

News bulletin - 2nd February 2010

How fragile is our dark sky? Are our renowned Norfolk nights getting slowly less dark? Now you can help maintain them....

Last year, several British National Parks and similar organisations began the process of obtaining International Dark Sky Park status as part of the International Year of Astronomy 2009. Galloway in Scotland is the first National Park to get this award.

The Norfolk Coast is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the NNAS committee approached their controlling body to see if they would be interested in NNAS conducting a light survey on their behalf. They offered to provide part of the money, despite NNAS having started an application with the National Lottery to obtain funds for the necessary equipment. We have just been informed that between the two funds we will receive a total of £2988. The money will purchase two Dark Sky meters and a Digital Camera with a Fish-eye Lens plus the necessary supporting equipment.

One reason for alerting you to this now is that 'The Big Lottery Fund' will release the information to the media on 17th February so it is remotely possible that the local press will be in touch with us about the project. If not, we will probably contact them. However, our survey can start earlier to beat the Summer time twilight deadline.

The project is called Norfolk Nightscape. It involves taking darkness readings at regular intervals, approximately two miles apart, along the 80 mile coastal strip plus some photographic records. These will provide a benchmark so that subsequent monitoring can take place to identify changes. As we seem to be treading new ground here, methods are likely to evolve through practise. We can obviously only do this work on cloudless, moonless nights and we all know how rare these are! Current plans are that the survey will begin next month and continue until mid April when summer twilight makes it impossible. Then we have to find ways of presenting the results to interested parties. The Norfolk Coast organisation will assist in circulating the results through their publications and contacts.

If you want any further information or want to be involved in this important initiative to protect our good astronomical skies contact John Prockter or David Waites.

Further details of the project and how members can be practically involved will be presented at our forthcoming NNAS talk – date to be arranged.