

Isle of Coll A Dark-sky Island



2021 Annual Report
International Dark-sky Association

September 2021

Isle of Coll Community A Dark Sky Island

2021 Annual report

As a condition for continued accreditation as an *International Dark Sky Place*, the International Dark-sky Association (IDA) asks that each 'Place' submit a report on activities related to dark skies by 1st October of each year. This condition is set forth in the program guidelines for each of the Dark Sky Places designation categories

Annual reports are an opportunity for IDA to formally check in with Dark Sky Places and to gauge the health of our mutual relationship. The reports are also a chance to provide feedback on the program and make any suggestions you may have for improvements.

Queries about this report should be addressed to:

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The Isle of Coll, The Inner Hebrides, Scotland

Coll is a small, low lying island some 5 kilometres west of the Isle of Mull and 6 kilometres south west of Ardnamurchan Point, the most westerly part of UK's mainland. The island is approximately 21 kilometres by 5 kilometres and is fairly central in the coastal chain of Hebridean islands, offering breathtaking views of the surrounding islands.

The highest point on Coll is Ben Hagh in the south west of the island, which rises to a height of 104 metres (341 ft).

The Isle of Coll lies 56.66 degrees north and as such has considerably longer daylight hours in the summer than most parts of the UK, mid summer there can be almost no darkness. Conversely, in winter, the Isle of Coll has considerably longer dark hours making sky viewing even more exciting. In the depths of winter daylight hours are short, approximately 09:00 hrs to 15:30 hrs.

The island is well known for its sandy beaches, large sand dunes and rich diversity of flora and fauna. The island has one village, Arinagour, which houses all the island's amenities and is just 1 kilometre from the ferry terminal where daily (summer) ferries connect with the mainland and the neighbouring Isle of Tiree. In the winter there are just five ferries per week. There is an airport in the S.W. of Coll with scheduled flights to Oban and Tiree on Wednesdays. The runway is unlit.

Coll is an incredibly dark place in winter assisted by the small volume of island vehicular traffic and the fact that there is no street lighting. Aurorae Borealis are often seen during these periods.

Isle of Coll and Tourism

The Isle of Coll has a population of approximately 180 full time residents and as such has little in the way of formalised committee infrastructure. There is a [Community Council](#) together with various groups of interested parties who form working groups as deemed necessary. As such there is no formalised 'Dark Sky' committee, just a collection of like minded people with a similar goal who convene as necessary.

Tourism on Coll is relatively low key. There is one hotel, one guest house, one hostel and twenty self-catering lets. The island has one camp site but many enjoy wild camping as allowed in the Scottish wilderness. The lack of beds ensures Coll's accommodation is usually full in the summer months. Despite this, Coll is always relatively quiet and one can usually have a beach all to oneself, even on a bank holiday. Coll, being close to the neighbouring Isle of Tiree, often shares visitors who 'do' both islands in one trip. Tiree has a considerably larger population (800) and infrastructure than Coll and can accommodate relatively large influxes of visitors. Coll tourists are usually considered to be niche, coming for positive and often unusual reasons; rare plants, insects, birds, castles, Celtic history and more recently for Dark Sky viewing. Coll's tourist infrastructure is, therefore, ideally suited for Dark Sky visitors.

Coll has no tourist information centre or facilities for attracting visitors other than an island based web site (visitcoll.co.uk) and a leaflet produced by island talent.

The reputation Coll enjoys is one quite envied in the Hebrides, the island hotel winning awards for both accommodation and food over many years. This is helped considerably by Coll residents' appreciation for the quality of food produced, farmed and fished on and around the island. Although the number of accommodation providers is small, many more families benefit from tourism since so

much produce used in supporting tourism is sourced from the island.

Scotland's reputation, and in particular the Western Isles, for wet and wild weather is considerable, yet the Isle of Coll, being at the westerly fringes and low lying, enjoys more clear days, and clear nights, than most parts of the highlands or the hillier islands such as Mull, Rum and Skye. This makes Coll an ideal location for viewing winter skies and in particular, due to the lack of ambient light, the Aurora Borealis.

Due to its northerly position, dark skies will not be a feature of mid summer and our skies only start to become dark again in August. The wonders of Coll's dark skies is an off season phenomenon.

2021 update

The IDA make suggestions for Annual Report topics and these have been taken as the basis of our report. Each topic is covered, as follows:-

- *Current information for the site IDA contact(s)*

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- *Does the [Dark-sky] site currently have a Provisional status? If so, what work has been done in the past year to resolve concerns that resulted in the Provisional designation?*

The Isle of Coll site has full recognition

Lighting

- *Were any changes made to local/municipal outdoor lighting policy in the past year? If so, describe and include text of any code language added or changed.*

No, there have been no changes to Argyll and Bute Council's lighting policy and all new builds on the island have to submit an outdoor lighting plan and are, therefore, fully compliant. There have been no new builds completed in the last twelve months.

- *Were there any new municipal lighting installations (or similar, large-scale installations on commercial property) built in the last year to show as examples built to your dark sky-friendly code?*

There has been no changes in the last twelve months.

Sky Quality

- *Were sky quality data taken in the past year? If possible, include a table or figure showing the information*
- *Did sky brightness increase over the previous year? Decrease?*
- *Is a permanently mounted sky monitor installed, or are there plans to install one?*

Due to COVID-19 and illness, no sky quality readings were taken this spring. There is no reason to believe the quality has changed as the Isle of Coll is remote from light pollution and there have been no changes to islanders' outdoor light fittings. There is no fixed SQM and no plan to install one.

Funding

- *Currently administering any grants related to dark-skies programming? If so, describe.*
- *Were any new grants won this year?*
- *Are there plans to apply for any future grants?*

No funding/grants have ever been requested or received. This situation has not changed and is unlikely to change.

Arts and Culture

- *Is any programming ongoing or planned blending the arts/culture with dark skies?*

There are no current programs but our community development company, [Development Coll](#), has a specific performance group identified for this.

Outreach

- *How many outreach programs were offered this year?*

Coll's Community Centre planned to host 'Coll and the Cosmos' astronomy weekends in the autumn of 2020 and spring of 2021. All were cancelled due to COVID. They are run by Cosmos Planetarium (<http://www.cosmosplanetarium.co.uk/>). More information can be found on the Coll Bunkhouse website (<https://collbunkhouse.com/dark-skies-coll-cosmos/>).



“Coll & The Cosmos is a stargazing weekend break on the Isle of Coll which makes the most of the island's incredible dark sky. The break has been specifically designed to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. No prior knowledge of astronomy is needed; we'll bring you the best of the night sky in a way that is fun and easily understandable”.

Coll & The Cosmos at Coll Community Centre.

© Development Coll

In the spirit of attracting visitors to the island during the quieter periods, the partnership between *Care4Carers* (<https://www.care4carers.org.uk/>), *Cosmos Planetarium* and *Coll Community Centre* has grown. *Care4Carers* brings groups of people to Coll for short respite breaks, and to take part in the Coll and the Cosmos weekends.

"Care for Carers is a Voluntary Organisation established in 1989 to provide support services to all carers, regardless of age, gender, disability or relationship of the person they care for. We deliver services to carers in Edinburgh and we deliver specific short breaks through our Stepping Out service to carers from across Scotland."

- *What was the estimated attendance for each outreach program? Total for the year?*

No outreach programs happened during the year because of COVID

- *Were any new outreach programs started this year? If so, are they complete or ongoing?*

No new outreach programs have been forthcoming in this period of COVID.

However, *Coll and the Cosmos* and *Care4Carers* weekends are commencing again this October and there are four weekends planned for March and October 2021.

The Coll Hotel has reported a significant increase in bookings for this autumn, directly relating to our Dark-sky. Some of their 45% increase could be contributed to foreign travel restrictions but since clients are asking about Dark-sky, it could mean that media coverage is having a positive effect.

Community and Media Relations

- *Any new media coverage you would like us to know about? May include e.g., PDFs as attachments*
- *Any engagement with local governments, community organizations, or private landowners in the past year to report?*

The Scottish newspaper, [*Daily Record*](#), published a one page guide to Coll's Dark-sky.

The national newspaper, *Sunday People*, ran a Dark-sky article in September 2021 which highlighted Coll's atypical IDA accreditation.

Due to COVID it's not possible to say if these articles added any additional boots on the ground but was, obviously, good publicity for Coll and Dark-sky activities.

More information about the island's Dark-sky can be found at http://visitcoll.co.uk/dark_sky/.

The website has being amalgamated with the popular vistcoll.co.uk website, the island's main advertising vehicle, and extended with more user information,.

Two donated telescopes are available for community use/loan, available from the Community Centre.

An increasing number of tourism organisations, including CalMac Ferries who serve the Hebridean islands, are advertising our Dark-sky status in their brochures and websites. Apart from attracting off-season tourists it also makes other location aware that IDA recognition can be beneficial to their quiet-time hospitality trade.