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TRUST ENCOURAGES RESPONSIBLE ACCESS AS VISITOR NUMBERS SOAR

The National Trust for Scotland welcomed more than two million people to its countryside locations in 2024, its highest ever figures in a record-breaking year for the conservation charity.

With increased numbers comes increased pressure on these special places so the Trust is encouraging people to access its landscapes responsibly.

David Frew, Head of Mar Lodge Estate at the National Trust for Scotland, said: "Our purpose is to share our places with people, so we're really pleased to have reached our highest ever visitor figures in 2024. We saw a 37 percent increase on the previous year and we want this growth to continue, and we also want to continue to improve access for people who may not have had the chance to explore countryside landscapes in the past.

"A lot of the challenges we face in maintaining our countryside properties come from people who simply don't know what is and is not a responsible way to visit these places, so we want to raise awareness. Many people won't know that seemingly small actions can have large impacts on fragile habitats. This is especially true when multiplied by hundreds of thousands of visitors.

"Fire safety is also an exceptionally important topic, even more so now we are experiencing increased periods of wildfire risk in Scotland and sadly, more wildfires at our places. We encounter dozens and dozens of campfires during these periods and people often just tell us they'll be careful. Many people don't realise that fires can ignite underground in areas of peatland and although it appears extinguished on the surface, it can have devastating consequences. And far too often we see a seemingly well-managed fire lose control from just one or two errant embers. We would really appreciate visitors listening to no-fire guidance and helping us protect our landscapes.

"We love sharing our special places with people from around the world, but we ask that everyone treats them with the care and respect they deserve. We don't want anyone to feel that the outdoors is beyond their reach, or somewhere they're not welcome, so education and engagement is the easiest way to do this."

The Trust's advice for visiting the countryside includes:

- **Don't leave anything behind** – All rubbish, wet clothes, food, tents and camping supplies, disposable barbeques, nappies, and even human waste need to be taken home with you. Rangers and volunteers spend hundreds of hours removing these things from the landscape to protect nature and improve the experience of other visitors.

- **Keep the land as you found it** – Creating ‘rock art’ has become more popular, where people stack stones into towers or arrange them in various patterns. While this may seem harmless, the practice can unknowingly disturb precious habitats and create lasting disruption in the area.
- **Consider other ways to leave tributes or memorials** – While many locations have a special place in people’s hearts and they may want to leave a marker or memorial, it’s important to protect the natural beauty and wildlife of these places. Physical markers may inadvertently harm wildlife, so people are encouraged to think of other ways to leave a tribute to loved ones.
- **Protect trees and woodland** – There has been an increase in people cutting and burning precious trees and deadwood to make campfires, which can cause irreparable damage to fragile habitats. And not only is this practice vandalism, but it is also often pointless as damp and living wood doesn’t burn well.
- **Remember fire safety** - Fire safety is extremely important, especially as Scotland’s temperatures warm and rainfall decreases. People are encouraged to never light an open fire during prolonged dry periods or in areas like forests, woods, farmland, or on peaty ground. Dousing a fire with a few bottles of water or letting it go out by itself simply isn’t sufficient to extinguish it and they can reignite days later. BBQs can also be very dangerous, especially disposable ones, so we would always encourage people to use a properly supervised camping stove. People are also encouraged not to drop ashes or cigarette ends, which can set dry vegetation alight. Glass bottles and broken glass can also act as a magnifying glass for the sun and can start fires.
- **Think about sustainable travel** – Many countryside locations may be most easily accessed by car, but this is not always the only way to get there. Car parks can become very busy, and people may feel compelled to park dangerously on busy roadsides and verges, increasing the chances of collisions and damage. Before travelling, check whether there are public transportation options like trains, buses, or shuttles that can remove some of the stress of the visit, and have a plan in place if parking isn’t available at the first choice.

The National Trust for Scotland aims to care for, protect, and share Scotland’s nature, beauty and heritage for everyone, as outlined in its 10-year strategy, launched in 2022. For more information on the National Trust for Scotland, visit www.nts.org.uk.

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About the National Trust for Scotland

Established in 1931, the National Trust for Scotland is Scotland's largest conservation charity and cares for, shares and speaks up for Scotland's magnificent heritage.

Over the last 90 years the Trust has pioneered public access to and shared ownership of some of the most magnificent buildings, collections and landscapes in Scotland. It cares for more than 100 sites, from ancient houses to battlefields, castles, mills, gardens, coastlines, islands, mountain ranges and the plants and animals which depend upon them.

In March 2022 the National Trust for Scotland launched *Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone*, its ten-year strategy which sets out the ambitions of the charity over the coming decade. From speaking up for Scotland's heritage which doesn't have a voice, to improving the lives and wellbeing of people across the country, and responding to the climate and biodiversity crisis, the Trust will build on its work in recent years to grow its impact and conserve and restore more of Scotland's heritage, as it moves towards its centenary in 2031.

Scotland's largest membership organisation, the National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work.

For more information on the National Trust for Scotland visit www.nts.org.uk.

The National Trust for Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC 007410.