



Press Release: 16 November 2015

STAR GAZING IN THE FLOW COUNTRY

Those attending a recent Dark Skies event, organised by the Flows to the Future Project, were rewarded with a perfectly clear sky and the Northern Lights.

With the rain still falling, but faith in the weather forecast, 30 people arrived at Halladale Hall on the 6 November for an evening of astronomy. Gordon Mackie and Maciej Winiarczyk, from Caithness Astronomy Group, shared their expert knowledge and advice with an audience of 30 people, all keen to learn about the night sky, what to look for and how to capture it on camera. As forecast, by the close of the presentations the sky had cleared in time for another adventure to begin.

Members of Caithness Astronomy Group set up specialist telescopes outside for the audience to experience a closer look at the galaxies beyond, before everyone headed for the Flows Lookout at the RSPB Forsinard Flows Nature Reserve. RSPB staff guided parties by torchlight along the newly constructed boardwalk and up to the top of the Lookout, where they could observe the night sky, its constellations and satellites with the help of Caithness Astronomy Group. An added delight was the presence of the Northern Lights.

Gordon Mackie said "Caithness Astronomy Group were delighted to be able to support this stargazing event. We had a great night. The area around Forsinard is a wonderfully wild and dark location - a superb place to gaze skywards and take in the wonders of the universe".

Since the Flows Lookout was completed this year, it has attracted over 2500 visitors and will remain accessible all year round. In the daylight the elevated position offers a fantastic view of the Dubh Lochan pool system, and by night a landscape unpolluted by artificial light. The Flow Country is not short of locations to appreciate the night sky, but the new Lookout offers a superb vantage point, with a degree of shelter from the wind. However, anyone thinking of making a late night trip in the dark should take a torch, stick to the boardwalk and wrap up warm.

Further events hosted by The Flows to the Future Project will be publicised shortly including another Dark Skies event in September 2016.

The Flows to the Future project gratefully acknowledges funding support from the Heritage Lottery Fund

PHOTOGRAPHS

- 1) CAG stargazingatstrathhalladale – **to be credited to Gordon Mackie**
- 2) Photos to follow via an email and downloadable from wetransfer – **all to be credited to Gordon Mackie**

NOTES TO EDITORS

The Peatlands Partnership includes Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission (Scotland), Highland Council, RSPB Scotland, Plantlife Scotland, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, The Highland Third Sector Interface, The Flow Country Rivers Trust, The Northern Deer Management Group and The Environmental Research Institute. It liaises with local community groups, , the Scottish Government's Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate and the North Sutherland Community Forest Trust. It is independently chaired by John Henderson of Scrabster Farm, Caithness.

RSPB Scotland is the lead partner in The Flows to the Future project, a Peatlands Partnership project, which gratefully acknowledges funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and from the following funders and supporters; Environmental Research Institute, European Regional Development Fund, Forestry Commission (Scotland), Peatland Action, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, The Highland Council, RSPB, WREN, Scotland Rural Development Programme, Scottish Government, Scottish Natural Heritage and The Tubney Trust.

More information about Caithness Astronomy Group can be found on their website:

www.spanglefish.com/caithnessastronomygroup/

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