



Wild Skies Shetland

About the Project

Wild Skies Shetland is a volunteer-run project which has brought some £100,000 worth of investment to the small island of Unst, population 600. The charity aims to generate local economic benefit by showcasing the wonders of Unst's ever-changing skies - this includes the northern lights, midnight sun, clear dark skies and dramatic storms.

Wild Skies organises a rich variety of sky-related events. In the past this has included bringing a large inflatable planetarium to Unst, theatre shows for children, photography exhibitions, a planetary trail and celebration of an eclipse. For the planetary trail, each planet was interpreted creatively by a local person. Artwork included a collage of the sun by the nursery school, Neptune made in deep blue glass, and a knitted Mercury.

Unst is honoured to have an asteroid named after it - Asteroid 394445 Unst. This was so exciting that a short film was made about it, with extensive involvement by local volunteers.

Wild Skies is launching its round-Unst sky-trail in 2022. The trail takes visitors to a dozen beautiful locations on the island, with each stop offering explanations about a different aspect of the sky - for example the effect of the moon on tides (near a tidal energy turbine) and Viking names for stars and constellations (by a replica longhouse and longship). The trail features

music, dialect and poems through "talking" benches, and Virtual Reality headsets displaying the northern lights.

Local people: getting involved and having fun

Local community involvement is central to the way Wild Skies operates - it is important that activities are enjoyable for both locals and visitors. In the words of one trustee: "Find as many ways to involve folk as you can. Involve the school. Involve the grazing committee. Involve shops. Ask people to paint, fund-raise, sing, act, write or build. Local buy-in and love for your project is key."

"I see two main benefits from Wild Skies Shetland. One is economic - we hope to generate income and employment from more visitors staying for longer. The other is how we humans connect with nature. The pandemic showed us many things - amongst them that the natural world around us, however tiny or spectacularly huge, is both therapeutic and life enhancing. Watching and marvelling at our ever-changing skies is, put simply, good for us."

Jane Macaulay, co-founder, Wild Skies Shetland



Location: Unst, Shetland

Type: Do

When Set Up: 2018

How Funded: urrently funded primarily through grants; developing income from charges.

Beneficiaries: Locals and visitors who enjoy memorable experiences; secondary economic benefits

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