




Isle of Coll A Dark-sky Island

2019 Annual Report
International Dark-sky Association



September 2019

Isle of Coll Community A Dark Sky Island

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As a condition for continued accreditation of 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 1 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:

Tony Oliver
Comraich
Isle of Coll
PA78 6TB
UK
tony@colldigital.co.uk
+44 1879 230546

and

Julie Oliphant
The Coll Hotel
Arinagour
Isle of Coll
PA78 6SZ
UK
info@collhotel.com
+44 1879 230334

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, 23 in all, 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 150 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 only one hotel, one guest house and one hostel other than property letting. 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 mid August. The wonders of Coll's dark skies is an off season phenomenon.

2019 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)*

Tony Oliver
Comraich
Isle of Coll
PA78 6TB
UK
tony@colldigital.co.uk
+44 1879 230546

Olvin Smith
Kilbride
Isle of Coll
PA78 6TB
UK
olvin@btinternet.com
+44 1879 230359

Julie Oliphant
The Coll Hotel
Arinagour
Isle of Coll
PA78 6SZ
UK
info@collhotel.com
+44 1879 230334

Paula Smalley
Gordonlea
Arinagour
Isle of Coll
PA78 6SY
UK
stay@tnmcoll.com
+44 1879 230319

- *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?*

Olvin Smith took readings in the 2018/2019 winter and reports he could see no change in the sky's darkness. Readings were within the range 20.63 and 21.65.

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 plans currently.

Outreach

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

Coll's Community Centre hosts two "Coll and the Cosmos" astronomy weekends a year. The winter of 2017/2018 was the fourth year these weekends have been run. They are run by Cosmos Planetarium (<http://www.cosmosplanetarium.co.uk/>). Below is a brief summary of what happens and more information can be found on the Coll Bunkhouse website (<https://collbunkhouse.com/dark-skies-coll-cosmos/>).



“Coll & The Cosmos is a star-gazing 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.

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In addition to attracting visitors to the island, at a quieter time of year, a partnership has developed between an organisation called Care4Carers (<https://www.care4carers.org.uk/>), Cosmos Planetarium and Coll Community Centre. 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?*

March 2019 - 14 attendees Coll and the Cosmos weekend (11 of these were carers here with Care4Carers)

March 2019 – free star gazing and planetarium community workshop 19 attended (funded by UK National Lottery Community Fund as part of a programme of cultural activities/events)

March 2019 – Cosmos Planetarium held a children’s astronomy themed activity – 7 attended

Because of the lack of any formalised tourist organisation on Coll, we can only estimate any effect on tourist numbers off-season that could be attributed to Dark-sky status. It is estimated that we have seen a ~20% increase in visitor numbers during spring/Autumn compared to seven years ago. A part of this must be contributed to Dark-sky status.

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

The young carers visit in Nov 2019 is new for 2019. If successful, it may become an annual choice for young carers through Care4Carers.

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?*

More information about the island’s Dark-sky can be found at <http://darkskeycoll.co.uk>.

Coll’s Dark Sky Facebook page has seen a small increase to 675 “likes” and 683 “followers”.

Since the island’s designation, the community has been inspired to take more interest in our dark sky with many more telescopes in regular use. There is an increasing number of organisations, such as CalMac Ferries who serve the Hebridean islands, advertising our Dark-sky status in their brochures and websites. Hopefully, this too will increase off-season tourist and, more importantly, awareness.