

Item:
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Report to Partnership Board Friday 20th September 2024

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

SCOTTISH ISLANDS PASSPORT UPDATE



PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide Members with an update on the Scottish Islands Passport Project.

Travelogues, digital travel stamps and physical stamps

In July we launched our next 2 travelogues, taking the total to 4 covering each of our 72 islands at least once. Each travelogue features 20 islands and are based on different themes. Islands included in each are spread across the regions rather than being grouped geographically to encourage visitors to explore other islands and therefore support balanced and sustainable tourism.

The third travelogue is called 'Eat, Drink, Explore' and is a reworking and expansion of the pilot travelogue that featured only 10 islands and was not released for general sale. This edition explores 20 islands and features various food and drink producers and establishments for each, highlighting the diverse and exciting range of island tastes available for visitors to uncover. This continues our island-centred ethos by encouraging visitors to spend with island businesses.

The fourth travelogue is named 'Wandering Our Islands' and is based around the theme of sustainable and active travel and slow tourism. Building on messages we've promoted throughout the project, this travelogue offers more information and incentive for people to use public transport and active travel options both to get to the islands and during stays, while highlighting any island businesses that offer facilities for this. This links with our digital travel stamps to further encourage this behaviour.

Both of these travelogues have a dedicated space for each island for visitors to collect the brass rubbing of the stamp that is hosted with an island business or organisation wherever possible, encouraging visitors to explore these community businesses while collecting their stamp rubbings.



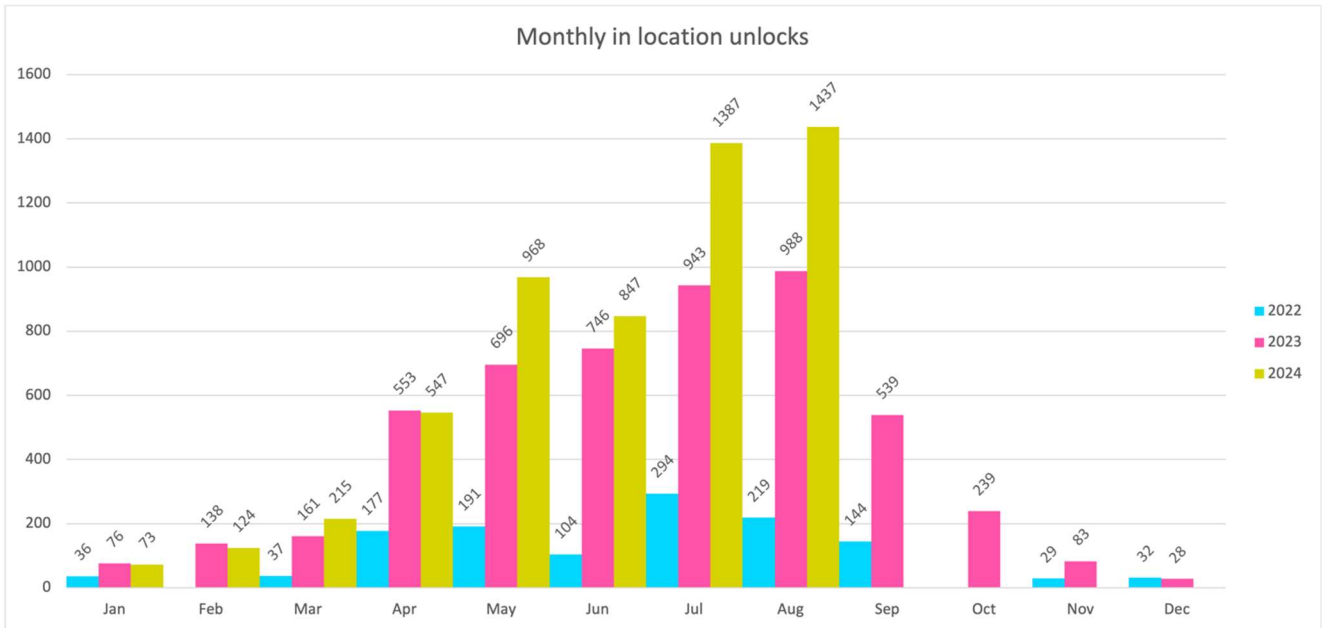
We focused our efforts on getting physical stamps installed to match islands featured in the travelogues as they were released so that visitors could collect those brass stamp rubbings. Now that we have featured each of the islands, we are very near completion of the brass stamp network with 60 completed, a handful we are waiting for confirmation with before adding the live locations to the app. Brass rubbing stamps on each island are hosted by community groups or island businesses.

We continue to work with Isle20 now Scottish Island Gifts as our official online retailer for the travelogues whilst also building a network of on-island retailers. We focused our efforts on offering businesses featured in the travelogues the opportunity to become retailers to begin with, we are now expanding that offering to more island organisations while also working to launch the travelogues on both CalMac and NorthLink ferries.

Digital app and Website

Since our last update, continued growth in app activity has been recorded:

- Over 32,575 app downloads and 203,465 unique sessions at the end of August (up from 17k and 117k respectively for August 2023).
- Stamps collected for each of the 72 islands covered by the app: 37,754 stamp unlocks to date with 25,416 people using the manual unlock option showing that the app is providing inspiration for island visits.



- We now have data to compare over 2.5 years which shows in the increase in monthly in location unlocks:

Active usage continues at a high level, outperforming comparable apps in the sector.

Since launching in December, we have seen 1,753 travel stamps collected, these are only available when users are in the islands. Walking stamp collection has the highest proportion at 83% of collections. The new AI technology is working well within the app with minimal failsafe thresholds being reached.

We now have over 1,100 experiences and travel experiences in the app with the majority of the main development work now completed. There is always scope for further development however the focus now switches to expanding our reach and userbase. We are undertaking a review of all the geofences for the stamps to ensure as much of the islands are covered as possible to minimise issues and enhance the user experience.

We are still working on creating an accessibility overview to be included in the app for each island, this links with our wheel travel category as we aim to improve accessibility information available for our islands. We are working in partnership with travel writers with lived experience of physical disabilities to source this data.

Our website, www.islands.scot, is designed primarily to funnel visitors to the app and provide additional information to compliment the travelogues.

Engagement & working with Partners

We continue to engage with island businesses and community groups for the final stamp installations, check and refresh content held for each island and as we seek island retailers interested in stocking the travelogues. We also continue to see members of the public make good use of the built in feedback loop in the app, allowing them to make suggestions on both content and functionality.

We have applied for a new funding stream with The National Lottery and their Climate Action Fund, if we are successful the project could be funded to 2030. For this funding, we require formal partnerships and are currently conducting a survey to gauge interest and availability of development trusts, destination marketing organisations, community groups and others. We find out if we have reached the next stage of the application process within the next few weeks.

We are currently looking for partners to analyse the data we are gathering which looks at behaviours of our app users when they are in the islands and their travel methods. There is a huge amount of data but we currently don't have the resource to analyse all of it. There is scope for this within the funding bid we have submitted.

Marketing

We expanded marketing activities to highlight our new developments with active and sustainable travel as well as to expand our userbase. We had large scale and outdoor advertising in several prominent locations in Glasgow and Edinburgh. We have an advert in place in Glasgow Airport domestic arrivals until March 2025 which we are seeing traction from with specific campaign QR codes so we can determine which marketing activities are working effectively. The results of these activities, after scaling back last year, are clear in our download numbers below.

<i>Period</i>	<i>Downloads</i>
2022	11,023
2023	6,374
2024 to end August	13,894

We continue with our social media posts across 4 platforms to promote the project, islands, island businesses and events as well as our travel stamps and travelogues.

We have created and promote generic posters for each island with a finalised stamp location which is offered to island businesses for on-island promotion. We engage with island businesses on social media to cross-promote with featured businesses, stamp hosts and stockists with branded assets available to them.

We applied for 2 categories at the Highlands & Islands Thistle Awards for this year and after an interview have been short listed for the Innovation in Tourism award. (Results on October 4th)

We have been approached by CalMac to appear on their podcast which will be recorded at the end of September during which we will promote as many connected islands as we can.

Funding & Resource

Funding secured through Paths for All to expand our active and sustainable travel innovation ended in March 2024. Despite previous indications that there would likely be a continuation of this funding, the announcement was made in December 2023 that the fund would close, thus removing this option for ongoing financial support.

At the start of 2024 we invested in large scale marketing to make best use of the available funds before the close of the financial year. This has yielded ongoing positive results and benefits which can be seen in our download numbers and activity.

The RURALITES project continues and allows continuity to March 2026 with the project manager's contract extended to that date.

ZetTrans have renewed their investment in Scottish Islands Passport to support ongoing activity and we would welcome conversation with other local authority partners to understand opportunities for joint working and support. This could be aligned with local strategic aims around tourism and/or active and sustainable travel.

The project continues to be sustained and achieves development milestones across the 72 islands with less than 1 FTE, demonstrating the principles of Best Value. The project works to deliver against outcomes in active and sustainable travel, balanced and sustainable tourism and thriving island communities.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note this report.

Risk Register

RTS Delivery
Impact – Positive

Policy
Impact – Positive
Financial

Impact – Positive

Equality
Impact – Positive

Report by: Katy Beasley

Designation: Scottish Islands Passport Project Manager

Date: September 2024