

action for tourism

Sustainable Tourism in the Brecon Beacons National Park



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Businesses take up call to COLLABOR8

Project's impact felt across National Park

COLLABOR8 has brought a whole new way of working across the National Park. 15 clusters of tourism businesses have been supported with all sorts of people involved. Together they have contributed hugely to the development of tourism in their area. From mountain biking specialists to canal-side pubs, bunkhouse operators to the organisers of walks and festivals, COLLABOR8 has spread its reach far and wide across the Brecon Beacons National Park in the three years that it has been in place.

Its tentacles have reached from small groups based in a village to large organisations such as Brecon Beacons Tourism, all with the common aim of helping businesses work together to achieve mutual goals. On the way they have produced some excellent events, websites and printed materials to help visitors get even more out of their stay.

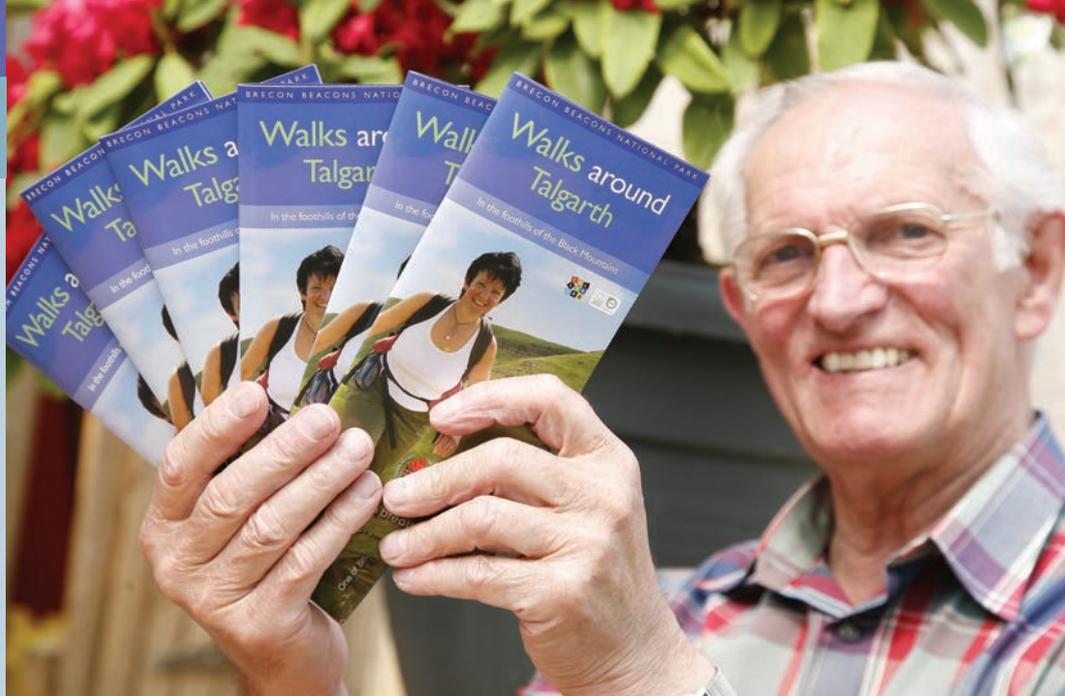
The idea behind the COLLABOR8 project, which is 50% funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Interreg IVB North West Europe Programme, was to get businesses together – either grouped by location or business type – to improve the experience of visitors to the National Park.

"The Brecon Beacons as a destination needs to compete with other parts of the UK like Cornwall and the Lake District. Our message was, 'We're stronger together'," said Richard Tyler, Sustainable Tourism Manager for the National Park Authority. "We wanted to focus people's minds on that, rather than competing with each other. The more co-operation between businesses we have, the better it is for visitors and the more likely they are to return and, obviously, the more leaflets and website maps there are, the better tourists will find their way around to spend their money in other businesses in the National Park too," he added.

Continued overleaf...

The project in numbers

- 15**
clusters of tourism businesses supported and developed
- 8**
new interpretation panels commissioned
- 9**
new websites online
- 12**
new walking routes mapped and promoted
- 5**
new festivals created
- 54**
days' training organised for National Park Ambassadors
- 86**
new Ambassadors created
- 27**
new providers under the Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS)
- 11**
businesses awaiting GTBS accreditation
- 1,000s**
of leaflets printed for walking trails, at a glance guides, activity providers etc



Tourism will 'continue to benefit from scheme's legacy'

The three-year project is due to end in June 2012 but its legacy will live on in the new ways of working that businesses have learnt, as well as the websites, walking trails and festivals it has spawned.

Thousands of leaflets produced with COLLABOR8 help have winged their way to new audiences locally, nationally and internationally – sometimes with surprising results. The visitors' books at churches in Llangors and Llangasty – featured in the 'Bwch With Altitude', walk- show intrepid travellers from Germany, India, Japan and even Hawaii have stopped off to find out about the churches' history while on the circular walk. All the clusters signed up to a code of practice which they wrote individually but which committed the businesses involved to the principles of sustainability, sense of place and quality. These qualities have infused all of their work, both separately and together. "The Brecon Beacons is all about giving visitors a high-quality, authentic experience based on robust sustainability principles." Richard Tyler said. "COLLABOR8 has encouraged everyone to work in the same direction, expressing the brand of the destination in all their work."

Richard continued: "We are sure that businesses will want to continue this way of working in the future and the friendships formed locally, nationally and internationally with our partners will flourish into many more projects. COLLABOR8 has left a marvellous legacy for tourism in this area."

Ambassador, you're spoiling us...

Another key part of the COLLABOR8 plan was the National Park Ambassadors scheme. People running businesses in the Park receive intensive training to learn about the geography, geology, history and biodiversity of the area – in addition to finding out ideas for things to do that they can recommend to guests or customers.

Now 99 people representing a wide range of tourist-related businesses have been named Ambassadors and the programme is ongoing. More than 50 days' Ambassador training has taken place since 2009.

"We've been thrilled by the number of people who've been prepared to give up their time, either to become Ambassadors or to take part in clusters or make their businesses more sustainable," said Richard. "Everyone who has taken part has seen the value of the scheme. As a National Park Authority we're here to help conserve the landscape and help people understand and enjoy this beautiful place. Tourism businesses are in the same game, so it's been a great partnership.

"We hope the work we've done over the last three years will continue to build on the area's reputation as a must-visit destination in the future. We're looking to the long-term and expecting to see a long-lasting effect."



Abergavenny develops town trail

Abergavenny isn't new to the tourism game. There's been a tourist association for the town for 30 years, but even established destinations can use help in raising their profile, as Gwen Jones of the association explained.

"Over the years in Monmouthshire, we've relied on the Wye Valley and the Vale of Usk but that's not our market. Our visitors are looking for B&B, things to do in the Black Mountains and, recently, great food. "We needed a new strategy to tell people about things to do in this area to keep them coming back," said Gwen.

With the help of COLLABOR8 the group pinpointed local attractions that were being partly overlooked.

"We developed a historical trail around the town and six day itineraries for day visitors or people staying in the area," said Gwen. New photos of the area's views were also commissioned and COLLABOR8 also paid for a designer to develop a new Abergavenny tourism logo and strap line – they'd previously used the town council logo.

The designer also developed a series of posters at Arriva Trains' stations along the Newport-Crewe railway line which passes through the town.

The history trail leaflet has been a runaway success – the group are re-ordering after their first print run of 5000 copies was quickly used up.

Gwen said: "Obviously having funding is helpful – but if you're not sure how to use the money, having someone to give you a direction is absolutely brilliant.

"The new marketing materials have really lifted us and I'm sure our new focus is part of the reason our membership is up despite the economic times."



Ambassador 'graduates' spread word

Some Ambassadors get all the luck. Tourism business owners who've signed up to be Brecon Beacons National Park Ambassadors were recently spoilt with an evening of food and fun at Buckland Hall, Bwlch.

Author and journalist Horatio Clare, whose parents moved to a farm in Cwmdru from London when he was growing up, proved an inspiring speaker about his adopted home patch. Horatio has since agreed to be the Ambassadors' patron. Since the scheme began in 2010, thanks to COLLABOR8 funding, 99 Ambassadors have 'graduated' from the scheme which gives them three intensive days of training as well as trips and events to enhance their knowledge of the National Park.

Carol Williams, sustainable tourism officer at the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, is responsible for organising Ambassador training and events.

She said: "The training gives them an insight into aspects of the Park they might not otherwise have had. Often people running tourism businesses here have come from outside the area so they don't necessarily know its in-depth history or about the geology or biodiversity to be found here.

"Also, they're usually so busy running their own business that they don't get the chance to explore it widely and find out about other businesses in the Park. We offer them the chance to get a deeper understanding of the Park and the activities they can recommend to their customers."

Gwen Jones, who runs a campsite and B&B at Llanfihangel Crucorney near Abergavenny, agreed. "It gives an insight into the area that you can pass on to visitors. If you've been here a long time you know areas but perhaps not their history. It's also interesting to find out how other people interpret the area to their guests. I think it's a brilliant scheme, I hope it keeps running," she added.

As well as three days' training, Ambassadors have special visits organised to familiarise them with places or activities – a recent example included going on a geocaching course.

And, of course, events and training provide good networking opportunities for participants. They also get a listing and web link on the Ambassadors' page of the Brecon Beacons National Park website.

"We definitely think they come away with greater enthusiasm and knowledge. Sometimes when you've got your head down working in tourism it's hard to see the beauty and value of the whole National Park," said Carol.



Bwlch grabs the limelight

Situated on the A40 in a gap between two hills, Bwlch is a place people pass straight through. But it hasn't let that get it down.

In fact, it now attracts visitors from as far afield as Japan and Hawaii to its churches who step out on a series of three circular walks starting and ending in the village.

One of the walks, appropriately enough, is called Bwlch With Altitude – the others are Bwlch With Fortitude and Bwlch With Magnitude.

Rhys Champion, who owns the Beacons Backpackers hostel and New Inn pub in the village explained: "The leaflets we've developed with COLLABOR8's help give people staying in the village a chance to do a spectacular circular walk without even needing a car."

The walks were developed with members of the cluster who included the vicar of the churches in Bwlch, Llangors and Llangasty, Alan Jevons.

"The idea was to include the churches on the Altitude walk to try to increase the number of visitors.

"As well as walks leaflets and a website we had funding to produce interpretation boards about the history of the churches for walkers who stop," said Alan.

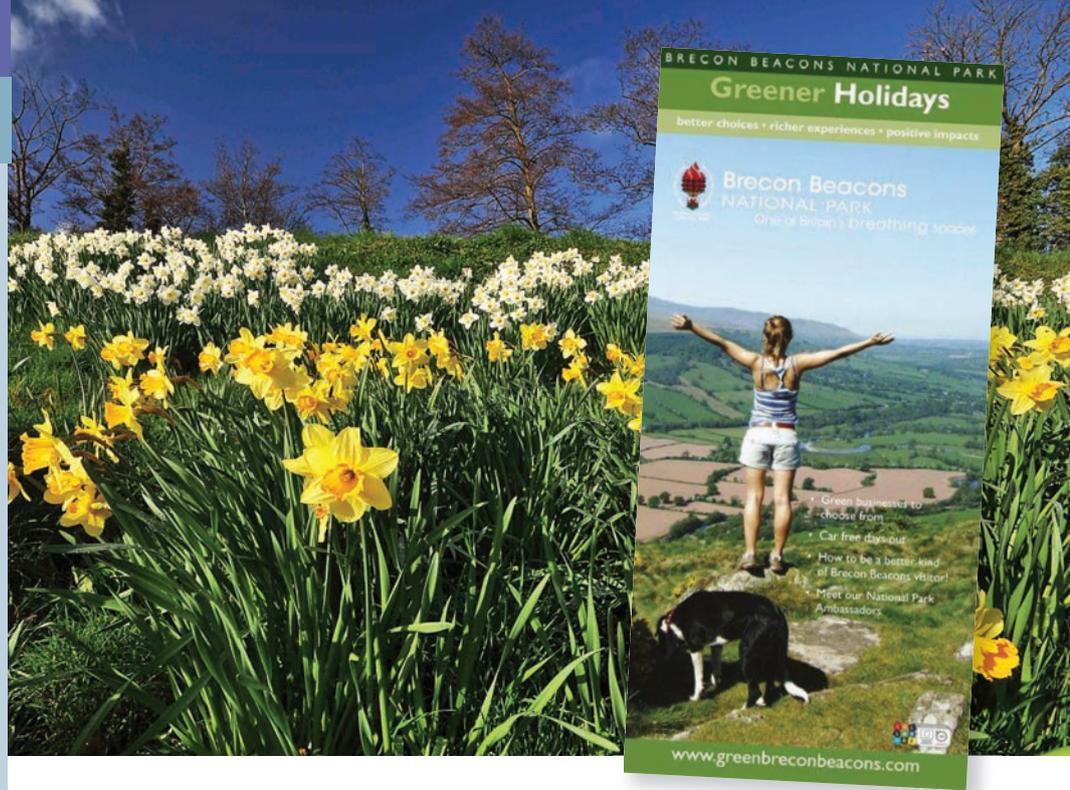
The number of tourists visiting the churches has increased – a stock of energy bars and water bottles left by parishioners for walkers soon disappears.

Visitor books also give a clue to the numbers stopping – and where they're from. "Sometimes it feels as if the whole world has been through the doors," laughed Alan.

Rhys Champion added: "Altitude has become a recognisable walk in its own right. OK, it's not as famous as Pen y Fan but people are captured by the name – and views."

He says he's sending between 20 and 40 walkers per week on one of the three Bwlch walks – and it's attracting new business to the area.

"From a community point of view, the more people that come here for walking, the better it is for other local businesses," he added. "Everyone wins."



Green cluster message: 'Going green makes business sense'

Along with the creation of tourism Ambassadors, the other 'keynote' COLLABOR8 programme has been the development of a green tourism cluster with businesses working together to achieve this.

Liz Matthews had been running her holiday cottage business in the west of the Brecon Beacons National Park as a green business since 1999. But the push to persuade more tourism businesses to follow in Liz's footsteps came along at just the right time for her. Liz, who runs Aberhyddnant Cottages at her home at Aberhyddnant Farm in Crai, was just redeveloping her website. "We've been green for quite a few years but you can't rest on your laurels," said Liz whose business now has a gold Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS) award. "There are new ideas coming out all the time that you'd miss if you weren't involved in the green network," she explained. After attending a COLLABOR8-funded green business workshop at the National Park Centre in Libanus she went home and immediately added public transport and car-free days out information to her website. Since then she has attended regular meetings of green business owners who have also signed up for the Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS) promoted by COLLABOR8.

In its first year of funding – in which COLLABOR8 paid for businesses to become accredited – 16 tourism businesses in the Park signed up to GTBS. By 2010-11 this had increased to 21 tourism businesses. So far in 2011-12 there are 27 newcomers to GTBS (seven gold winners) and 11 in line for accreditation.

COLLABOR8 has paid for a leaflet about greener holidays in the National Park, a 'Brecon Beacons as a sustainable destination' guide on the Green Traveller website – and for GTBS-listed firms to be on the Green Traveller website.

This year the emphasis of the group has shifted towards helping businesses see that going green makes good business sense – with workshops being co-ordinated by consultant Barbara Grantham, funded by COLLABOR8 and Visit Wales. Three courses are being run aimed at hospitality businesses, attractions and self-catering businesses to explain why going green is good for business.

"It's about supporting each other. Since joining the group I've met a man in Myddfai who I now use to supply soap for all my self-catering cottages," said Liz. "Not only is it better for the local economy but it's a lot easier for the business. If there's a problem and your order is late you can pop over and pick it up!" She's picked up other tips from networking with her green tourism colleagues too. "You may think you're already green and doing brilliantly," she added, "but if you don't attend the group you may be making mistakes other people have already solved."



Sheep festival gets Royal seal of approval

When a group of Llandovery businesses got together to put their town on the map in 2009 they needed a theme to unite traders and other groups in the town.

By coincidence, in early 2010 the Prince of Wales, who owns the 191-acre Llwynywermod farm and estate in Myddfai near Llandovery, launched The Wool Project to promote the sustainable wool industry.

He'd invited four members of the newly-formed Llandovery Chamber of Commerce to tea to talk about the project and the germ of idea to link Llandovery with wool – and sheep – was born.

It is, after all, in sheep-farming country, is home to a rare breed sheep market and it's on an old drover's route from west Wales.

At the same time, COLLABOR8 came along offering to help boost the town's tourism offering and fund a sustainable tourism action plan.

Fiona Walker, one of the original chamber of commerce members, explained what happened next: "COLLABOR8 put on several workshops where we came up with a brand for Llandovery – Love Llandovery – and they were able to help us hone the idea of linking the town with its connection with sheep farming.

"COLLABOR8 also brought in a man from the Yorkshire Dales where they run a sheep festival and everyone latched on to the idea. It also tied in with the Prince's Wool Project," she explained. Before they knew it, a Sheep Festival – the first in 2010 – was in the making. Fiona became the event co-ordinator: "The sheep theme helped us connect with the agricultural community."

COLLABOR8 funded a website about the festival and paid for marketing materials to help get the first festival off the ground. Prince Charles became its patron.

"Suddenly everyone was talking about it and getting on board. People were talking about 'Our Sheep Festival'," said Fiona. "We involved the young farmers – as event comperes – and took part in the fashion show. And we held it on a weekend to coincide with the UK rare coloured (sheep) breeds auction too."

In 2011 the festival was bigger and better. It included sheep dog trials, sheep shearing demonstrations as well as food stalls, traders' stands and storytelling.

"We're not living in easy times and the festival has definitely helped," said Fiona, who runs the Red Giraffe internet café. "There is an increased sense of pride in the town. We know that come September the town will be buzzing and full. "Friendships have been formed and it has helped knit the community together!" she added.

*The Sheep Festival 2012 will take place on September 29-30.

Three years ago Talgarth offered plenty of places to stay – but not necessarily things for visitors to do on their doorstep.

All that changed with the impetus of COLLABOR8. A local group of 18-20 mainly tourist business owners began to think their town might be missing a trick.

A sustainable tourism action plan pointed the way forward – there were great walks and cycle rides that could be done in and around the town without tourists having to leave the immediate area.

Joyce Shaw, who runs a five-star B&B just outside Talgarth, was part of the cluster: "All we had in the tourist information centre was a photocopied sheet which didn't look very professional," she said.

"We felt we had so much more to offer."

With that in mind, a series of walks in and around Talgarth was developed – COLLABOR8 paid for design and print of the leaflets and a website.

One of the walks, to the Witches Pool or Pwll-y-Wrach, has even inspired an annual event – an 8-mile circular walk with a quiz en route. Entrants get free sausage and mash at the town's Tower Hotel too.

Another leaflet developed by the group explains the town's history and provides a map. And a Taste Talgarth leaflet has also been developed thanks to COLLABOR8.

"I think it's all worked really well," said Joyce.

"I have something to show tourists that looks good. Having a budget helped focus our minds on what we needed to help Talgarth develop as a destination in its own right – I no longer feel I need to send my guests off to Hay and Brecon because there's enough to do here."

Llandovery in numbers

45% said the festival was their main reason for visiting the area

68% of visitors with children gave the festival a 10 out of 10 rating

96% of visitors said they would recommend the festival to friends

92% of businesses said they had benefited from the festival

* Figures from the survey after first Sheep Festival in 2010 by The Research Solution

Art trails in numbers

Crickhowell

162 pieces of work sold under £100

42% of exhibitors had between 100 and 200 visitors

86% felt taking part in Art Trail worthwhile experience

25% of work sold was in the £250 - 500 range

Brecon

7 full days of arts events

90 attended Branding Brecon workshops

1 report on town branding and 1 web video funded

40 page festival brochure printed

20 days of co-ordinator time

90 art boards by the public

* Figures from economic impact report in 2011 by *The Research Solution*

Talybont puts itself on tourist map

The small village of Talybont-on-Usk has big ambitions – and has already raised its profile thanks to COLLABOR8 funding.

A group was formed after two local businesswomen met at a tourism conference organised by the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority in 2011.

“Because we were hearing what other tourism groups in the UK do, the idea to form a Talybont group came up,”

explained Anna Bell, who runs the Star Inn in the village. Together with Ceri Scott-Howell and Clare Wright she set up the Talybont group, inviting every tourism business in the village to take part.

COLLABOR8 paid for a tourism consultant and sustainable tourism action plan – and the group decided to commission a visitor board first.

Said Anna: “As businesses we want to show people you don’t have to get in your car and drive away from the village to do wonderful walks or cycle rides.”



New arts events created in Crickhowell and Brecon

This year, Crickhowell Art Trail, ran jointly by the Crickhowell cluster and the Crickhowell Resource and Information Centre (CRIC), enters its fourth year. From small beginnings in 2009 when 10 artists got together to show their work, it has grown to an event with more than 75 craftspeople and artists taking part.

Gone is the homemade, photocopied art trail flyer. Now the trail is so extensive the brochure about the event has grown to 60 pages long.

And it is now firmly established in the tourism calendar, benefiting all the local tourism businesses, said organiser Suzette Patten who works in CRIC.

“We wanted to raise the profile of artists working in the area – and to put our gallery at CRIC on the map,” she said. “It started out as a very tiny, homemade kind of event. It wasn’t until we had COLLABOR8 funding that we were able to expand it and really showcase the quality of art in the area.”

COLLABOR8 funding enabled Suzette to commission first an A3 double-sided map about the trail, then a proper brochure. She was also able to organise a photographer to take photos of the artists at work over three days.

She has turned the photos into a travelling exhibition about the Art Trail to generate pre-event publicity. This year’s trail will be launched with the photo exhibition at Tretower Court before touring around the Park.

Video helps boost event

Funding was also used to create a video about the event and to put on a bus for artists to visit each other’s venues ahead of the trail weekend. The trail now spans from Talgarth to Talybont, Llangynidr to Crickhowell and on to the Abergavenny area. Artists taking part include sculptors, textile designers, glassmakers, jewellery makers, illustrators, furniture makers as well as painters.

Artists open up their studios, galleries and in some cases homes, to welcome visitors – and buyers – in. “It has meant a lot more economically than I think some of the artists expected,” said Suzette. “Some got commissions and many were able to get good publicity in the press about the trail too,” she added.

The trail’s focus on Crickhowell has been good for business in the town, too. In 2011 many shops gave over window space to display art ahead of the event. “Last year there was such a buzz – we had all these people wandering around with their trail leaflets finding the different studios in Crickhowell,” said Suzette.

The gallery in CRIC saw 750 visitors in three days during the 2011 festival – a big leap from average visitor numbers in the summer (around 50 people per day).



COLLABOR8 also paid for an economic impact survey in 2011 (see left).

So successful has the trail become that now, even though COLLABOR8 funding is coming to an end, the brochure will now be paid for by business subscriptions. Said Suzette: "At the moment, the trail is mainly a bonus for tourists who are already in the area. It takes place at the same time as the Hay Festival so it is an additional thing to do.

"But as it becomes more established the tourism aspect will continue to grow and we hope it will eventually become as big as Herefordshire Art Week."

Brecon arts festival strikes a chord

Sometimes the best ideas in life are the simplest – as the organisers of Brecon Arts Festival discovered during the event's second year last year (2011).

One of the most popular attractions in the week-long Brecon Arts Festival week held in October half term was a set of blank boards attached to the railings outside St Mary's Church in the centre of Brecon.

Members of the public were invited to add their art, doodles and thoughts to the boards in response to the festival. They proved so popular the boards were quickly filled up and later went on display in the town's library.

A group of artists in Brecon had already been marketing the town as an arts venue when COLLABOR8 came along in 2009. The funding allowed the group to expand to include local tourism businesses as well as artists – a survey was carried out and two workshops held to establish a marketing strategy for the town.

The focus on art remained but they decided to broaden the festival's range to include dance and music. COLLABOR8 funded a co-ordinator and the festival became Brecon Arts Week in 2010. Julia Blazer, who runs a shop in the town, was the event's co-ordinator. She said: "It enabled us to put on a whole week of arts that just wouldn't have happened without funding for a co-ordinator's role.

"In the first year (2010) it was a smaller event but the number of artists taking part had doubled by 2011. We also attracted musicians and dancers too."

In its second year the festival included a stained glass workshop, jewellery-making demonstrations, a bell-ringing workshop and live music.

"One of our biggest successes was getting local businesses which had previously had nothing to do with art involved in the festival," said Julia. "We had estate agents, insurance brokers and accountants offering us display spaces."

"It was great to see so many artists, musicians and dancers getting on board as well as local businesses."

Brecon Arts Week will run in October half term 2012. www.artbeatbrecon.co.uk

The group in Cwm Tawe is one of the smallest clusters funded by COLLABOR8 with around 20 active members.

A consultant provided a sustainable tourism action plan for the area funded by COLLABOR8.

Members of the group identified a lack of signs welcoming visitors to either end of the valley as one of their priorities.

A new logo and strap line was designed with the Cwm Tawe name replacing Upper Swansea Valley – reflecting the area's tranquility.

The strap line 'Where beauty, legend and adventure meet' encompassed the area's disparate businesses which range from Craig-y-Nos Castle and Country Park to Dan-yr-Ogof Caves and from B&Bs to outdoor activity providers.

Orientation boards were installed to mark the start and end of the area as you pass through the valley.

Leaflets listing accommodation and activity providers with a map was designed and paid for with COLLABOR8's help and six great days out itineraries completed the group's work to date.

Website revamp for bunkhouses group

Bunkhouse operators in the Brecon Beacons National Park had been working together as a group for more than a decade when COLLABOR8 came along.

There are 23 bunkhouses in the Brecon Beacons who are members of the group – representing a large proportion of the 33 bunkhouses in Wales.

They were used to supporting each other and marketing themselves together – but what they didn't have was an up-to-date website.

Punch Maughan, who runs Glynmeddig Barn bunkhouse as well as being chief executive of Brecon Beacons Tourism, explained: "Our website was very dated and it was difficult to update. COLLABOR8 funded a new website and we took the opportunity to update the content.

"Now we've got a better internet presence and better content on our site."

www.bootsbikesbunkhousesco.uk

Horseriding group benefits from links

Horseriding has long been one of the activities people seek out when they come to the Brecon Beacons National Park.

The businesses in the sector are mainly long-established and are used to working independently from each other.

So getting together as a group wasn't something that came naturally, explained Cordelia Passmore who runs Llantony Riding and Trekking.

"As businesses we all offer something different - some focus on lessons for novices, some do guided treks and others cater for experienced riders.

"Because of the great variety we didn't necessarily think we could promote ourselves as a group but actually the variety is a good thing because it means we can cater for all levels of experience between us," she said.

Now, having attended regular group meetings along with six other group members, Cordelia knows which business to pass enquiries along to if she can't cater for them.

"We don't do lessons here so I pass them on to Golden Castle, or anyone with little children I tend to recommend Cantref," she said.

As well as simply exchanging information, the group benefited from a COLLABOR8 funded new leaflet about riding in the Brecon Beacons, a refreshed horse riding website and a pop-up banner to take to trade shows and tourist information centres.

The group also worked on a code of conduct for riders in the National Park, addressing the sometimes thorny issue of erosion of paths with rights of way officers. Now all members of the group featured on the website have signed up to the code.

Last, but not least, COLLABOR8 funded advertising about their joint offering in British Horse magazine to help them reach an even wider audience.

"Promoting riding is definitely better done with a larger group offering more variety," said Cordelia. "The aim is to draw people into riding, whatever their ability, then show them the choice we can offer."



Outdoor Providers Group takes joint action

With 190 members, the South Wales Outdoor Activity Providers Group (or SWOAPG) is one of the biggest clusters of tourism businesses in the National Park.

The group, which also includes companies based outside the park in a wide area across South Wales, started in 1990 with just 24 providers.

The number of providers has grown so much that it became clear help was needed in the form of a paid group co-ordinator. That's where Gary Evans of outdoor training provider Hawk Associates stepped in.

With funding from COLLABOR8 he assumed the role of group co-ordinator in July 2010. "With the number of outdoor activity companies growing so fast it was essential for us - and for the National Park Authority - to have a way of speaking with one voice," said Gary. "As providers can get our point across because we're stronger together, and the Park Authority knows who to come to when it wants to get its message out to a large number of providers. It's a partnership approach." One of the perennial issues for the group is access agreements - when outdoor groups want to use land that is protected or conserved.

Just one of the agreements the group has negotiated since the advent of Gary's paid role - strongly supported by a dedicated committee of volunteers was established - was over access to the Sychryd Gorge on the western edge of the National Park.

The land is owned by the Forestry Commission and there was concern that gorge-walking groups were damaging the delicate ecosystem there.

Working together with the Forestry Commission we developed a code of conduct for gorge-walking providers. "The providers understand the issues now - because the banks of the gorge are constantly being sprayed with water there are some rare species of moss and liverwort there.

"Unknowingly gorge-walkers were trampling along the banks of the gorge but now there is clear guidance on where they can walk and everyone is happy." The group is now in the process of negotiating open access to previously closed-off reservoirs in the area with the help of the National Park Authority's Splash Project officer.

"Now the group is much better organised and everyone knows where to come if they have a problem. We're all working to get people into the area any way we can."

Under COLLABOR8, clusters agree to a code of practice committing themselves to common objectives.

This binds the group together and helps everyone understand what it is there for. The key qualities that COLLABOR8 was set up to promote were sustainability, sense of place and quality and clusters committed themselves to working towards those aims. For business, this was a natural way of working – unless you can agree your objectives you will never achieve anything.

Trans-national working

COLLABOR8 is a transnational project and everyone has learnt a huge amount from the other eight partners.

In total 48 people from the Brecon Beacons took part in trans-national exchanges – learning how other people address problems is always an important part of generating new ideas.

Not only that, but the National Park has been able to pass on green tourism ideas to South Kerry in Ireland and the South Downs National Park.

Better still, businesses in the Park have been able to swap good ideas and best practice with other similar regions.

“The innovative South Downs Green Tourism Network has had a big impact on the National Park’s own Good Business Sense programme,” said Richard Tyler, Sustainable Tourism Manager at the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority.

“Trans-national working really does work – the Park’s successes have been our partners’ successes and have shown that collaboration is what it’s all about.”

Walking festival draws new visitors to Hay

It’s fair to say that Hay-on-Wye is already on the tourist trail, thanks to the town’s annual literature festival. But a group of tourism business owners recognised they needed to think of ways to promote the town outside the literary festival season.

Stimulated by COLLABOR8, Hay Tourism Group was established in 2009 to do just that – with the project offering to help boost tourism year round.

First COLLABOR8 paid for a survey of the town’s visitors. It revealed many are walkers who use it as a base to explore the Brecon Beacons. The group latched onto the idea of promoting the town as a walkers’ destination.

Firstly they applied for ‘Walkers Are Welcome’ accreditation – walkers’ breakfasts and ‘muddy boots welcome’ signs started popping up in town. Next, they set about more ambitious plans – to create a new walking festival.

“In late 2008 it became clear we needed to attract different kinds of tourists to Hay,” said Anna Heywood of Hay-based Drover Holidays and a founder member of Hay Tourism Group.

“We get visitors all year round and 90% of those who responded to the survey said how important walking was to them so a walking festival seemed ideal.”

In 2011 they held the first festival – with COLLABOR8 proving invaluable in funding Anna’s time as a part-time co-ordinator for the three-day event. “I was employed for half a day a week for the six months leading up to the festival. Without that it would have been really hard to get it off the ground,” explained Anna.

Events were so well attended in 2011 (there were 23 walks and evening events) that plans are under way for 2012’s walking festival to be a five-day event. “People really enjoyed the festival and it attracted quite a high percentage of local people too,” said Anna. “I led one walk and one local lady who came along said to me, ‘I’m so glad you organised this walk. I would never have had the confidence to do it without a guide.’”

Town businesses are well and truly behind the event now and the hope is to make it self-funding. “It hasn’t directly brought in business to us personally,” said Anna. “But the fact that I’ve got to know local businesses by way of volunteering means we can refer enquiries on to each other. I also feel that people were sceptical about running another festival in Hay but now I feel we’ve got the respect of key organisations in the town and I think the festival’s got a bright future.”



Richard Tyler

Sustainable Tourism Manager

01874 620405

Email richard.tyler@breconbeacons.org

Carol Williams

Tourism Growth Area Officer

01874 620478

Email carol.williams@breconbeacons.org

Catrin Parish Marks

Sustainable Tourism Officer

01874 620490

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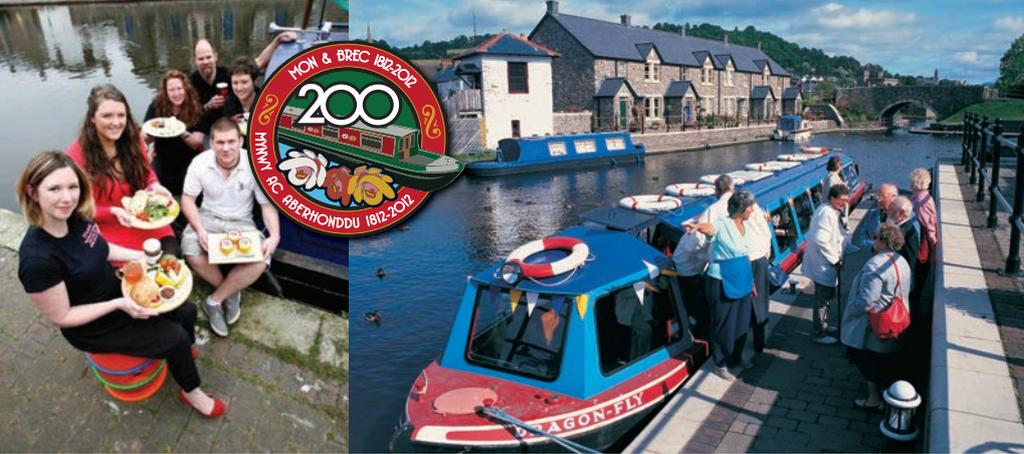
Brecon Beacons National Park Authority

Plas y Ffynnon, Cambrian Way
Brecon, Powys LD3 7HP

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Design: [touchdown 07973 711523](http://touchdown.co.uk)

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journalist and media consultant, Everymedia Solutions Ltd.
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National Park partnership with Brecon Beacons Tourism helps spread COLLABOR8 word

Six years ago there was no trade body for tourism businesses in the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Even three years ago when COLLABOR8 funding came in, the group of businesses Brecon Beacons Tourism (BBT) represented was small.

But what started with 50 members and a volunteer co-ordinator has blossomed into an organisation representing 285 businesses and run by paid staff.

“We’ve grown exponentially and COLLABOR8 has certainly contributed,” said Punch Maughan, now executive director of BBT which is funded by the Brecon Beacons National Park, Visit Wales, Powys Council and member fees.

“When we started out it was totally volunteer-run. COLLABOR8 has paid for my time so I’ve been able to attend lots of National Park meetings on behalf of members. That has meant that as a group of businesses we’ve been able to have an input into the decision-making process which we wouldn’t have had before,” said Punch, who also runs Glynmeddig Barn, near Sennybridge.

Because COLLABOR8 has generated many new events, BBT has more to sell too, explained Punch. “Whether it’s Llandoverly’s Sheep Festival or an additional walking festival in Hay on Wye it makes a difference – it’s all added to the mix,” said Punch. But the main benefit has been greater collaboration between businesses. “Before I think we were all a bit suspicious of each other. But we would all have had less of a voice without working together,” she added.

Contact Punch Maughan at BBT 01874 638835 or email info@breconbeaconstourism.co.uk

Canalman’s lunch on the menu for anniversary

You’ve heard of a Ploughman’s lunch – now meet the Canalman’s lunch, coming to pubs along the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal in its bicentennial year.

It’s one of the ways tourism clusters and their businesses along the canal’s length are being encouraged to market themselves during the canal’s 200th birthday celebrations.

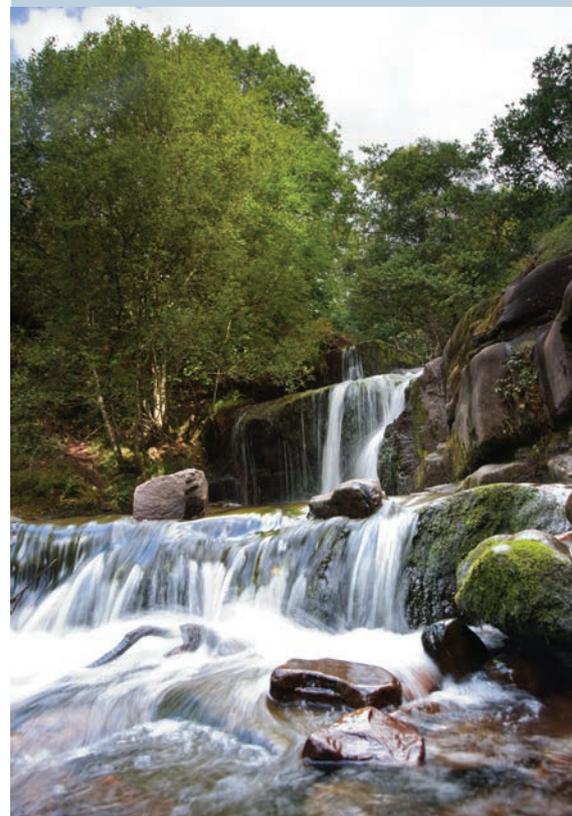
As part of her role as COLLABOR8 and Powys County Council funded canal co-ordinator, Alison Crawshaw has organised a variety of locally-produced food to be included in the Canalman’s.

Choices include three special canal-themed beers made by Brecon Brewing, Blaenafon Cheddar’s Canalman’s Cheese and Usk River’s Brecon Bargee Chutney.

Alison Crawshaw has been funded to help co-ordinate the canal celebrations and maximise their impact on tourism businesses in the year leading up to June 2012.

She has also produced a newsletter and Facebook page to publicise events. With an emphasis on publicity and co-ordination – Alison has a background in marketing and festival organisation – the role has seen her guide local groups in Talybont, Llangynidr and Brecon in planning their own celebrations. She’s also worked with Brecon History Society on canal-themed family activities for summer half term.

For more information www.facebook.com/MonmouthshireAndBreconCanal



Brecon Beacons
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