

## 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

#### Introduction

Measuring the number of people visiting a range of sites with geodiversity interest and then both analysing long term trends at a site level and also comparing sites to wider visitor figures could be a useful way of monitoring how engagement in geodiversity sites is comparing to the wider visitor economy.

#### Methodology and data

Using the 2011 report as a starting point, an updated and expanded target list of venues and sites was agreed and a Survey Monkey questionnaire was developed. The updated list was drawn up to both enlarge the dataset, but also to ensure a more balanced coverage across the UK and across the types of venues, sites and events that engage people with geodiversity.

Unfortunately, despite the widened list of consultees (twenty venues were contacted), the data collected (seven completed returns) only provided a limited expansion of information, figures can be found in Table 12a. This needs to be addressed for future reports; the variation of the quality of data collected also needs to be considered for future reports, in particular around how numbers are counted, and the fact that some venues record calendar years and others by financial years.

Respondents were also asked where possible to provide some more background to their figures, in particular the breakdown of domestic versus overseas visitors, the proportion of visitors who were school children and any local factors behind visitor number variations. Where provided this information is recorded below.

#### Geodiversity sites/venues and events that provided data

##### [Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre](#)

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.

Visitor numbers collated through a manual click in system. School numbers collated on database and invoice record system, school % for most recent year is taken from those directly visiting the Centre as a school group. 75% of visitors are from the UK with 25% from outside the UK. School children make up 10% of visitor numbers.

Events that have affected visitor numbers include:

2001 - Designation of World Heritage Site Jurassic Coast

2004 / 2005 - Redevelopment of Centre

2012 - Fatality at Burton Bradstock - Closure of all beaches for 3 days in July

2014 - Partial closure due to storm damage and repairs (Feb - July)

### [Wren's Nest](#)

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. Visitor numbers are an estimate made by wardens on the site.

### [Knockan Crag](#)

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. We have changed our counter equipment in the past couple of years, and now the count is more accurate. This is the count for the numbers of people accessing the trails (rock room and walking around the site). The site is often closed for a short period (week) annually during October/November for maintenance however this does not dramatically affect visitor numbers. There has been major redevelopment of the interpretation, and this was 'relaunched' in May 2013.

### [Tentsmuir NNR](#)

Tentsmuir NNR lies at the north-eastern most tip of Fife, sandwiched between the estuaries of the Rivers Tay and Eden. Tentsmuir Point is the outermost edge of a large sand dune system, part of which is now covered by forest and farmland. The dunes continue to grow out towards the sea. Indeed, this is one of the fastest growing parts of Scotland, which adds greatly to the Reserve's scientific interest. Seals, waders and wildfowl feed on the tidal Abertay Sands and an array of flowers and wildlife live amongst the dunes. Visitor figures are based on number of cars passing the main access barrier multiplied by a factor of 2.5 average occupants.

### [Giant's Causeway](#)

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 was opened in July 2012 under the control of National Trust and visitor data captured at till point. UK residents make up 44% of visitors with 56% from outside the UK. School groups form 15% of visitors.

### [Yorkshire Fossil Festival](#)

The first Yorkshire Fossil Festival was held at the Rotunda Museum in Scarborough in September 2014, numbers were an estimate, and would also be included in Rotunda Museum figures for 2014/15. It will be running again at the same location in September 2015. Details of the 2014 festival can be found on the festival website.

### [Rotunda Museum](#)

The Rotunda was founded by the Scarborough Philosophical Society in 1829. The circular design was the suggestion of William Smith, the Father of Geology as a way of displaying geological specimens and illustrating geological strata. It underwent a major redevelopment between 2006 and 2008. Visitor numbers are recorded by financial year, they are reported here in the year that forms the majority of the financial year (2011/12 figures appear in 2011).

Table 12a shows the visitor numbers as provided; those figures that formed part of the 2011 report have been retained, even where figures provided by venues for the period 2002-2010 as part of this report are different.

Table 12a: Number of Visitors to Geodiversity Places

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre</b>	67,007	66,422	61,993	75,665	85,083	79,333	84,708	92,304	81,704	94,144	89,751	89,429	94,155
<b>Wrens Nest NNR</b>	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
<b>Knockan Crag</b>	10,887	17,900	14,765	12,923	10,506	11,028	10,000	10,000	No Data	8,488	9,652	10,637	11,763
<b>Giant's Causeway</b>	406,801	398,977	445,327	464,243	553,063	712,714	751,693	714,612	No Data	No Data	No Data	754,000	788,000
<b>Tentsmuir NNR</b>	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	91,975	81,363	105,538
<b>Rotunda Museum</b>	No Data	11,369	10,568	8,922	0	0	19,990	17,300	21,494	19,865	20,896	20,230	No Data
<b>Yorkshire Fossil Festival</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5,000

Cells shaded grey are those figures provided in the 2011 report.

### [Visitor economy and other comparison reports consulted](#)

In order to compare and place into a wider context the visitor data from geodiversity places the following reports and documents were consulted:

- Visitor Attraction Surveys in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland (Table 12b)
- Visit Britain World trend data, covering overseas tourism to the UK as a whole (Table 12c)
- Great Britain Tourism Survey, June 2014, covering domestic tourism of at least one night's stay in duration in England, Wales and Scotland (Table 12d)
- The GB Day Visitor Survey, April 2014, covering day visits in England, Wales and Scotland (Table 12e)
- Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE), 5 Year Report, January 2015, England only

Table 12b: Year on Year % change in overall visitors to attractions

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>England</b>	8	2	1	-0.5	3	3	2	5	3	3	-1	5
<b>Wales</b>	8	0	0	1.1	0.8	7	0.7	10.5	0.7	1.4	-5.3	-
<b>Scotland</b>	4.7	2.2	2	2.8	6	1.8	-4.5	3.5	0.45	10.46	-4.5	-4.94
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	9	11	4	3	8	8	1	8	-2	5.9	6.3	6.5

Cells shaded grey are those figures provided in the 2011 report.

Source: Visitor Attraction Surveys for each country, except Scotland where data is from GB Tourism Survey.

Table 12c: Overseas tourism numbers for UK

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>Total Overseas Visitors to UK (000)</b>	24,180	24,715	27,755	29,970	32,713	32,778	31,888	29,889	29,803	30,798	31,084	32,813
<b>Year on Year Change</b>	6%	2%	12%	8%	9%	0%	-3%	-6%	0%	3%	1%	5.6%

Source: Visit Britain World Trend Data

Table 12d: Domestic Tourism of at least one night's stay in duration

	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>GB Domestic Holiday Trips (millions)</b>	115.7	126.6	126	122.9
<b>Year on Year Change</b>	-5.50%	9.40%	-0.50%	-2.50%
<b>England Domestic Holiday Trips (millions)</b>	95.5	104.2	104.5	101.8
<b>Year on Year Change</b>	-6.60%	9.20%	0.20%	-2.60%
<b>Scotland Domestic Holiday Trips (millions)</b>	12.1	13.4	12.8	12.1
<b>Year on Year Change</b>	0.50%	10.50%	-4.60%	-4.90%
<b>Wales Domestic Holiday Trips (millions)</b>	8.7	9.7	9.6	9.9
<b>Year on Year Change</b>	-2.50%	11.90%	-1%	3.40%

Source: Great Britain Tourism Survey June 2015

Table 12e: Day Visitor Survey

	Visits				Expenditure			
	2011	2012	2013	2013/12	2011	2012	2013	2013/12
	Millions	Millions	Millions	% Change	Millions	Millions	Millions	% Change
<b>England</b>	1,307	1,467	1,370	-7%	£42,670	£48,459	£46,024	-5%
<b>Scotland</b>	134	142	124	-13%	£6,152	£4,651	£4,467	0%
<b>Wales</b>	102	101	89	-12%	£2,939	£3,834	£3,061	-20%
<b>GB Total</b>	1,542	1,710	1,583	-7%	£51,761	£56,944	£53,731	-6%

Source: GB Day Visitor Survey April 2014

In addition to the trend data other pieces of information may be taken from the various surveys and future reports should make better use of this, for example the GB Day Visitor Survey identifies that in 2013 the average day visitor was traveling 35 miles to undertake outdoor activities and 52 miles to visit a visitor attraction. The final document reviewed for this work was the 2015 Monitor of People Engaging with the Natural Environment (MENE) report, there is great potential in this document to link with UKGAP monitoring and whilst beyond the capacity of this work it is worth noting one finding in MENE about the frequency of people visiting the natural environment rising from 50% in 2009/10 to 60% in 2013/14 (people visiting an outdoors space at least once a week).

### Discussion and recommendations

It is clear from the work carried out for this report there is a great deal of potential in the tourism and visitor economy data available; however, more work is need to align this data with information from geodiversity places. This will only produce major benefits if recommendations below are considered and applied to future reporting.

The 2011 report provided data from visitor attraction surveys and compared the trends within those to the trends at geodiversity places; this approach was initially followed again by comparing the data at table 12a with some of the trends reported below. However, it became apparent that this was not producing useful information but was instead potentially providing misleading trends analysis. This was primarily due to the small data set of geodiversity places, and also the individual sites circumstances playing a more prominent role than wider trends (for example new visitor centres or changes in how visitors are recorded).

The use of visitor numbers is arguably the most basic way to measure engagement, and notwithstanding the difficulties in gathering this data, future reporting could be more ambitious in examining other forms of engagement, including online and via other media. This would be harder to measure but might well yield interesting results. One approach to this might be to work with a very small number of key partners to develop case studies that can then be used by other geodiversity places and supporters as examples.

It was clear throughout this work, and demonstrated by the low return of information that the current pressures on venues and sites mean that whilst most are very keen to participate in this kind of work, the reality can be different. This same pressure also applies to the resource available to carry out the research and analysis. Both these factors need to be considered for future reports.

For future reports the following should be considered:

- Greater buy-in by reporting geodiversity places needs to be gained, use of other networks and partnerships should be considered, for example the Geological Curators Group, and landscape based partnerships (Geopark networks etc)
- The identification of a small number of partner geodiversity places to carry out more detailed research might yield more useful information, this needs to be balanced against the broad brush data collection opportunities, and available resources.

- Visitor numbers should be collected from venues at least annually, if not more frequently, this would help geodiversity places respond with the minimum of effort.
- Geodiversity places need to be encouraged and perhaps supported in reporting visitor data that is segmented by audience type, including origin of visitors.
- Consideration should be given to opening the survey up to all geodiversity places using online systems such as Survey Monkey, coupled with social media and use of networks. The potential gain in the amount of data needs to be weighed against a possible loss of data quality.
- Much greater use could be made of other reports such as MENE (and many others). To realise this thought needs to be given to aligning data collection with these reports (for example reporting periods). This needs to be done with consideration to the likely future resourcing levels for this kind of work.
- Could existing surveys (in particular MENE) be persuaded to adopt some questions that directly address engagement with geodiversity places?
- There is scope for amalgamating some elements of UKGAP Indicator 15 with this Indicator to better understand the economic impact of geodiversity places.