



# The Highland Council Access Rangers Maoir-dhùthcha Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd

**Annual Report 2025**  
**Aithisg Bhliadhnail 2025**

# Contents

## Clàr-innse

**Geàrr-chunntas ràithe**

**Eagrachadh & obrachadh  
Sgioba Maoir-dhùthcha ràitheil**

**Brath-aithris cruinneachadh  
maoir-dhùthcha**

**Com-pàirteachadh luchd-  
tadhail, sgrùdadh làraich  
agus aithris**

**Ag obair còmhla ri càch**

**Obraichean leasachaidh làraich,  
innealan-cunntaidh dhaoine  
agus obair-gleidhidh**

**Conaltradh**

**Taic agus a' gluasad air adhart**

**Giùlan luchd-tadhail**

**Eàrr-ràdh 1**

# 1. Season summary

## 1. Geàrr-chunntas ràithe

In 2025 The Highland Council (THC) employed 18 Access Rangers patrolling large areas across the Highlands. Their main purpose was to encourage people to behave responsibly and to follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. They advised on other considerate behaviours in line with legislation, The Highway Code, and Highland Council policies. They also provided information on facilities and places of interest to visitors and worked with communities and land managers to minimise the negative impacts of high visitor numbers.

All of the posts this year were funded by the Council from its main budget after agreement at its budget meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2025. Recruitment started immediately afterwards which after approvals, advertising, interviews and appointments the Rangers Induction days were held between 28<sup>th</sup> -30<sup>th</sup> May. The induction introduced the new Rangers to standard operating procedures and policies from different Council services along with Scottish Fire & Rescue and Police Scotland.

Over the summer, there appeared to be an alternating pattern of a busy weekend followed by a quieter one. Key weekends were exceptionally busy, coinciding with bank holidays and schools breaking up and returning. The Glasgow Fair weekend often has a noticeable impact in Lochaber. The weather also acted as a key determining factor in visitor numbers, this year being a relatively warm and dry summer which meant periods of high fire risk even into September. There were a couple of strong storms, Floris in August and Amy in October that caused damage including many fallen trees and blackouts.

Whilst the vast majority of visitors welcome the advice and information from the Access Rangers there continues to be a high number of irresponsible and occasionally confrontational behaviours encountered.

Data was collected by the Access Rangers whilst patrolling on three days per week, including the weekend, between June and October. However, April patrols were less frequent and did not cover all the areas as we relied on casual staff. September and October also had a reduced number of patrols as rangers take their annual leave. It was also notable that this October was very wet and stormy in many areas resulting in reduced figures.

The highlights of the collated data to note include:

The areas with the highest informal camping numbers and associated problems, particularly fires, litter and abandoned tents continue to be **East Lochaber and Loch Ness**. Informal camping increased this year in North Lochaber and South Skye and appears to have reduced this year in Wester Ross, Sutherland and Caithness, although it is still much higher than pre-covid levels. Forty five abandoned tents were found, most commonly in Wester Ross and Loch Ness. Over 4,231 off-site tents were recorded this year compared with 5,508 last year. Whilst there is a decrease in the total number this is still far higher than was evident pre-pandemic. To more accurately compare tent numbers due to reduced number of patrols this year we can calculate an average number seen per patrol. This year was 2.41, whilst it was 2.77 in 2023, 3.36 in 2022 and 7.1 in 2021. This suggests a **13% reduction** in 2025.

High recreational vehicle (RV) numbers (this includes, motorhomes, campervans and roof-top tents) were recorded in Lochaber and Skye and around the NC500. Increased numbers were apparent in West Lochaber, Lochalsh and parts of Sutherland, whilst the biggest decrease was seen in Wester Ross, but still relatively high. A total of 31,782 were recorded this year, compared to 34,147 in 2023. To more accurately compare RV numbers due to reduced number of patrols this year we can calculate an average number seen per patrol. This year was 18.11 whilst it was 16.69 in 2023, 16.41 in 2022 and 16.6 in 2021. This suggests an **8% increase** seen per patrol this year.

This year had a prolonged sunny dry spell, one of the sunniest on record and rainfall well below average when fire risk was very high. Subsequently, the Access Rangers were even more vigilant of camp fires in unsuitable locations. Fire marks and damage were most commonly found around in East Lochaber (513) and Loch Ness (605). Over 2,681 fire marks were recorded Highland wide, lower than 2023 (3,740) but with 236 fires put out by Rangers (233 in 2023) that may have posed a risk of spreading.

The problem of blackwater toilet waste dumping increased substantially this year to 207 from 126 in 2023. Wester Ross & Assynt were locations where this was most often found along with Black Isle & Mid Ross and North Skye. With a 60% increase, this appears to be a growing problem each year.

North Skye and Coigach & Assynt were this year's areas with highest levels of outdoor toileting issues at 1,862 incidents out of a Highland total of 6,428. This contrasts with its lower camping numbers than some other areas and so maybe due to reduced availability of public toilets over longer distances and thus use of laybys.

Parking issues appear most prevalent in Wester Ross and Black Isle, with North Skye and Loch Ness significant, with most warning notices issued for inconsiderate or obstructive parking. The Parking Enforcement team do cover some hotspot areas such as Skye and Glenfinnan. Chanonry Point, in the Black Isle area, recorded a high figure as a Ranger was on site who issued reminders for non payment of the parking fee when a person was not present to be spoken with. In total, 590 notices were issued Highland wide.

Rangers collected nearly 2,100 bags of litter, similar to the 2,200 bags in 2023. They reported 638 waste/fly tipping issues, more than the previous year. This increase in the amount of litter and reports was likely to be a result of not having the Seasonal Waste Assistants again this year. Rangers often removed bin overspill and reported the full bins.

By the end of October, the Rangers had engaged with 22,632 people (29,874 in 2023 and 28,500 in 2022) people mostly to inform them of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and facilities available. However, of these, 269 were negative engagements. Whilst a small number of the total, they are uncomfortable, distressing and possibly threatening to the Ranger involved.

The presence of the Access Rangers has had a significant impact in reducing the irresponsible or inconsiderate behaviour of many visitors and potential causes of distress to Highland communities and other visitors. With Access Rangers patrolling countryside sites, their presence increased compliance within Invitation to Pay car parks, increased responsible behaviour and the work that they carry out in removing litter and immediate repairs ensures ongoing visitor enjoyment of our countryside, increasing the likelihood of repeat visits and positive reviews to increase the economic benefit gained from tourism.

## 2. The Seasonal Access Ranger Team set-up and operation

### 2. Eagrachadh & obrachadh Sgioba Maoir-dhùthcha ràitheil

The Rangers job description was to:

- Engage face-to-face with visitors to explain and encourage responsible behaviour following the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.
- Monitor visitors use impacts and incidents and reporting on a weekly basis.
- Speak to informal campers to explain responsible access and leave no trace.
- Reduce the number of open fires by explaining the impacts which cause damage to vegetation and alarm to residents.
- Reduce the amount of litter by encouraging visitors to take home what they bring. Rangers will also collect litter when necessary and report large quantities.
- Encourage responsible parking and prevent obstructive parking. Rangers will assist with parking enforcement, if necessary, with the issuing of Parking Warning Notices
- Liaise with communities and landowners when issues arise, working together on solutions.
- Improve and maintain Highland council owned or managed countryside sites and work with land managers on other sites.
- Improve and maintain some of the most heavily used paths particularly to popular natural visitor attractions.

Thirteen Access Rangers started full time on 28<sup>th</sup> May and were in post for 5 months until the end of October. A further two posts were filled on 15<sup>th</sup> June leaving two vacancies covered by neighbouring Rangers. However, one Ranger left at the end of August and the three vacancies were filled for the last 2 months of the season. The ability to retain one full-time, two-part time Rangers and use of casual Rangers over winter in 2024/25 was a great advantage and enabled those staff to be ready for the Easter holidays. We are hoping to do the same in the 2025/26 season.



# 2.1 Deployment

The 18 Access Rangers covered the areas on the map below:

**The Highland Council area is 25,659 sq kms.**

**The Highland Council Access Authority area is 24,159 sq kms.**

**Which excludes Badenoch & Strathspey, as it is within Cairngorms National Park.**

**This represents almost 1/3 of Scotland's land area at 77,925 sq kms.**

**It is almost the size of Belgium and 20% larger than Wales.**

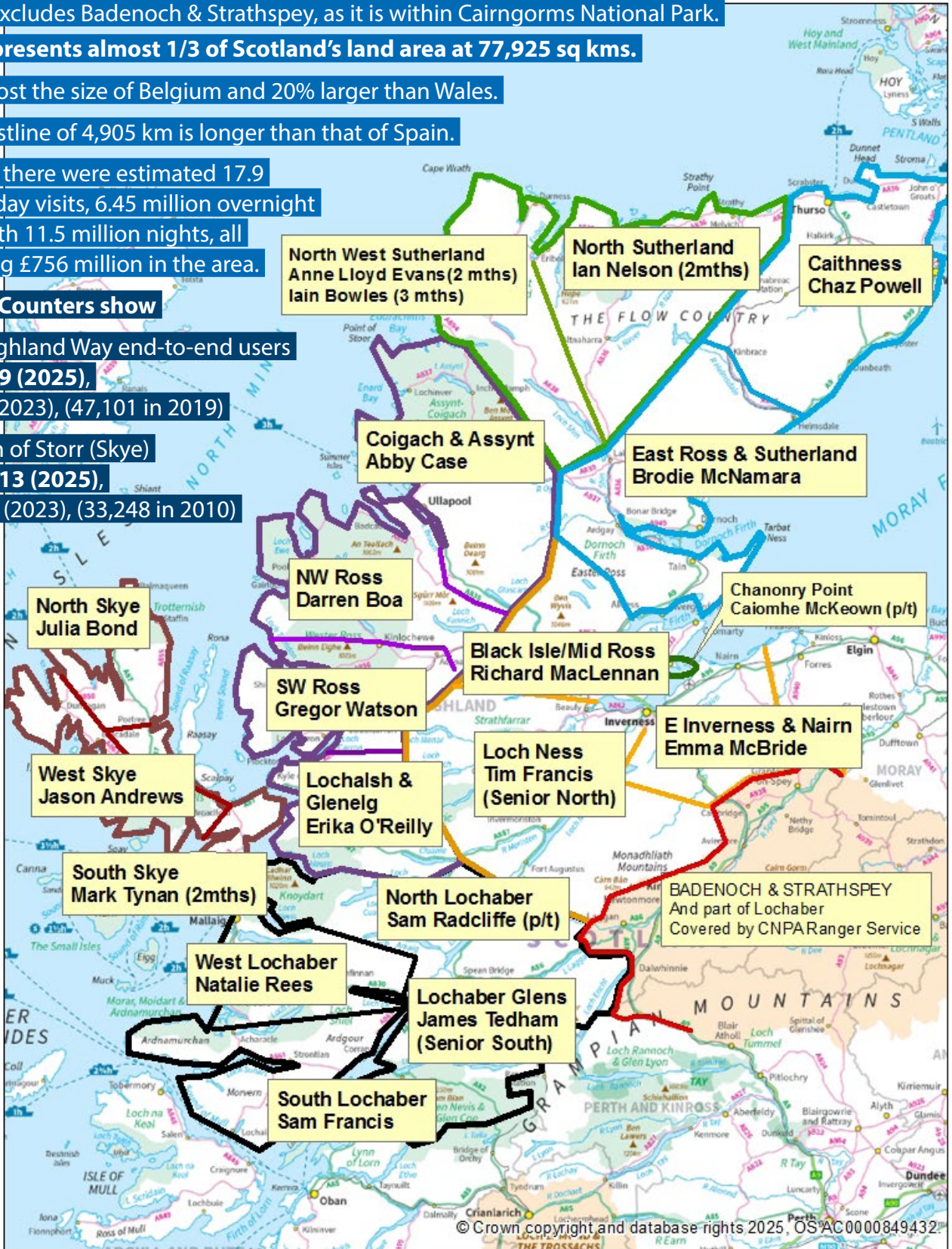
**The coastline of 4,905 km is longer than that of Spain.**

**In 2024, there were estimated 17.9 million day visits, 6.45 million overnight visits with 11.5 million nights, all spending £756 million in the area.**

**People Counters show**

**West Highland Way end-to-end users = 49,179 (2025), 47,557 (2023), (47,101 in 2019)**

**Old Man of Storr (Skye) = 275,213 (2025), 293,093 (2023), (33,248 in 2010)**



© Crown copyright and database rights 2025, OS AC0000849432

Ref: **Access Rangers 2025**  
Date: 24 August 2025

0 6,000 12,000 24,000 36,000 48,000 Meters  
1:1,130,000

**The Highland Council**  
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Equipment for the team included a hired van with THC and Highland Council Ranger Service magnetic logos, THC and Ranger branded uniform, a mobile phone and in some cases a laptop. Each Ranger was given a tool bag of hand tools, plus several other tools to undertake basic maintenance on visitor sites or paths especially where public safety was a concern.

Training was primarily a two-day induction course on the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and devised Standard Operating Procedures for many of the key issues, delivered by experienced Access, Parking, Environmental Health and Waste Officers. It also included sessions with Police Scotland and Scottish Fire & Rescue Service. A further session on tool training was given when those were issued. The training was supplemented by webinar training on Conflict Avoidance arranged by Naturescot. A two day Outdoor First Aid course was provided for those who did not already have a first aid qualification.

A Ranger Handbook has been developed with the past three years' experience and a copy was given to all new Rangers. This included all the information required on functions and procedures, other Services, equipment, communications, and contacts. It is intended to be revised before the start of each summer season.

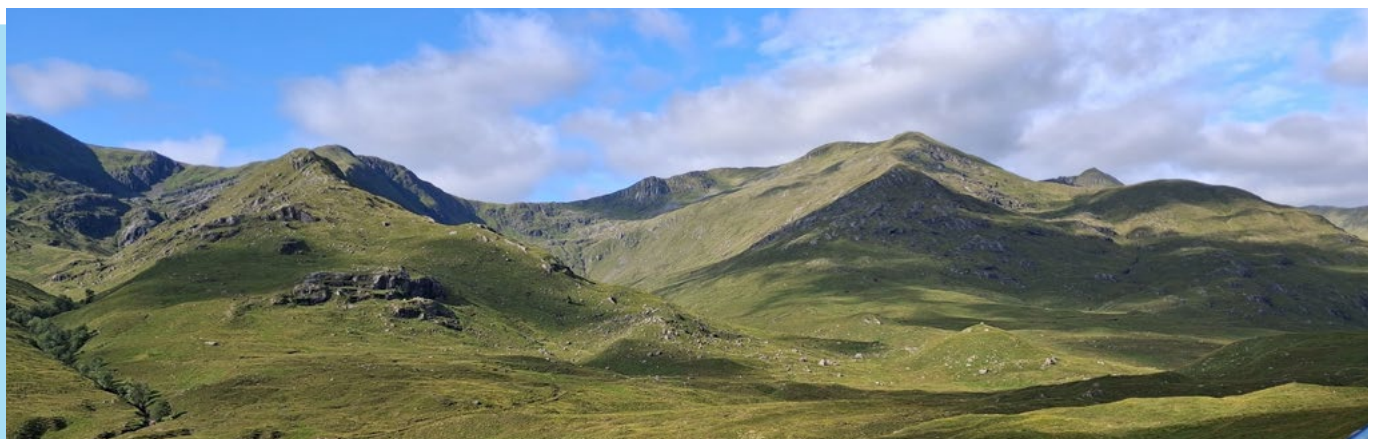
Two Senior Rangers supervised the Ranger team with further reference to the Outdoor Access Manager. The three area Access Officers and the Countryside Projects Officer gave other assistance.



The Rangers worked five days per week which included weekends, having two days off mid-week. They patrolled on 3 days per week, recording the observed data on those days. Over the course of the summer, they spoke to over 22,632 people. They were most vigilant in engaging with people conducting irresponsible behaviour and often advised on actions to leave no trace. They would also provide a welcome face for general information on the area or nearby facilities.

As a conversation starter, handing out a guidance leaflet for responsible campers or motorhome users was especially useful. A leaflet on 'Responsible Camping' originally produced by Nature Scot is now re-printed by THC. THC have also produced and printed a generic Highland-wide motorhome user leaflet, with several

language versions online. Other organisations have produced area specific motorhome leaflets with a map of facilities, e.g. Venture North for Caithness & Sutherland and Wester Ross Biosphere for Wester Ross. During these patrols they recorded numbers for site monitoring reports specifically on camping, vehicles, people and any remains of camping activities. Whilst on patrol they may clear a dirty site, note it for further work or report it to another Council or agency service. On the two other working days, the rangers made community or land manager contacts, worked on popular sites, arranged volunteer workdays, or conducted core path inspections.



## 3. Visitor Engagement, Site Monitoring & Reporting

### 3. Com-pàirteachadh luchd-tadhail, sgrùdadh làraich agus aithris

The site monitoring reports were completed by each Ranger weekly and submitted to the Senior Ranger every Monday. The data collected in this continuous recording over the five-month period has been used to create graphs & charts showing the distribution of specific types of visitors and a number of issues. This information will be made available to numerous services and can aid identification of areas to target service or infrastructure improvements. These figures are representative and can be comparable between areas and years but cannot show the definitive numbers.

The figures compare the totals in each category recorded this year with 2023. The yellow highlighted figure being the higher of the two. Only four categories were higher this year:

- i. 'Fires put out'- reflecting a warm dry summer.
- ii. 'Motorhome waste dumping'- more facilities and education are likely required.
- iii. 'Reports to THC website'- mostly overflowing bins, need to improve emptying capability.
- iv. 'Dogs on leads' - perhaps indicating more awareness by dog owners.

### 2025 Area/Totals all Patrols

Total Number of sites visited  
**2025 = 21358**      **2023 = 21806**

Number of Patrols  
**2025 = 1755**      **2023 = 1992**

Number of parked cars  
**2025 = 55888**      **2023 = 66558**

Motor homes / camper vans  
**2025 = 31782**      **2023 = 33243**

Number of mini buses/coaches  
**2025 = 846**      **2023 = 929**

Number of roof tents  
**2025 = 786**      **2023 = 904**

Number of tents  
**2025 = 4231**      **2023 = 5508**

Number of abandoned tents  
**2025 = 45**      **2023 = 59**

Number of new fire marks  
**2025 = 2681**      **2023 = 3740**

Fires put out  
**2025 = 236**      **2023 = 233**

Number of parking notice issued  
**2025 = 590**      **2023 = 792**

Litter (1/4 bag equivalents)  
**2025 = 8264**      **2023 = 8744**

Toileting on site  
**2025 = 5678**      **2023 = 7817**

Motorhome waste dumping  
**2025 = 207**      **2023 = 126**

Reports to Highland Council website  
**2025 = 638**      **2023 = 401**

Dogs on lead or close control  
**2025 = 4930**      **2023 = 3820**

Dogs off lead not under control  
**2025 = 258**      **2023 = 920**

Number of people seen  
**2025 = 78336**      **2023 = 78935**

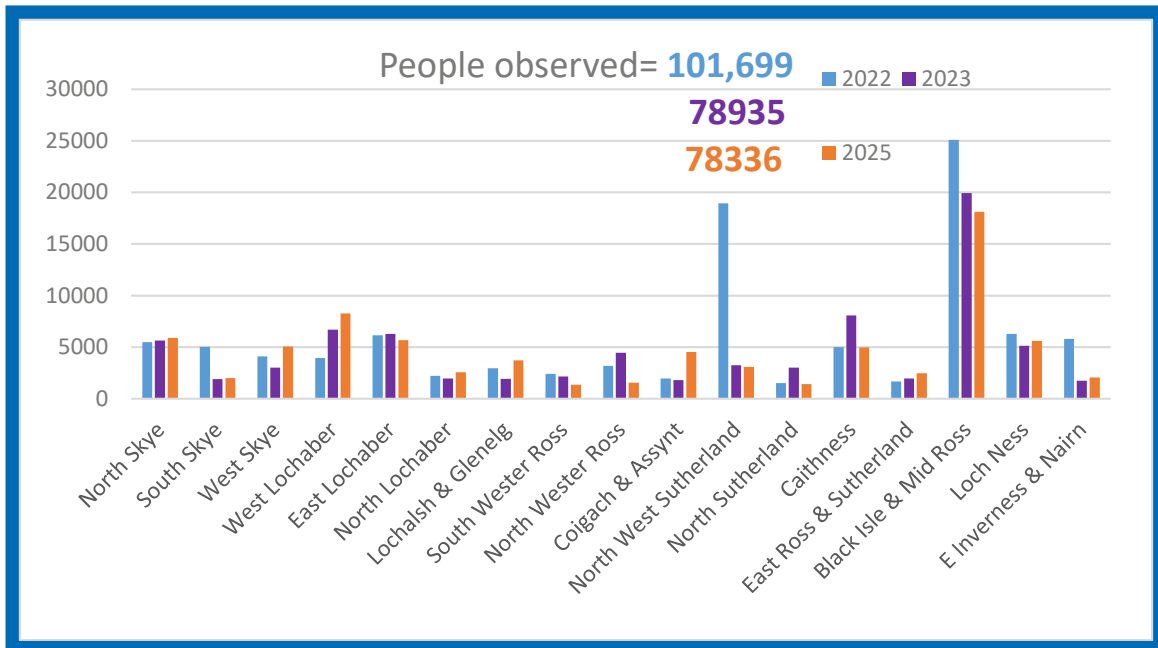
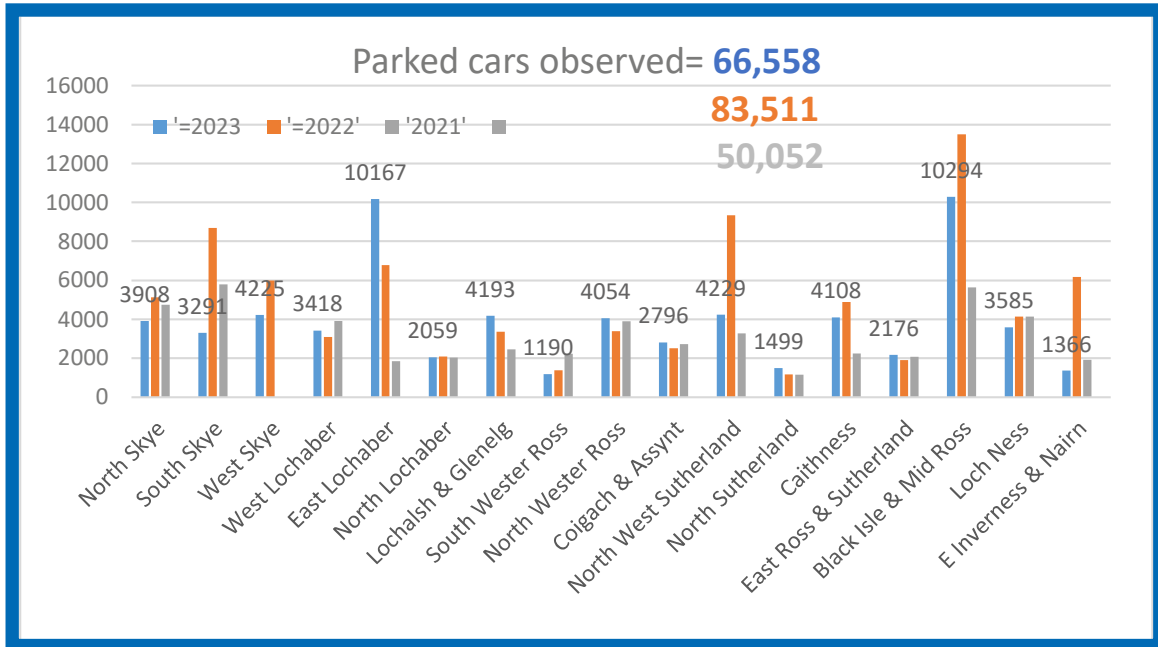
Number positive engagements  
**2025 = 22363**      **2023 = 29435**

Number negative engagements  
**2025 = 269**      **2023 = 439**

Number of reports to Emergency Services  
**2025 = 36**      **2023 = 44**

The two graphs below are an indicator of visitor numbers, the first being the number of cars seen parked in smaller countryside car parks and at the roadside. It does not include large car parks, i.e Old Man of Storr, Fairy Pools, Glen Nevis or town/village car parks i.e Ullapool, Lochinver, Wick. The exception is at Chanony Point, where a part-time Ranger operates, hence a high record for the Black Isle area.

The second is the number of people seen at countryside locations and closely resembles the first but shows some differences.



### 3.1 Access Ranger Patrols

The Highland Council area (not including the Cairngorm National Park Authority area, which operates its own Ranger service) was divided into 17 patrol areas. All areas were patrolled by a solo ranger, other than East Lochaber, which had two rangers for most of the season. Given the numbers of people and issues experienced in Glen Coe and Glen Etive, they covered that part of the area together.

The Access Ranger patrol areas that were decided upon in 2021 have worked well and were retained with some minor adaptations in Skye and Lochaber. A West Skye patrol area was created from the start of July 2022, to better reflect the data collected by the three Skye rangers. West Lochaber was divided, north and south for patrols but then were added together, for data recording purposes.

It was also accepted that keeping the same patrol areas would provide continuity in the collection of the data. These areas took into consideration, known popular locations, reports of issues from the past 4 seasons

and where Rangers from other organisations covered. The final deciding factor on patrol areas was the location of successful candidates. Temporary accommodation in much of the Highlands is extremely difficult to find, three appointed candidates had to withdraw as local accommodation could not be found. There is certainly an advantage to being able to find suitable candidates that live or have connections locally.

The size of these patrol areas varies from 900 to 1,700 sq km but average 1,400 square kilometres. However, much of this area is only accessible on foot, cycle, or horse under access rights. Most people accessing remote land are generally aware of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and are often experienced with 'leave no trace' principles. It is the land close to the roadside, less than 1km of a public road, that is under most pressure from people unfamiliar with the access code. It is these roadside areas, and in particular popular visitor sites that the Access Rangers pay most attention and record their observations.



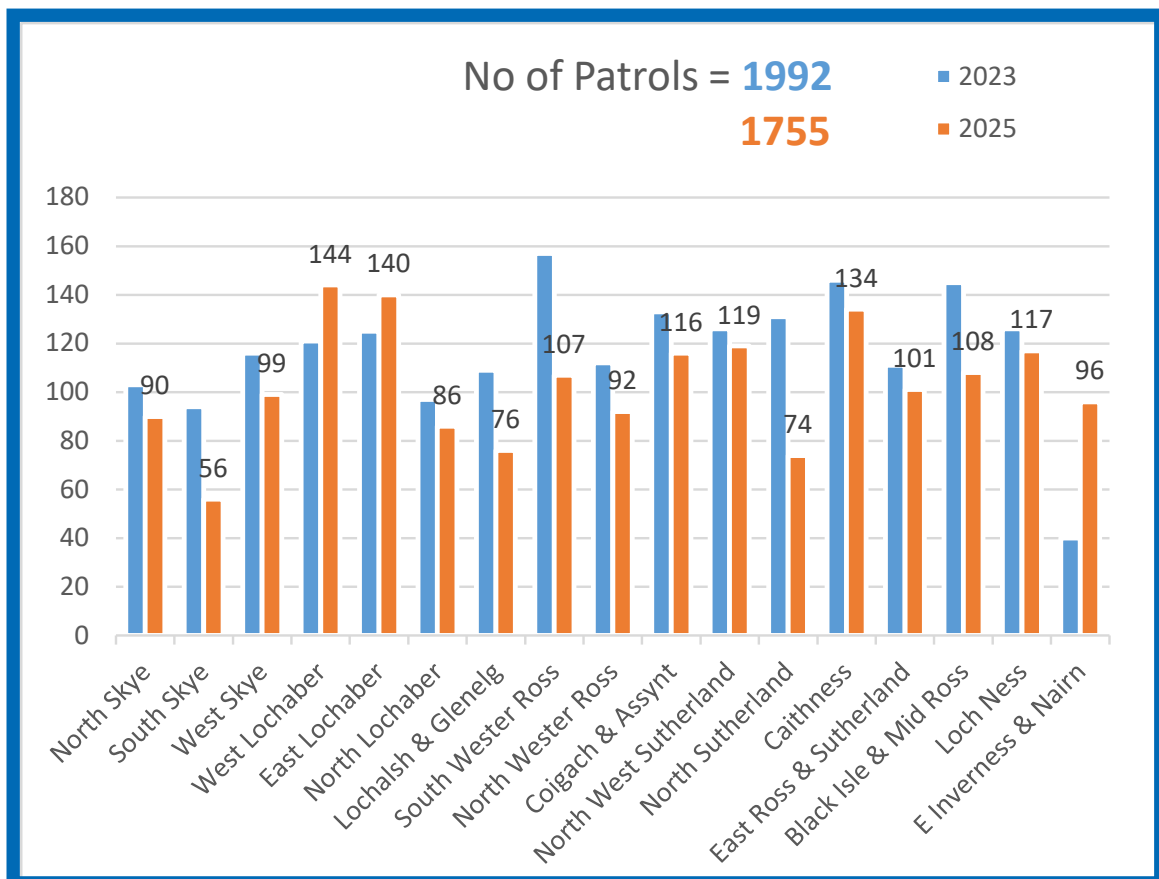
Patrols were carried out on 3 days per week. This was always on Saturday & Sunday mornings (7am - 10.30am) and evenings (5.30pm - 9pm), and a long single patrol on a Friday afternoon/evening (1pm - 9pm).

The number of patrols was 1,755 in total, 237 fewer than 2023, but as evenly divided throughout the Highlands as could be made with the staff available, with an average of 103 patrols in each area. There have been reduced number of patrols in 2025 for several reasons:

- Most Rangers had a later start date, 28<sup>th</sup> May, than 2023.
- The North Sutherland and South Skye areas were vacant for three months but had occasional patrols by a neighbouring Ranger.
- North Lochaber was reduced to patrols every second week as the Ranger worked part-time.
- Black Isle & Mid- Ross, Northwest Ross and Lochaber Glens were affected by the Rangers injury or illness for up to 2 months in each area.
- Lochalsh & Glenelg had no resident Ranger and was covered by a Lochaber Ranger when accommodation was available.

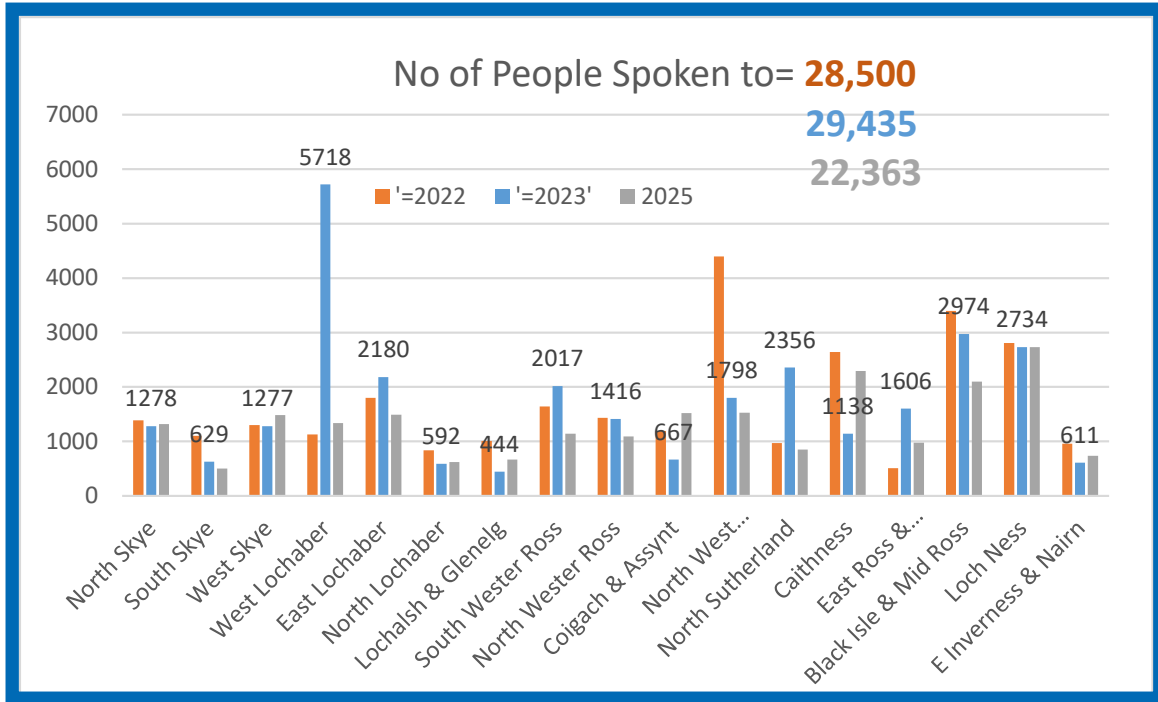
If patrols were carried out 7 days a week (2 per day) from 1<sup>st</sup> April to end of October (30 weeks) the maximum number of patrols would be **420** in each area, thus **7,140** over 17 areas Highland wide. This figure can be used to extrapolate the recorded number of each data set to the maximum possible by multiplying by the average seen per patrol. This maximum potential figure will be noted in italics in brackets where total figures are shown below.

Whilst this potential total is very speculative, a true comparison can be shown by the average data recorded per patrol this will be shown for some of the categories below.

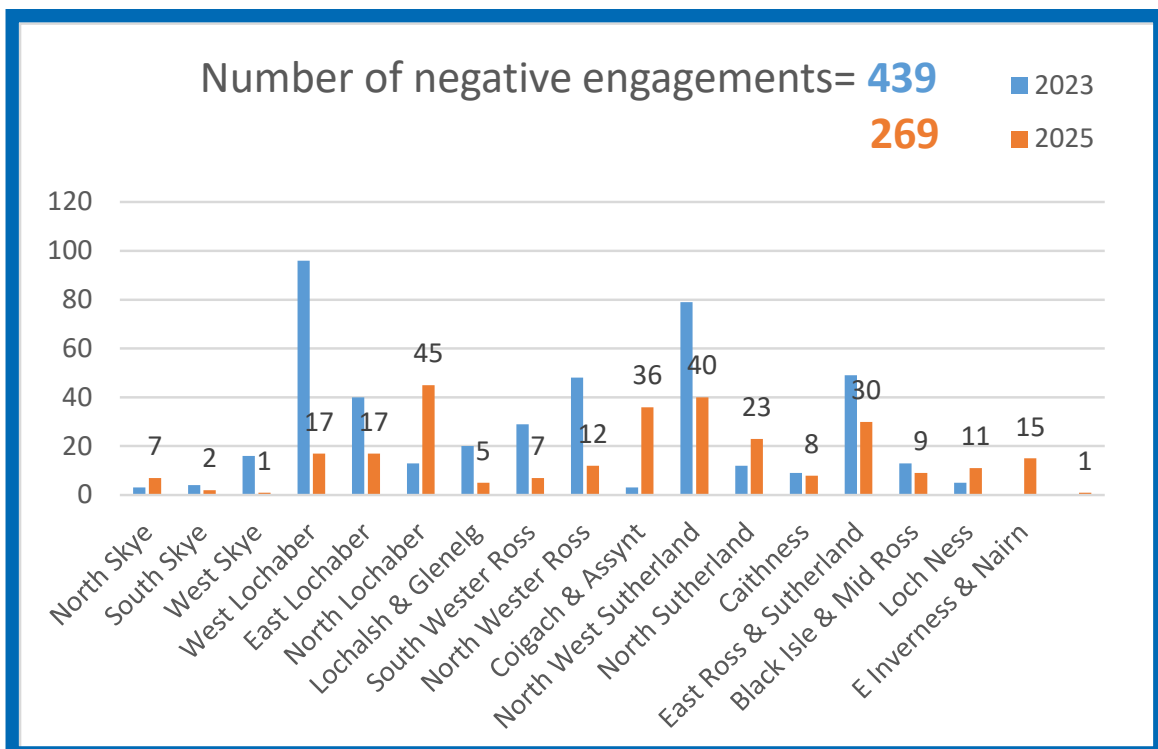


### 3.2 Visitor Engagement

The Access Ranger role is primarily to engage and educate people on the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, but they will also welcome people with advice and information about the countryside, landscape and the area they are visiting. This year the Rangers were able to engage with **22,632 people** (potentially 92,075). There were no considerable spikes in numbers in certain areas although experienced Rangers in Loch Ness and Caithness spoke to slightly more people. The spikes in West Lochaber and Northwest Sutherland in previous years were due to an extra Ranger in the area. Other areas are showing more consistent levels of engagement.

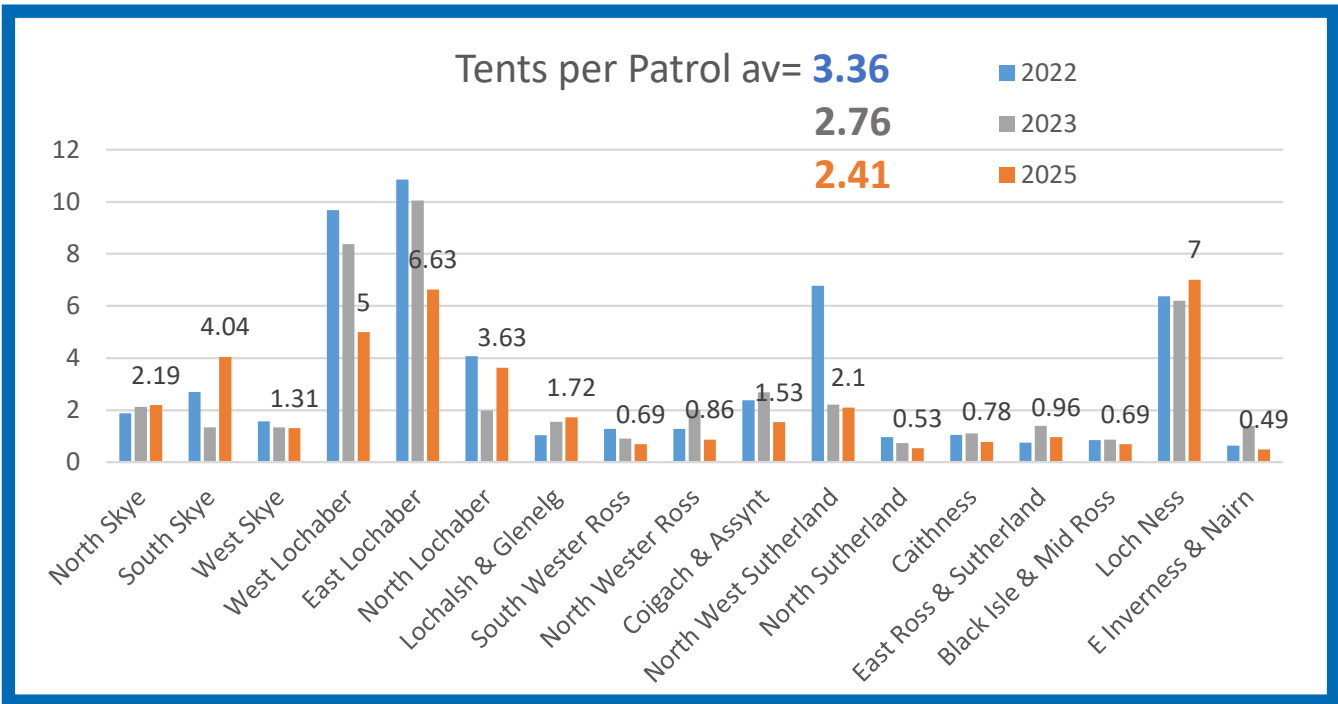
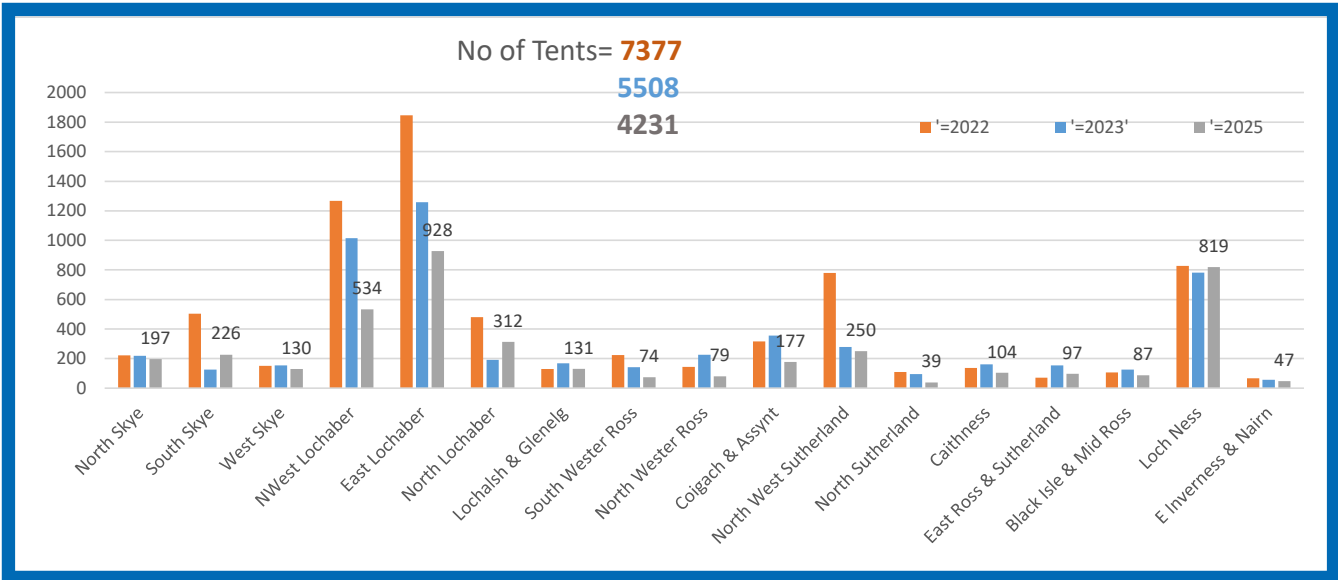


In addition to the figure below for 2025 are a further **269 engagements** that were negative (potentially 1,094), with the person concerned being argumentative, abusive, or aggressive. This has decreased from 2023.



### 3.3 Informal camping

These are the number of tents observed camping off a formal campsite. They are most often by the roadside or in close vicinity to a vehicle, and not truly wild camping. The Access Rangers will engage with the people seen to ensure that they are aware of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC) and show consideration for both the environment and people living or working locally. The SOAC states that camping should be lightweight (i.e small tents & minimal equipment), small numbers, max. 3 nights in one place, avoiding enclosed fields, well away from roads or buildings and leave no trace (i.e no litter, fires or excrement).

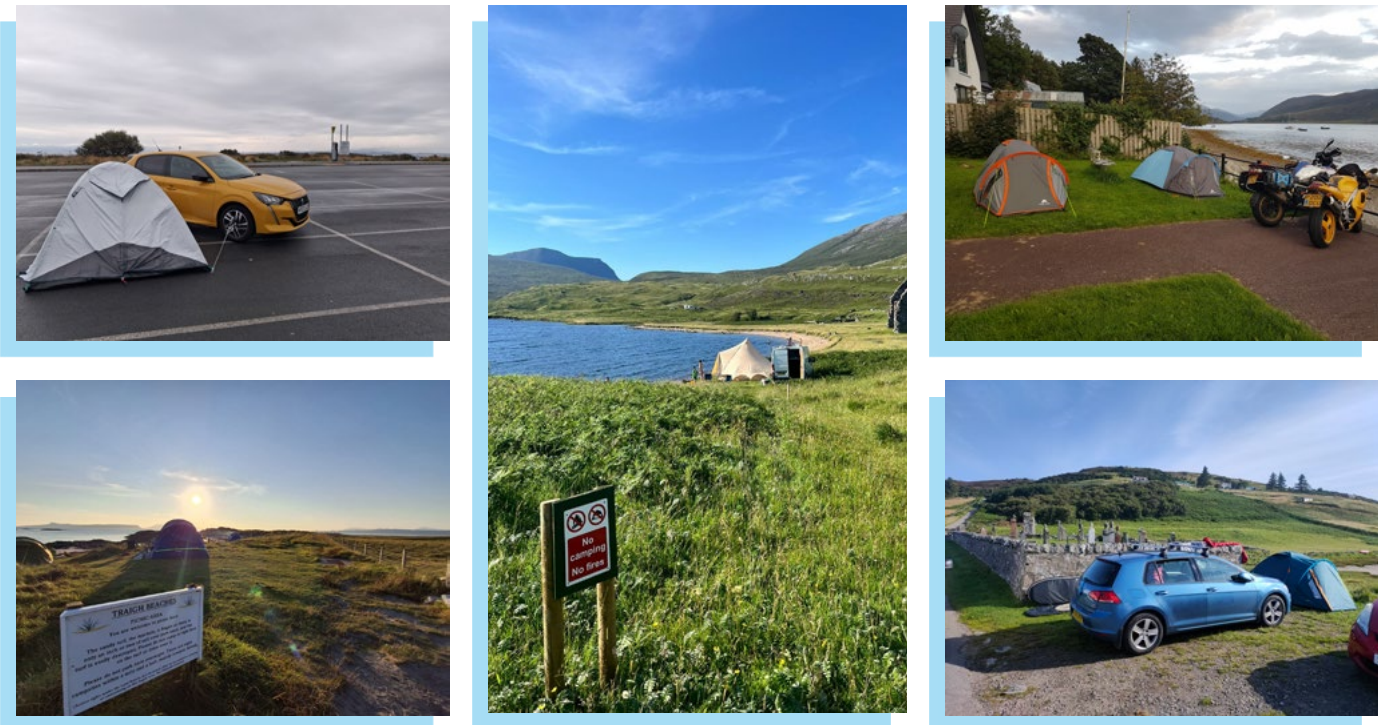


This total figure of **4,231** tents observed (potentially 17,207) shows a steady decrease in most areas in the numbers of tents seen but still a relatively high figure, and considerably higher than anecdotal pre-covid numbers. The potential number for 2023 was 19,706, thus a 13% decrease in 2025. The graph of average tents seen per patrol shows much the same pattern but there are some notable differences such as rising numbers in South Skye, Lochalsh and North Lochaber. The highest numbers are still seen in East and West Lochaber despite dramatic reduction in numbers. Whilst high numbers in Loch Ness are holding steady.

The availability of overseas travel and more accommodation options post Covid lockdowns is probably reducing the camping numbers. There is a corresponding rise in recreational vehicle use, which may indicate

a shift from tents to overnighting in vehicles. The number of tents remains highest in Loch Ness and East Lochaber and whilst remaining high there is significant decrease in West Lochaber. North West Sutherland, most of Wester Ross showed decreases. Only areas such South Skye, North Lochaber showed any increase. Perhaps this distribution change indicates less of a desire for people to seek less popular areas than the previous years.

There are many examples of inappropriate informal camping, that is not compliant with SOAC, in the wrong location, the wrong equipment or with lack of consideration for the environment or others. Driving off-road onto land without consent can be an offence. Pitching a tent or encamping within a road is also an offence.



Inappropriate locations - not permitted in SOAC.



Inappropriate tent size for 'wild camping'.



Mess left behind or untidy campsites



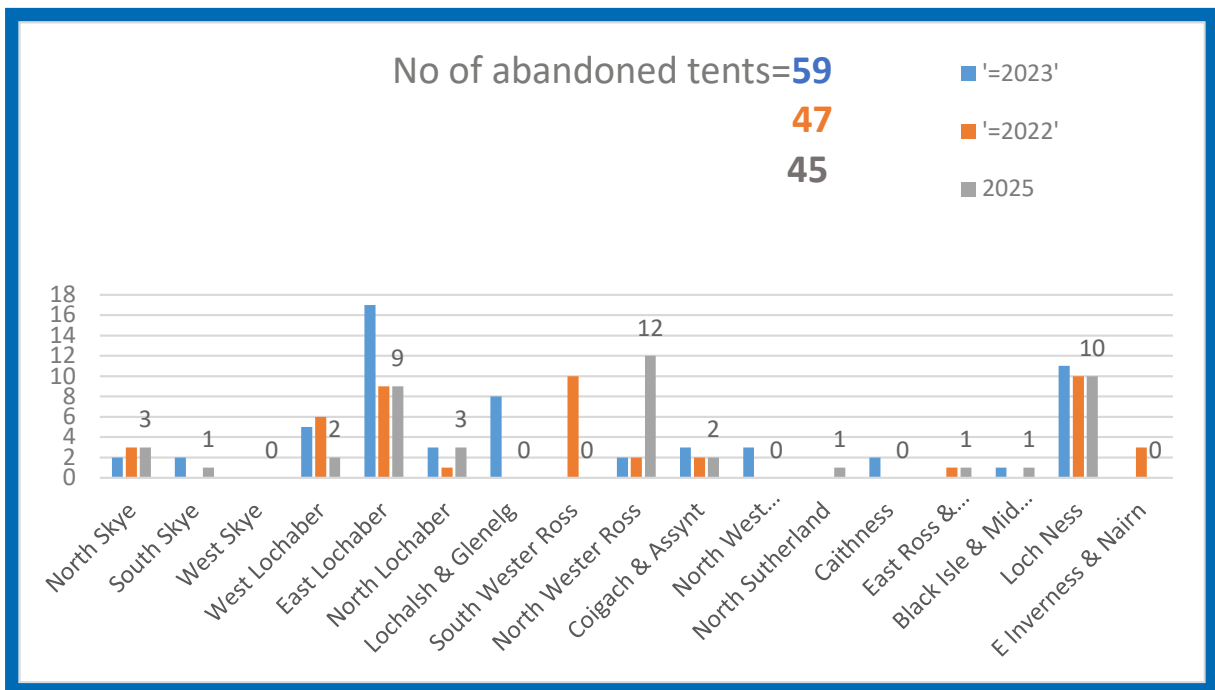
Inappropriate group size



### 3.3.i Abandoned Tents

There were also a number of abandoned tents and assorted equipment discovered, left to litter the landscape. A Standard Operating Procedure for this was developed in 2022 to ensure these were not prematurely removed and to inform owners where the equipment was being stored. It is then stored for at least 2 weeks before either given to charities, if in good condition, or disposed of if not.

In most cases more equipment is left where off-site camping is most numerous such as East Lochaber and Loch Ness but North Wester Ross had surprisingly the most abandoned tents this year.



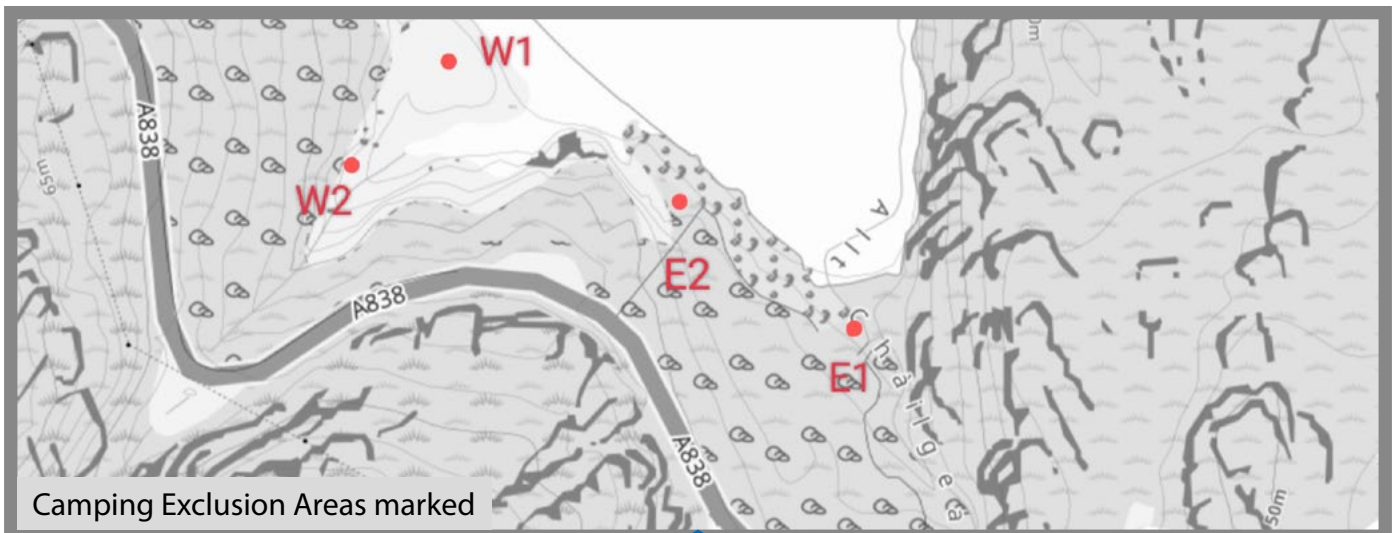


### 3.3.ii Cumulative camping

Cumulative camping is a particular problem in some popular locations even when some individuals are following Scottish Outdoor Access Code guidance. As soon as one group leaves the space is occupied by another group. The vegetation has no time to recover, degrades and eventually bare earth or sand appears. This is particularly a concern in areas of rare or fragile habitat such as ‘machair’. This is a calcareous grassland with a distinctive ecosystem only found in western Scotland and Ireland. Whilst the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code are not explicit on this matter, there is scope within sections 3.45 & 3.47 of SOAC that highlight damage to habitats with repeated recreational activities and to follow local advice.

Following the trial in 2022, we continued with creating small camping exclusion areas or ‘Habitat restoration areas’ on two beaches near Arisaig (Traigh & Tougal) and Ceannabeinne near Durness in 2023. Given the general success, this practice was continued at Ceannabeinne in 2024 and this year. Not only have these areas shown signs of vegetation recovery but it is likely that it has contributed to the decrease in camping numbers seen at Ceannabeinne in the last two years.

It is intended that they will be reinstated next year, ideally for the whole summer period on the most damaged areas. We will also assess if the area size or number should be increased. We will also consider if other locations also should have excluded areas.



Camping Exclusion Areas marked



**Photo left:** Machair grassland and dune grasses becoming heavily eroded by repeated camping. The grass sward is worn down and fire sites burn off the vegetation.

**Photo lower left:** Signs of recovery at end of one season.

**Photo below:** After 2 years exclusion.



**PLEASE KEEP OUT**

**HABITAT RESTORATION IN**

**PROGRESS**

Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003  
 Scottish Outdoor Access Code – section 3.45 & 3.47



SCOTTISH OUTDOOR  
ACCESS CODE  
outdooraccess-scotland.scot



The Highland  
Council  
Comhairle na  
Gàidhealtachd



The Highland Council  
Access Rangers Service

### Recommendations from Access Ranger de-briefing

Clearer & precise definition of ‘wild camping’ in Scottish Outdoor Access Code e.g. have a minimum distance from road, building etc; specific minimum or maximum tent size; maximum number of tents per site:

- Continue and expand camping exclusion areas.
- Promote ‘Leave No Trace’ message.
- Areas that most need attention are:

Ceannabeine,	Traigh,	Toigal,	Ardvreck,	Glen Etive,
Glen Brittle,	Glenelg,	Duntelchaig,	Dalcrag,	Loch Tarff,
Clunes,	Loch Arkaig,	Duncansby Head.		

### 3.4 Recreational Vehicles (RVs)

These are the numbers of motorhomes, campervans, roof-top and car boot-extension tents observed parked up, mostly overnight but some may be in car parks during daytime. There is no distinction made between types of vehicles other than they are all ‘adapted for sleeping purposes’.

The inclusion of roof-top and car boot extension tents was necessary as these continued to be regularly observed. These vehicles are often seen parked off-road even though a tent being on a vehicle does not convey it access rights and so these vehicles must be considered akin to motorhomes. However, if overnight parking in a layby in this type of vehicle it is not possible to do so without ‘encamping’ and strictly this would be an offence in section 129 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984. There is much reluctance by these owners to be considered alike to motorhomes and believe that no law covers this relatively new activity.

There has been an increase in the numbers of ‘aires’ and car parks permitting overnight stays (for a fee) including several Council car parks. These are often well used by drivers wanting to be respectful of local concerns. It is likely that many of these vehicles have not been included within the data if in sites in peri-urban areas, such as Inverness, Nairn, Wick, Ullapool, Fort William and Fort Augustus.



Motorhomes overnighting in car parks.



Motorhome owners acting inconsiderately, releasing waste water and spreading out over parking area.



Motorhomes parked illegally off road.



Roof tents, illegally parked off road.

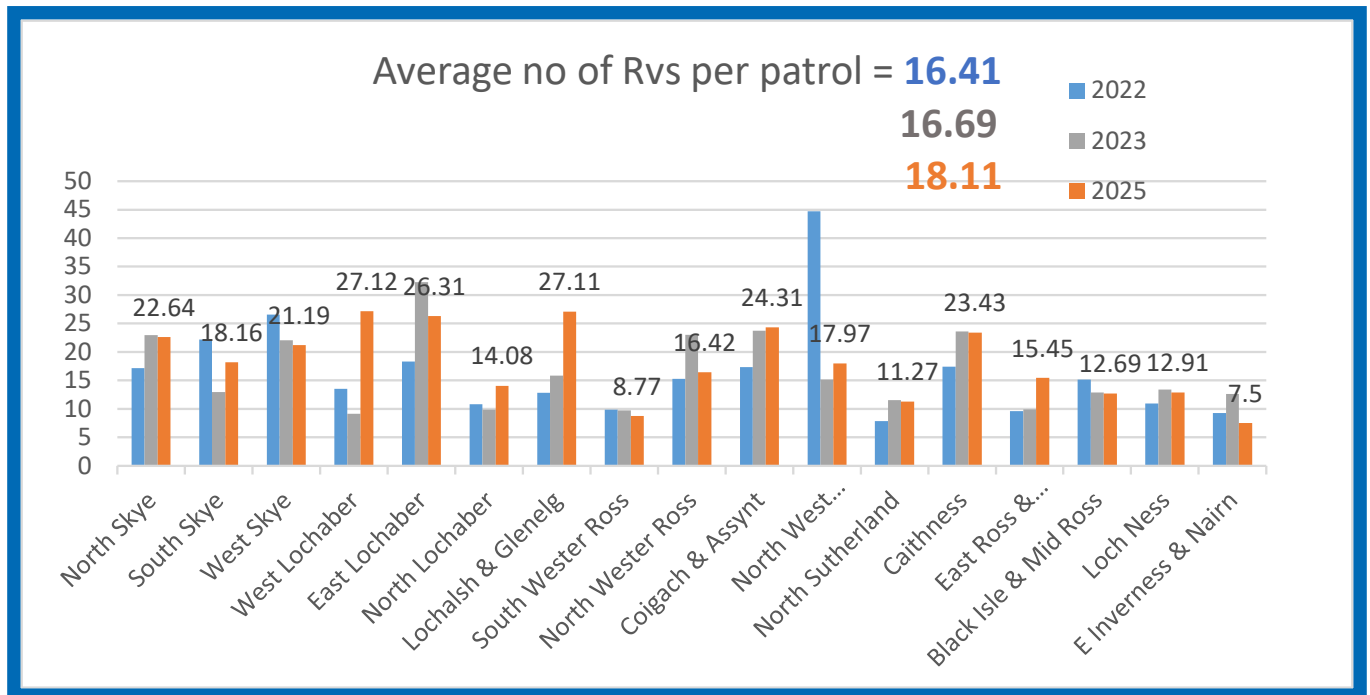
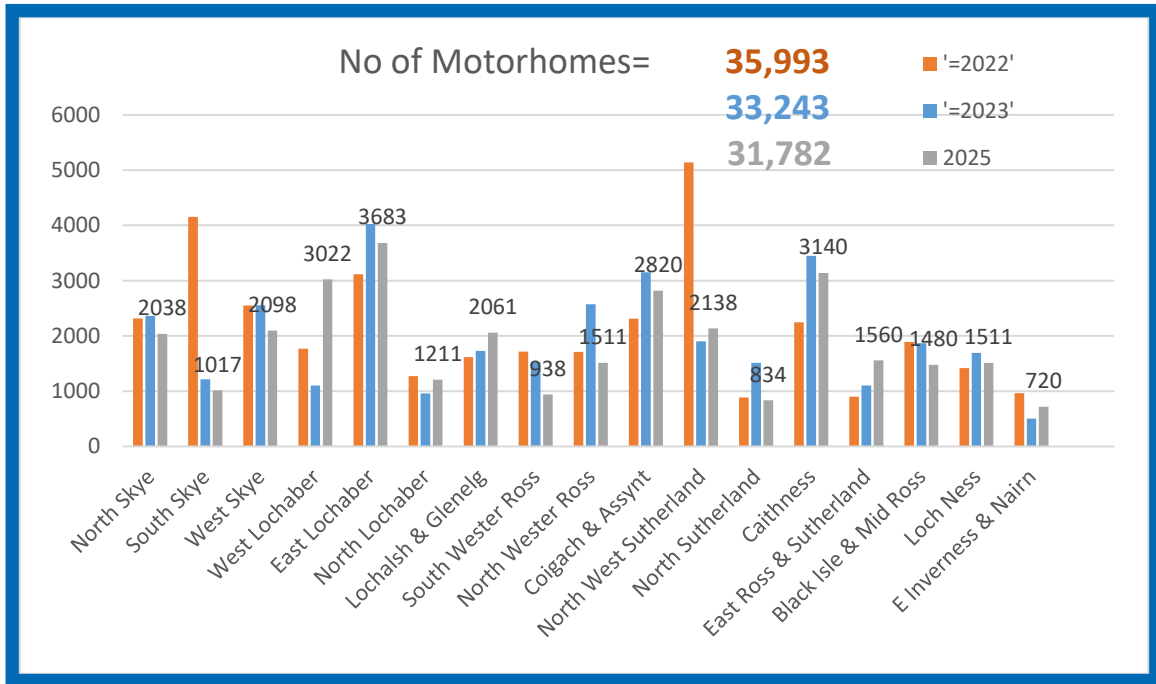


Roof tents, illegally camped in laybys.

The numbers of RVs counted this year shows a slight decrease but remains over 30,000 at 31,782 observed (potentially 129,305). However, this is partly explained above due to a reduced number of Ranger patrols compared to previous years. If comparing average number of RVs seen per patrol the number has increased to 18.11 from 16.69 and so the extrapolated potential number for 2023 was 119,166, an 8% rise in 2025.

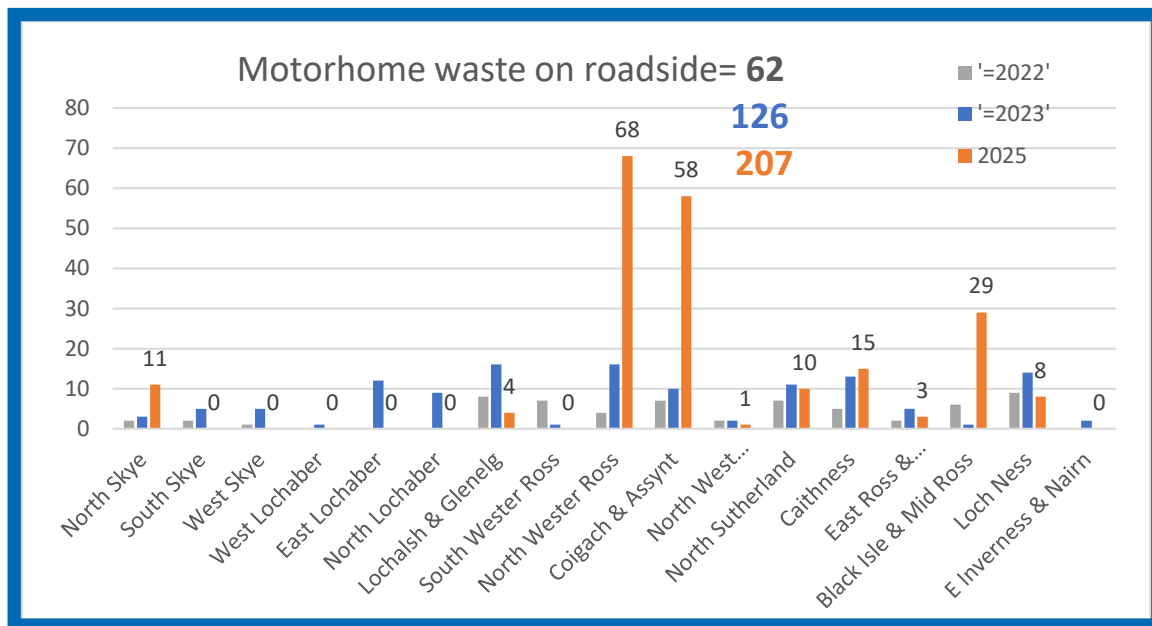
The areas where increase in numbers were most evident in West Lochaber and East Ross & Sutherland, with modest rises in North Lochaber, Lochalsh, North West Sutherland and East Inverness & Nairn. Other areas showed slight decreases notably Skye and Wester Ross. However, this is partly explained above due to a reduced number of Ranger patrols compared to previous years and the increase in managed off road sites/aires.

Average per patrol figures show most areas either holding steady rising slightly with some rising significantly, i.e West Lochaber, Lochalsh, South Skye and East Ross & Sutherland. Only Wester Ross and East Inverness and Nairn showed any decrease.



Incidents of motorhome black waste dumping were increased substantially this year, notably in North Wester Ross and Coigach & Assynt. It is a problem that causes great concern being a mixture of chemicals and human waste, it can cause great harm in water courses and to vegetation, and revulsion to anyone, or their pet, that steps in it. Currently the Council do not have an effective method of clearing these spills. The number of disposal points is slowly increasing but it appears to still be a long way from sufficient. Even where sites exist the signage appears to be inadequate with many drivers saying, they were unaware of existing facilities.

There is a significant difficulty in remote areas in dealing with this waste. The disposal points need to be either connected to the mains sewer or it is collected in dedicated tanks. These dedicated tanks require specialist collection and disposal which can be expensive. Most public toilets are connected to septic tanks which are deactivated by the chemicals and often cannot cope with the quantity of waste.



### Recommendations from Access Ranger De-briefing

- Increase number of motorhome aires and waste disposal points, especially in areas listed below.
- Leaflets were extremely well received and a good conversation starter.
- Provide clear information online as well as continue with leaflets.
- Work with hire companies to ensure bookings, waste disposal and parking areas are understood.
- Check other online sites give correct information e.g on SOAC, overnight parking laws etc
- Areas that most need attention are:

<b>Ceannabeine,</b>	<b>Oldshoremore,</b>	<b>Balnakiel,</b>	<b>Strathy,</b>	<b>Gruinard,</b>
<b>Redpoint,</b>	<b>Torridon,</b>	<b>Traigh,</b>	<b>Toigal,</b>	<b>Ardvreck,</b>
<b>Achmelvich,</b>	<b>Glen Brittle,</b>	<b>Duncansby Head</b>		

# 4. Visitor Behaviours

## 4. Giùlan luchd-tadhail

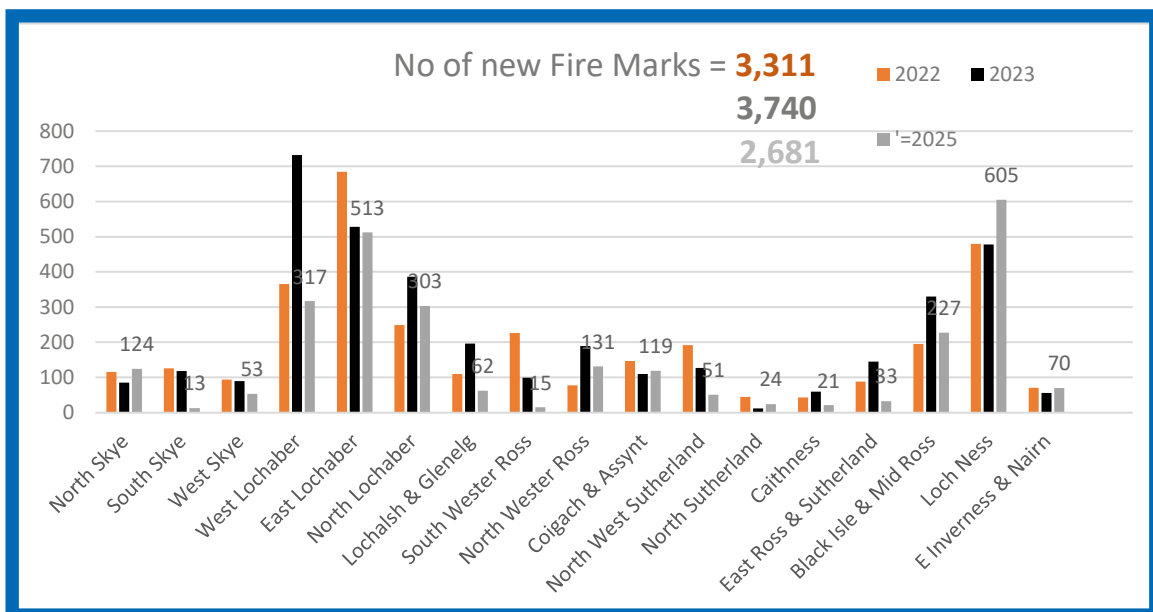
Associated with tent camping, and to some extent RVs, are several activities that may cause concern to communities or land managers. These are fires, outdoor toileting and litter.

### 4.1. Campfires

A fire is often seen by many as an essential accompaniment to camping. However, many people do not consider the risks and damage that they can cause. There is potential to spark a wildfire in prolonged dry periods and especially in woodlands or on peaty ground. Even in other areas damage to the ground or vegetation used to fuel the fire can take years to recover. There is existing legislation aimed to prevent fires close to roads or buildings, but it is very difficult to enforce. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code advises to use a stove in preference and to avoid lighting a fire in woodland, forests, farmland, on peaty ground and near buildings and cultural heritage sites. The evidence of previous fires in an area often encourages more visitors to light their own. The Rangers have always discouraged fires unless it is raised off the ground and it is likely to leave no trace. This year they were particularly vigilant due to a long period of high fire risk throughout the summer, and the outbreak of large wildfires at Dava and Galloway in particular. Subsequently they helped people put out a higher number of campfires, 236 that may have posed a risk, even a potential wildfire.

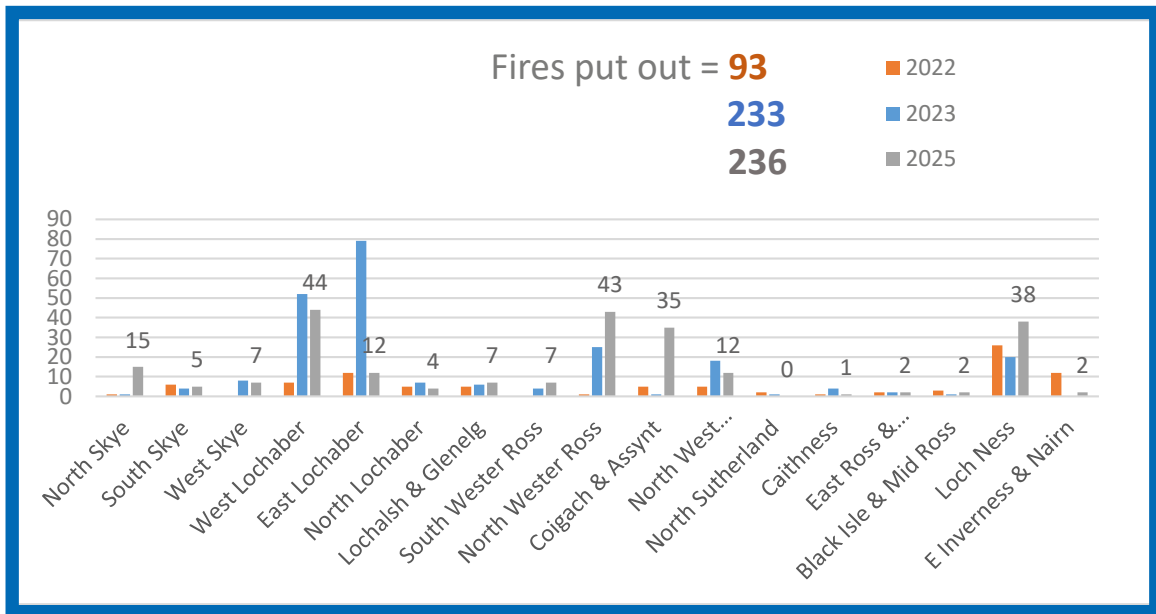


Fires left to burn.



As a result, there were fewer fire marks in most Highland areas this year, it is hoped this is due to greater awareness by the public. However, some areas still saw increased fire marks particularly Loch Ness and East Lochaber despite a stronger ‘no fires’ message in many parts of Scotland. This has led to extensive discussions in national Visitor Management groups, it is likely that stronger messages and actions to discourage fires will be put in place next season, an example being the introduction of a campfire restriction byelaw in Cairngorms National Park.

We will work to improve and increase the awareness of high fire risk periods with mobile and roadside signage.



Vegetation damage- trees cut and attempt to burn.



The above photos also show other damage that can be caused by lighting fires such as damage to trees and other vegetation and picnic tables. Often non-biodegradable litter (cans, plastics, glass) is left partially burnt in old fire sites.

### 4.1.i Disposable barbeques

Disposable barbeques are also fires and pose similar risks of wildfire and scorched ground. They can pose unique risks too, such as often being left behind, creating litter as they remain hot for a long time. If buried in sand have been known to burn feet. On occasion these are placed in bins, whilst still hot and may cause bin fires (photo below-middle).



### 4.1.ii Fire Site Restoration

Access Rangers placed advisory No Fires signs, endorsed by The Highland Fire & Rescue Service, which were successful in reducing fires in some locations, but not in others, where signs were removed or even burnt. The numbers of fire marks seen this year is fewer than last year. Below show some successful sites at Loch Ashie and Loch Tarf near Inverness.



Most fire sites were removed to discourage further use, however there is debate about retaining some fire sites to minimise new ones being created. A method used by Rangers near beaches was to cover fire sites with seaweed or sand once the debris was removed. This made the site less unsightly and encourages vegetation regrowth. Sand covered sites were often where any new fires were lit, whilst seaweed discourages further use, both methods in different ways reduce any new damage to the grassland. Other methods of restoring fire sites were tried, such as covering with turf, staking hazard tape around site, or jute matting. All these methods worked to some degree and encouraged vegetation regrowth, but it was variable as to whether visitors left them undisturbed. In general, far fewer fires were made by visitors at restored fire sites, where there was also a sign. No method was completely successful in deterring further fires. An increase in the number of portable raised fire pits is at least a welcome development to reduce ground damage.



The Access Rangers continued to use a removable magnetic sign on their vans when a High Fire Risk Warning was issued for the area. We are planning to use roadside signage next year.



## Recommendations from Access Ranger De-briefing

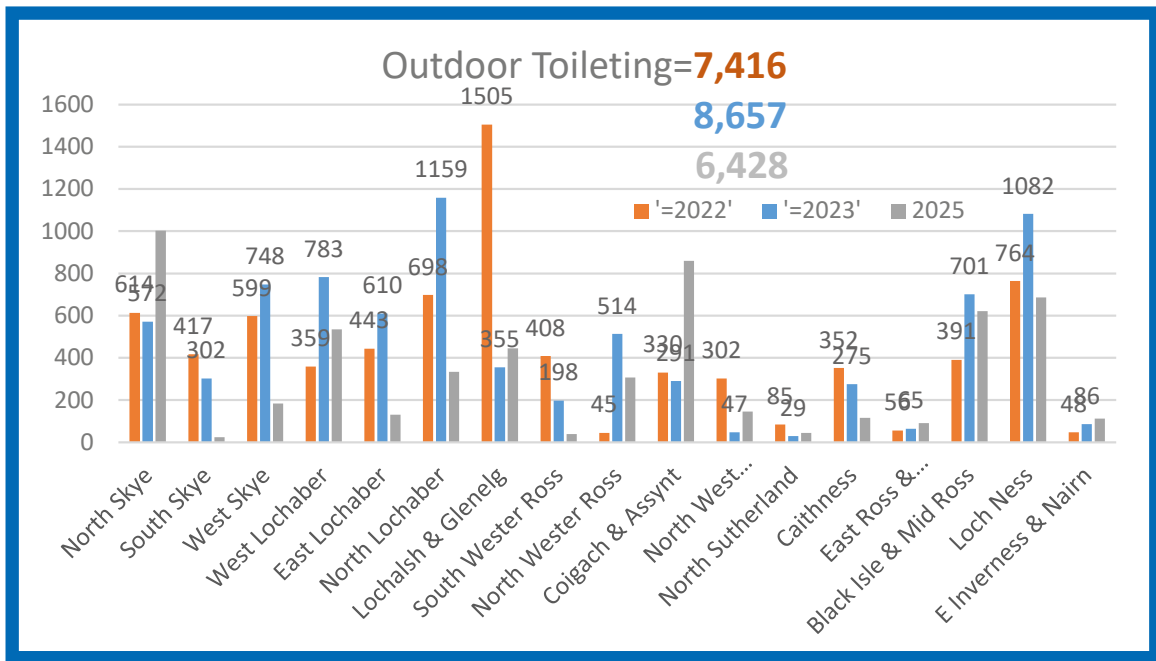
- Promote 'Leave No Trace' message.
- Permanent signs required in worst locations.
- Better understanding with Police & Fire Service when called out.
- Better promotion of No Fire message nationwide. Target 'bushcraft' courses and popular imagery.
- Lobby local shops and/or supermarkets not to sell disposable BBQs.

## 4.2. Outdoor toileting

This is often found in association with informal campsites but also on roadsides, in laybys. This is also a problem that appears to be increasing each year in many areas, with Lochaber having it worst.

North Lochaber & Lochalsh shows a particular problem area in both years. There are relatively low camping numbers here and so may often be due to people stopping to relieve themselves in laybys rather than overnighting. The trunk road through this area is frequented by many commercial vehicles and coaches as well as visitors. Suitability of toilet facilities should be reviewed in this area and elsewhere. Areas where this should be considered are mentioned in Appendix 1.

The Rangers did their best to discourage this by placing signs notifying the nearest public toilets. This year's signs were printed and thus more 'official' and included a QR code of a public toilet map.



In areas where there was overuse and rocky ground, encouraging people to bag & bin their poo. '#Bag It and Bin It' was a promoted Highland Council campaign on social media and with signs and posters around the area.



### Recommendations from Access Ranger De-briefing

- Encourage more comfort scheme sites in worst areas, e.g Lochalsh. Discuss with Amenities team.
- Need to find a way to install temporary or low-cost public toilets in some remote locations, e.g.



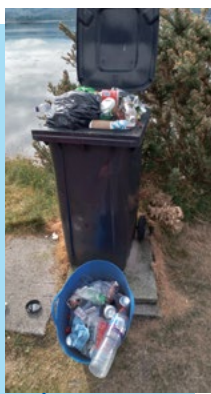
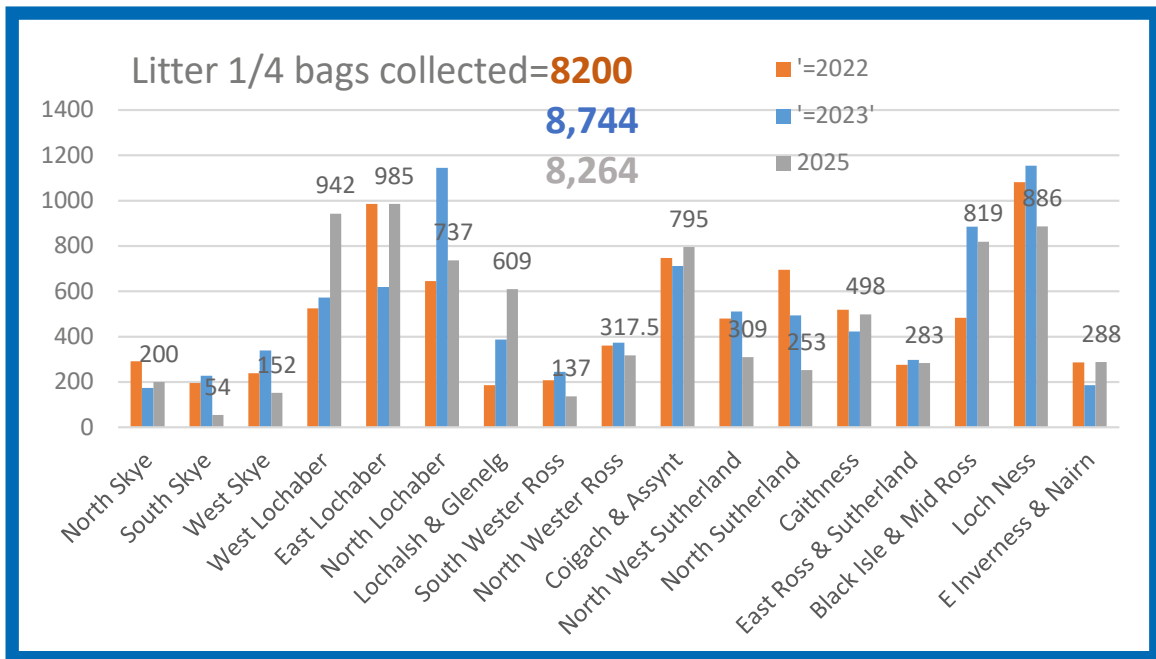
Ceannabainne, Camusdarroch, Duntelchaig

- Continue with 'Nearest Toilet' signage, with map QR code.

### 4.3. Litter

Litter was collected by the Access Rangers at popular countryside sites around the Highland area. This is usually found around the site and sometimes beyond the road verge that otherwise would not be collected by the Waste team. The Rangers often collected overflow rubbish out with bins that may be spread by animals or wind and reported full bins to the Waste team. This year Access Rangers were issued with a sharps safe box after syringes were found in a couple of locations.

The data shows a reasonably consistent amount of litter collected of 2,066 full bin bags, similar to previous years when there are no seasonal Waste Assistants to swap out full bins. Litter is a problem in all parts of the Highlands although a greater amount was collected by the Access Rangers in Lochaber, Loch Ness, Coigach & Assynt and Black Isle & Mid Ross. Some areas have seen consistent levels while others show a big change.



#### Recommendations from Access Ranger De-briefing

- Promote 'Leave No Trace' message.
- Some locations require more bins whilst others should have bins removed, discuss with Waste Team.
- Large lockable bins required for Ranger use when some distance from Recycling Centres e.g. Drumnadrochit.
- Worked well with Waste Operatives, need to continue increased frequency of collections.

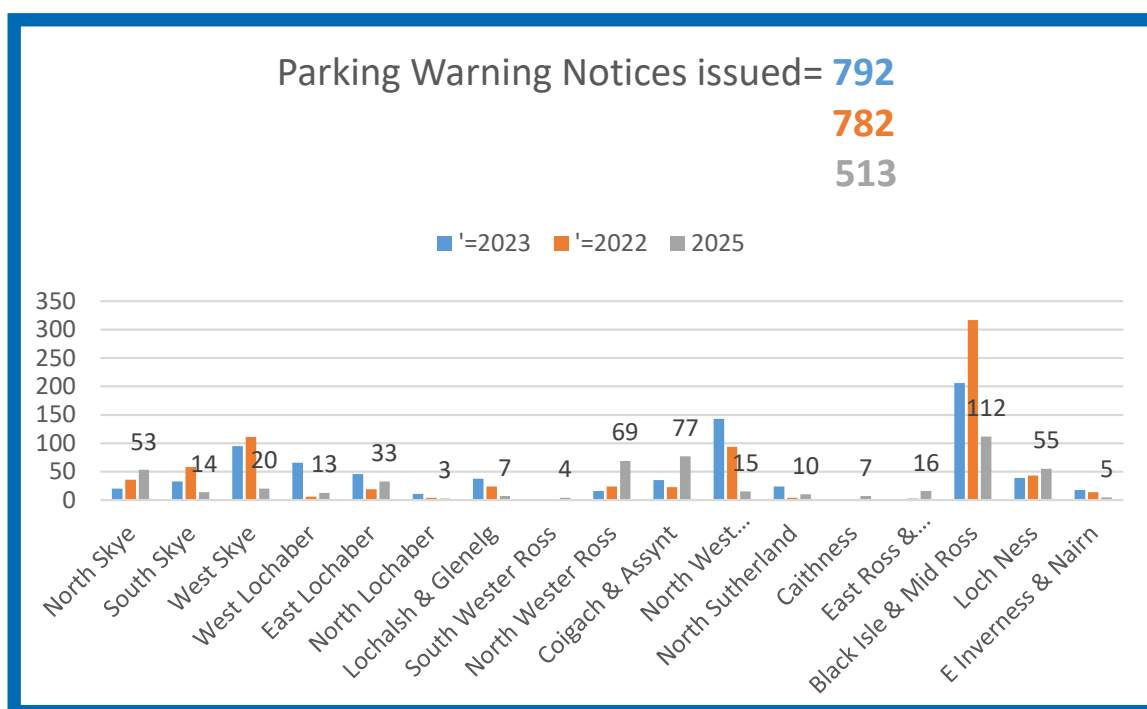
## 4.4. Other Council Services

### 4.4.i. Parking

As well as additional litter collection, the Access Rangers undertake a few activities that assist other Council services. One of these is parking, where the Rangers issue Parking Warning Notices provided by Parking Services, to advise that someone is illegally or inconsiderately parked and that they should move or may risk receiving a penalty charge. This often has the desired effect and discourages others from similar parking. It is quite common to find cars parked in passing places and thus causing an obstruction. These cars risk being removed by the Police, as they may be obstructing traffic.

At Chanonry Point, the Parking Notices are often placed on cars that have not bought a parking ticket, which other people see attached to windscreens and then encourages compliance. Thus, the Ranger presence makes a significant impact on the income generated without having to issue Penalty Charge Notices.

Whilst the data shows a decline in the total number given out, there were increases in Wester Ross, Assynt, Lochaber and North Skye. The highest number is still on the Black Isle, which includes Chanonry Point although fewer than previous years.



There are twelve car parks with parking meters inviting payment for day use. Whilst a voluntary payment, it was seen that the ranger’s presence increased compliance, either as the site was well maintained, users felt a service was being provided or they thought they may risk getting a fine. There are several other car parks where this model could be appropriate, these are mentioned in **Appendix 1**. It was unfortunate that at least two of these car parks in Caithness, the machines were not working for a long period of time needing specialist repair.

Whilst some **verge parking** has attempted to be addressed at the Arisaig beaches, Glenfinnan and Drumhollister (Puffin Cove) with double yellow lines, clearways and bunding, it still regularly occurs. It is also a very common problem at Corrieshalloch Gorge, Stac Pollidh, Fairy Glen and Fairy Pools, Duncansby Head, Skerry Harbour and the Wailing Widow waterfall. There are car parks in these locations that soon fill and create overspill on to the surrounding verges. These verges, and many others around Highland, have become churned up with wheel ruts and vegetation damaged.

Some verge parking occurs where there is no car park for a site that has become an internet hotspot such as Wailing Widow Falls. This is how the Fairy Pools phenomenon began. A people counter there in 2002 recorded 13,240 visits, 67,062 in 2014, this has reached 161,468 visits in 2025.



Parking in passing places, not permitted or in EV spaces.



Parking on verges and damage caused. Encamping in laybys.

### Recommendations from Access Ranger De-briefing

- 'Invitation to pay' sites mostly good but more needed. List of 22 provided to Parking Services.
- Some ITP car parks need improving, resurfacing, or marking e.g. Duncansby, Bonar Bridge, Gruinard.
- Some areas need clearway orders and/or No Parking areas before next Easter especially if close to pay car parks e.g. Arisaig, Glen Brittle, Glen Etive, Smoo, Gruinard, Ceannabeinne, Claigan/Coral Beach, Rosemarkie, Balnakiel, Plockton.
- Some sites require increased car parks e.g. Mellon Udrigle, Stac Pollidh, Dores, Duntelchaig, Whaligoe, Duncansby Head, Dunnet Head.
- Explore Park & Ride/Walk possibilities at: Arisaig, Glen Brittle, Claigan, Storr, Fairy Glen, Plockton.

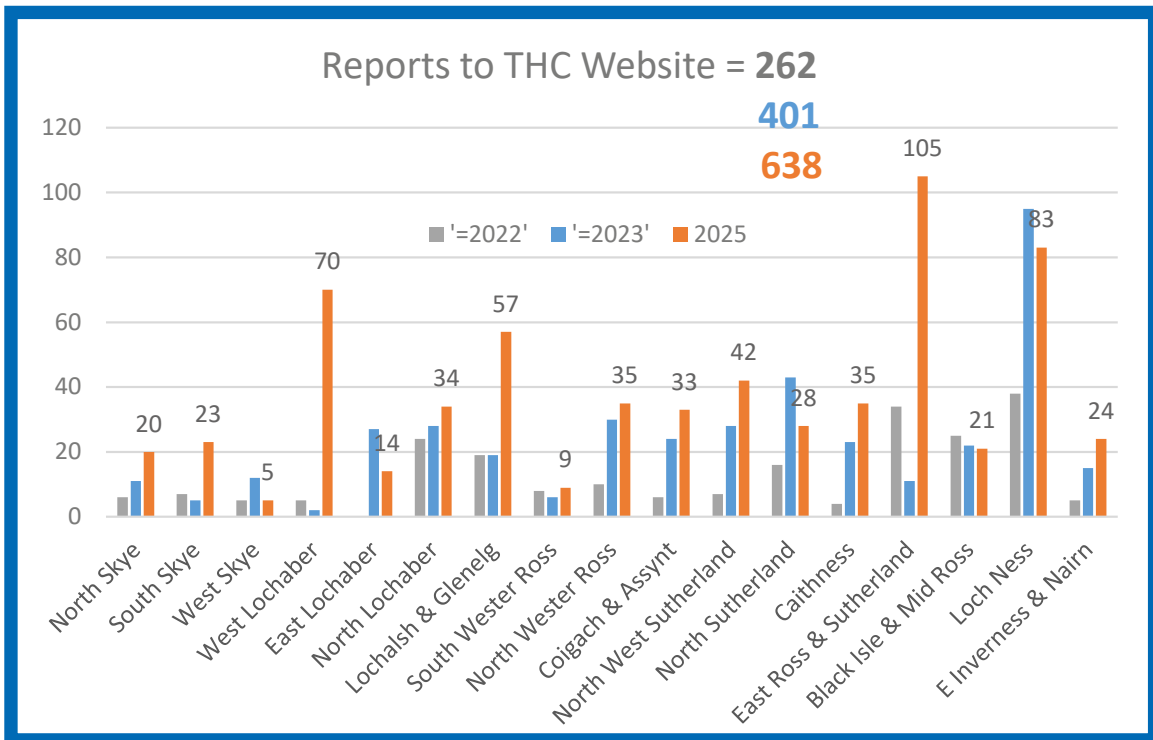


### 4.4.ii. Fly-tipping, dog fouling and other issues

The Rangers will often make reports on The Highland Council’s website ‘Report a Problem’ to advise other services of something that requires attention. This most frequently will be Waste for full/ overflowing bins, Environmental Health for fly-tipping or Roads for issues seen such as flooding or damaged signs. There was a big increase in reports this year, mostly for waste and fly-tipping. Nearly all areas showed a rise with the highest numbers in East Ross & Sutherland, West Lochaber, Loch Ness and Lochalsh.



Fly tipping from visitors (left) and locals (right).



These figures and charts give an initial picture of the issues and their distribution around the Highland Council area in 2023 and how that compares to the previous two Ranger seasons.



## 5. Ranger gathering De-briefing

### 5. Brath-aithris cruinneachadh maoir-dhùthcha

A De-briefing workshop was held on the last Sunday of October to gather the thoughts of the Rangers on service improvement, working with others and site management suggestions outlined in Appendix 1.

#### What the Rangers thought worked well and should continue are:

- autonomy, flexibility, and trust;
- the data recording forms;
- the geographical spread;
- continuity of staff;
- site knowledge;
- signs raising public awareness including van messages;
- community relationships;
- leaflets;
- equipment & uniform;
- Ranger handbook;
- support through Whats App/Teams calls;
- 99% of engagements;
- and finally, a fantastic office!

#### What the Rangers thought could be improved/changed:

- Miles travelled
- No weekends off
- Shared patrols/shadowing
- Social media
- Sometimes rush to finish patrol
- Hard to get hold of some in community
- Assistance from other THC services
- Van Lease company
- Land managers conflict with SOAC
- Enforcement powers
- Two-way radios
- IT systems
- Funding uncertainty
- Hire company/ Stopover Facebook pages education



The Ranger De-briefing Workshop

# 6. Working with others

## 6. Ag obair còmhla ri càch

The Rangers were provided with contact numbers for appropriate Council staff, i.e Access officers, Parking enforcement, Waste operatives, Dog Wardens, Roads, and Amenity Services. They also had contacts for local Police, Fire Service, and other organisation’s Ranger services. Contact details for community representatives and land managers were also given where known and they were encouraged to make more.

The requested reported data to Scottish Government also included the ‘Reports to Emergency Services’. The Highland Council Rangers recorded **36 incidents**. This data was perhaps intended to record exceptional anti-social behaviour, which thankfully was very rare with only **9 incidents**. However, some of these reports were for Road Traffic Accidents (RTA) that the Rangers were first or early on scene and called in. Other incidents reported were injury or welfare issues.

During the season the Access Rangers worked hard to co-ordinate their patrols with other organisation’s Rangers and to inform Services and Police about any relevant incidents. They contacted **47 separate community councils or trusts** in their areas on at least **92 occasions**, gaining information and building trust. Some volunteer workdays were arranged with these groups including path works in Fortrose and Ullapool.



Working with Naturescot.



Working with volunteers and Council services.



Over **174 land managers crofters and businesses** were contacted, and discussions were held regarding managing visitors on their sites to co-ordinate any actions and provide assistance. The Access Rangers created Whats App groups with Forestry & Land Scotland, NatureScot and National Trust for Scotland rangers in specific areas. This greatly improved co-operation and coordinated their patrols.

The Outdoor Access Manager attended monthly national Visitor Management Operations and Coordination group meetings along with occasional Highland Ranger Manager and THC Cross Service Visitor Management groups reporting and coordinating actions with other Council services, emergency services and land managers. There was also regular contact with the other ranger partners within the council area. He submitted fortnightly RAG reports to the national Visitor Management Strategy Group for the North Coast 500, Arisaig/Morar and East Lochaber Glens areas.

# 7. Site Improvement Works, People Counters & Maintenance

## 7. Obraichean leasachaidh làraich, innealan-cunntaidh dhaoine agus obair-gleidhidh

The Rangers were able to undertake several tasks that improved popular visitor sites. Some of this was maintenance works whilst other work was to reduce damage caused by vehicles or people. Where possible contact was made with local groups and involved volunteers. These projects were done throughout Highland and including places such as: Scourie, Helmsdale, Beauly, Portree, Bonar Bridge, Badbea, Dunnet, Achmelvich, Gruinard, Gairloch, Loch Moy, Muir of Ord, Embo, Applecross, Golspie, Arisaig, Culloden, Glencoe, Drumnadrochit.



In September, the Rangers installed nine satellite linked people counters at several countryside sites where we have some management input. We can now collect numbers visiting for 18 countryside sites around Highland. Funding from the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal became available for these due to a project underspend. The new counters (marked ^) were too late to capture significant numbers during the main visitor season but can be reported in future years, however, below are recorded numbers to 30<sup>th</sup> December 2025.

\*Where people pass in both directions the full count has been halved.

### Sutherland & Caithness (4 sites)

Achmelvich (from 29/9/25) = 4,088\*^

Ardvreck = No data

Smoo Cave (from 30/9/25) = 3,400\*^

Whailgoe = No data

### Isle of Skye (6 sites)

Old Man of Storr (from 30/12/24) = 258,878\*

The Quiraing (from 30/12/24) = 146,181\*

Fairy Pools (from 30/12/24) = 161,468

Coral Beach (from 30/12/24) = 62,972\*

Fairy Glen (from 30/12/24) = 113,180\*

Lealt (from 30/12/25) = 141,009\*

### Easter Ross (2 sites)

Fyrish (from 29/9/25) = 4,380\*^

Chanonry Point (from 29/9/25) = 6,276\*^

### Wester Ross (3 sites)

Gairloch Beach (from 28/9/25) = 7,520\*^

Gruinard Bay (from 30/9/25) = 5,075\*^

Mellon Udrigle (from 29/9/25) = 3,074\*^

### Long Distance Routes (end-to-end users)

Kinlochleven WHW (from 30/12/24) = 49,199

Grotaig GGW (from 30/12/24) = 10,214

Knockfink SSW (from 30/12/24) = 1,934



## 8. Communications

## 8. Conaltradh

The generic email address continued to be the main way in which the public contacted the Ranger team for incidents or for general queries. Once the Rangers received Council email addresses they were able to make direct email contact with relevant individuals and organisations. As the Ranger team had acquired dedicated phones last year these were available immediately to new Rangers who then could make immediate contacts in their area.



## 9. Support and Moving Forward

### 9. Taic agus a' gluasad air adhart

The Access Ranger team has received numerous compliments and messages of support from residents and visitors. This has been directly by word of mouth, email, and Facebook posts. This support has also been recognised by Highland Council Ward Members, particularly after the Outdoor Access Manager and Rangers gave a series of presentations to several of the Ward areas within The Highland Council in September, October, and November. The Ranger team was highly commended on the difference they were making to our local communities and countryside. This year's team of 18 Access Rangers have yet again been able to continue to make a great difference to visitor management within the Highlands.

The issue of enforcement has often been raised in relation to inappropriate and inconsiderate behaviour. In line with national ranger policy, we have focussed on engagement and education of visitors and will continue to do so. However, there are a number of people who consistently flaunt the rules of acceptable behaviour and a deterrent may be required as a last resort. We aim to explore views and options for establishing restrictions or penalties where appropriate, particularly in regard to campfires and roadside camping.

**Philip Waite, Outdoor Access Manager**

**30<sup>th</sup> December 2025**



# Appendix 1

## Eàrr-ràdh 1

### Issues of Concern in Highland Areas

Many of the following issues have been reported in previous years but some have been attended to or in planning, marked in **BOLD**.

#### Caithness

- Car Parks at Duncansby Head, Whaligoe Steps.
- Parking on access road to Dunnet Head.
- Parking at Red Point/ Drumhollister. Dangerous roadside parking, current fencing not improved issue.
- Path upgrade required at Duncansby Head.
- No toilets at/near Whailgoe, Ousdale Broch, Noss Head, Dunnet Head.
- A99 traffic management near Whaligoe.

#### Sutherland & Easter Ross

- Car parks at **Caennabeinne**, **Balnakiel**, Oldshoremore, Bonar bridge, Melvich beach, **Ardvreck**, Inchnadamph, Tarbetness, Portmahomack beach - all candidates for 'Invitation to Pay' (ITP).
- Coach parking and extension at Smoo Cave.
- Improvements to car park surfacing and picnic sites at Oldshoremore, Bonar Bridge, Tarbet Ness, Big Burn Golspie.
- Toilets required at/near Caennabeinne.
- Path improvements at **Caennabeinne**, Bonar Bridge.
- Motorhome waste disposal needed in Durness area.

#### Wester Ross & Lochalsh

- Car Parks at Achnahaird, Mellon Udrigle, Gairloch Beach, Redpoint, Applecross, Lochcarron, Torridon - all candidates for ITP.
- Parking areas need improvement at Wailing Widow Falls, **Achmelvich**, Achnahaird, Bone Caves, **Stac Pollaidh**, Corrie Hallie layby, Loch Maree layby, Gairloch Harbour, Plockton Coral Beach, Kintail.
- Toilets needed at/near Gruinard, Mellon Udrigle.
- Path improvements at Wailing Widow Falls.
- Toileting issues along A87 Kintail and A890.

## Isle of Skye

- Car parks at Lealt, Glen Brittle, **Coral Beach, Kilt Rock**, Elgol, Duntruim - all candidates for ITP.
- Parking areas at Neist Point, Elgol, Staffin slipway, Duntruim, **Fairy Glen**, and Aird of Sleat need improvement or signing.
- Ferry terminal parking capacity issues at Uig and Sconser.
- Road improvements needed in Glen Brittle on approach to Fairy Pools and road end.
- Public toilets needed north of Staffin, Coral Beach, Neist Point.

## Lochaber

- Car Parks at Ballachulish peninsula, Laggan Locks, Traigh, **Camusdarroch, Glen Etive** - candidates for ITP.
- Parking improvement needed at Cuil Bay and Kintail.
- Public toilets at Ballachulish need improvement. Also issues in Glen Garry and **Tougal**.
- Bins and waste issues at Glen Garry, Loch Lochy and Camusdarroch.
- Path improvements needed at Tougal.
- Shuttle bus services would be advantageous at Glen Etive, Glen Nevis, Aridaig/Morar.

## Inner Moray Firth

- Car parks at Silverbridge, South Souter - candidates for ITP.
- Parking improvement needed at Nairn (signs), **Chanonry Point (signs, height barrier), Rosemarkie**, Dores, Newhall Point, Jemimaville, Lochindorb (height barrier).
- Bins & waste issues at Secret Beach, Dores, Alturlie.





[www.highland.gov.uk/countryside-outdoors/outdoor-access/8](http://www.highland.gov.uk/countryside-outdoors/outdoor-access/8)  
[www1.highland.gov.uk/outdoorhighlands](http://www1.highland.gov.uk/outdoorhighlands)