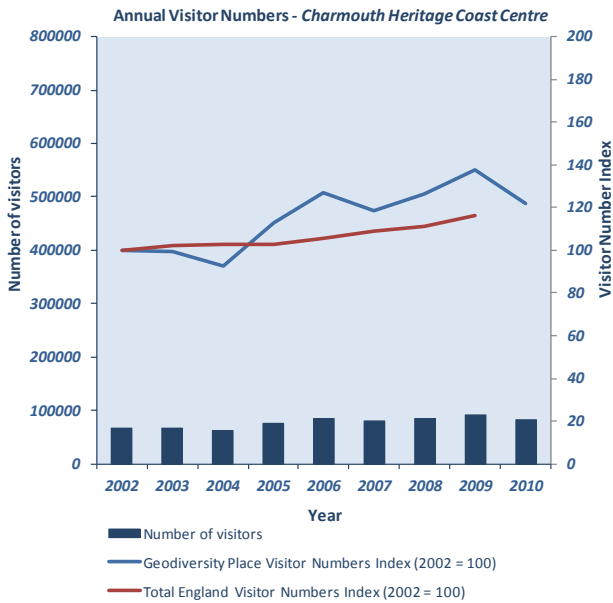
The first chart shows visitor numbers for each of the four geodiversity places. The second chart shows the more extensive data available for the *Giant's Causeway*. The following four charts show, through the use of indices, how the annual change in visitor numbers at each geodiversity place compares to the relevant country annual total change in visitor numbers recorded by the Visitor Attraction Surveys.

Annual Visitor Numbers - Total for Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre, Wren's Nest, Knockan Crag and Giant's Causeway



Annual Visitor Numbers - Giant's Causeway 1980 to 2009





Assessment of Trend

- Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre:** There has been an increase in annual visitor numbers from 67,000 to nearly 92,000 in 2009, with a small drop observed in 2010. The overall increase of visitors to Charmouth, at least for the period until 2009, is greater than the rather flat rate of increase in visitor numbers observed for English attractions overall.
- Wren's Nest:** Annual visitor numbers (based on estimates) remained the same until 2007, when there was a significant increase which was maintained each year until 2010. For the period as a whole, the increase in visitor numbers to Wren's Nest is extremely similar to the rather flat rate of increase in visitor numbers observed for English attractions overall.
- Knockan Crag:** Visitor numbers appear to have declined steeply, from a peak of nearly 18,000 in 2004 to just 10,000 in 2009. However, more recent data are based on estimates. Again there is a rather flat rate of increase in visitor numbers observed for Scottish attractions overall, with a peak (in 2006) followed by a dip (in 2008) showing the influence of the re-opening of Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery in Glasgow, now Scotland's most visited

attraction. The greater importance of North American visitors to Scotland (compared to England) means that the weakness of the US dollar during parts of the period under consideration may also have had an effect.

- *Giant's Causeway*: Over the longer period (1980 – 2009) it is clear that visitor numbers to the Giant's Causeway have been on the rise, with a more substantial increase shown in 2006 and again in 2007 which was then maintained for 2008 and 2009.

The total numbers of visitors to the Giant's Causeway each year is far more than for each of the other selected geodiversity places. As well as being an internationally recognised site, the fact that it is ideally located for a full day trip from Belfast is perhaps helpful.

The rate of increase in visitor numbers observed for Northern Irish attractions overall is somewhat greater than for England and Scotland, reflecting perhaps (among other things) the positive influence of the Peace Process on tourism. Also, as the Giant's Causeway is Northern Ireland's most visited attraction, the rate of increase in visitors to this place is likely to have a significant effect on the rate of increase in numbers for Northern Irish attractions overall.

In a survey completed in 2009 (Bill MacNeill Consultancy) 91% of first time visitors to Giant's Causeway stated that they had come to see 'the stones', with 'the stones' remaining the main reason for return visits (52%). These data help to identify that for Giant's Causeway at least, people visit the site for its interesting geological formations.

- *Overall*: With the exception perhaps of Knockan Crag, it would appear that annual increases in visitor numbers to the selected geodiversity places are at least comparable to annual increases in visitor numbers to attractions across the comparable country as a whole – if not slightly greater.

Data Limitations and Future Recommendations

The data are dependent on the method used to record visitor numbers at each site. Wren's Nest is looking to install footfall counters in the near future which would increase confidence in the visitor numbers data from this place. However, the annual Visitor Attraction Survey also makes use of a range of data including: ticket sales; mechanical or electronic counting; manual counting; and, estimates.

It would be interesting to include a greater range of geodiversity places, including at least one from Wales, possibly Dan Yr Ogof caves in the Brecon Beacons if data become available. It would perhaps be more useful to only include geodiversity places that contribute to the annual Visitor Attraction Surveys and / or encourage more geodiversity places to contribute to these surveys. This would make recording under this indicator much more straightforward, with data more readily accessible.

The data recorded in the Visitor Attraction Surveys also include: visitor numbers by type of attraction and by region. There is much more that could be done in terms of relating data concerning geodiversity places to the information recorded in the Visitor Attraction Surveys.