



Dogsledding in South-Estonia, Haanja - Pille Saarnits



European  
Ecotourism  
Network

EEN/ECOLNET

Newsletter

Issue 5

November 2013

ECOLNET PARTNERS WISH YOU ALL A HAPPY, HEALTHY AND GREEN 2014!

## The 2nd European Ecotourism Conference took place in Poiana Braşov, Romania, 23-25 October 2013, supported by the ECOLNET project

The 2nd European Ecotourism Conference held in Poiana Braşov, Romania, from 23 to 25 October, was also scheduled to be the end-of-project Conference of the ECOLNET project. Organised by our Romanian partner, the Association of Ecotourism in Romania, the conference was a great success, bringing together more than 80 professionals of Ecotourism from 22 countries! They learned about the European Ecotourism Labelling Standard -EETLS and the European Ecotourism Network - EEN, exchanged knowledge and experience, discussed best practice in ecotourism and debated the future of ecotourism in Europe.

The four workshops organised in the context of the conference offered a unique opportunity to the participants for information exchange and debate. The topics included:

**Improving the benefits provided by Certification programmes and standards.** One of the main issues raised concerned the EETLS and its application at national and European levels and its complementary function in relation to existing ecotourism certificates and labels. Various options have been considered so that the implementation of EETLS can be cost-effective and give the maximum benefit to the ecotourism sector. The discussion also explored how

quality certification schemes may contribute effectively to business development and marketing.

### **Multi-stakeholder approaches to developing Ecotourism destinations.**

Specific practices and tools were discussed in connection to these approaches: tools to create, maintain and strengthen the connection between protected areas, local administration and tourism within an ecotourism destination; and practices to encourage joint marketing and management of different ecotourism destinations.

### **Practical tools for conservation and local development.**

The possibilities to maximise the benefit brought in by ecotourism to protected areas and local communities were explored. Participants mentioned practical methods to support nature conservation and local development through ecotourism, avoiding conflicts but providing benefits for both of them.

### **Product development strategies for better visitor experience.**

It was agreed by all that the quality of the visitors' experience depends on good interpretation and appropriate information offered to them. It also depends on the quality of some main 'ingredients' of an ecotourism destination (well-preserved nature and culture, active community,



*A view from one of the plenary sessions of the conference*

opportunities for involvement, etc.) that should be monitored and promoted on the European tourism market. All these aspects were discussed and illustrated with examples.

TO ACCESS THE CONFERENCE RESULTS AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEBATE JOIN THE **EEN PLATFORM**

All plenary sessions and workshops slides are also available on the [ECOLNET website](http://ecolnet.org)

For video recording of the conference, look at <http://european-ecotourism.eu/>

To take part in the ongoing discussion, visit the [European Ecotourism Network platform](http://european-ecotourism.eu/)

## DECLARATION OF THE 2<sup>ND</sup> EUROPEAN ECOTOURISM CONFERENCE

A strong point of the Conference was the adoption of the **Declaration of The 2nd European Ecotourism Conference** through which the professionals of the ecotourism sector expressed their needs and their common principles for a sustainable development of ecotourism destinations.

*"Following the deliberations and discussions of the participants of the 2nd European Ecotourism Conference*

*We recognize these common needs:*

- *To bring sustainability and nature conservation to the ecotourism destination regions;*
- *To develop a common understanding of ecotourism in Europe as a conservation and development tool;*
- *To co-ordinate communications for ecotourism destinations in order to attract guests;*
- *To communicate the benefits of ecotourism to policy and decision makers.*

*and,*

*We agree with the following ecotourism destination concept*

*Ecotourism destinations in Europe should have:*

- *A protected area associated with the destination;*
- *A critical mass of local ecotourism businesses;*
- *A sustainability plan under implementation, in developing ecotourism;*
- *Nature and local culture as the main ingredients in product development and marketing;*
- *Active participation of local communities based on shared values, empowered through education and awareness raising.*

*We, the 80 participants from 22 European countries, including ecotourism and sustainable tourism associations and networks, ecotourism businesses, education institutions, experts and consultants on ecotourism, have endorsed this statement and committed ourselves to use it as a guide for future action*

*Brasov, Romania, 25th of October 2013"*

## ECOLNET National workshop in Finland

by Pekka Alhojärvi,  
EEN Finland

This workshop, held in Helsinki on the 18th Nov. 2013, rounded up a series of 9 workshops that took place during the ECOLNET project. 23 participants coming from sustainable tourism organisations, education institutes, ecotourism businesses and certification agencies, as well as NGOs, discussed the recent and likely future developments in the field of labelling standards and certification schemes addressing sustainable tourism and ecotourism, with special reference to the EETLS. They also debated on the way these schemes could impact knowledge networks and educational curricula, tools and materials.

Among the speakers, Mr. Pekka Alhojärvi, chairing the event and representing the

European Ecotourism Network, Ms. Katja Winogradow, Dr. Lasse Loven, chairman of the EUROPARC Sustainable Tourism Working Group, Mr. Matti Tapaninen from Metsähallitus (Finnish Forest and Park Service) and Dr. Tuija Sievänen from the Finnish Forest Research Institute (Metla) held active discussions with the participants on ecotourism practices in protected and recreational areas in Finland.



Interesting proposals were put forward and decisions were made, including:

- ✚ The creation of the EEN Finland to

which all participants were invited to join.

- ✚ A conceptualisation of this EEN Finland and the definition of its role for the
- ✚ A discussion about the future to be held by a working group managed by Pekka Alhojärvi
- ✚ A joint task force to be set up consisting of members of research and education institutes, NGOs, SMEs and Metsähallitus, to try and answer the need for further criteria and indicators specific to the Finnish ecotourism sector.
- ✚ Regarding educational aspects, the EEN, EETLS and ECOLNET will be presented as new development, accompanied by its own tools, at the Annual Meeting of the Education Institutes of Tourism in Finland, Savonlinna 21-22.11.2013
- ✚ All these proposals and issues will be introduced to and discussed in the EEN Finland forum.

## The Handbook: a new resource offering user instructions for the EETLS e-evaluation tools and the Ecotourism training packages!

The EETLS Handbook is now available and can be downloaded from the EEN's website and online community!

It focuses on the products developed by the European Ecotourism Network and the ECOLNET project, namely, the European



Ecotourism Labelling Standard –EETLS and the accompanying learning material and online evaluation tools.

The Handbook targets ecotourism businesses wishing to prove

EETLS compliance; agencies assessing the quality of sustainable tourism or ecotourism; and education/research organisations actively involved in ecotourism. The Handbook aims to:

- ✚ provide all ecotourism professionals, especially ecotourism businesses and quality certification agencies, – with a simple and efficient methodology for using the EETLS and the evaluation and learning tools developed by ECOLNET;
- ✚ help the users understand the structure and content of the EETLS, obtain a working knowledge of the EETLS criteria and indicators, and provide the means for assessing the compliance of business practices with the EETLS.
- ✚ Guide the users of the self-assessment tool and the integrated evaluation tool to proceed with the rating of their organisation on the basis of the criteria and indicators of EETLS, adopting a step-by-step methodology.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Handbook will be soon available in the 9 languages of the project and can be downloaded from the website <http://www.ecotourism-network.eu/en-ecotourism-standard/en-online-evaluation> (English version)

## Ecotourism Ireland

by Mary Mulvey, Trainer & CEO of EcoTourism Ireland

The mission of Ecotourism Ireland is to develop high quality ecotourism experiences for the tourism market. We strive to provide an advocacy role to help all our policy makers in Ireland to achieve this aim. These policy makers include, but are not limited to, community network groups, local authorities, Irish tour operators and Government agencies.

We aim to deliver high quality services ranging from ecotourism mentoring, training and certification for a wide variety of business needs. The Ecotourism Ireland label has been recognised by GSTC Global Sustainable Tourism Council. Furthermore, we wish to keep Ireland up to date and aware of the best international developments in ecotourism and share our experiences with others in the field.

We receive no core funding for our activities. We charge a sustainable fee for our work. Since we are a non profit organisation, any profit made in our venture will be reinvested to further develop our role and endeavours.

The Burren and Cliffs of Mother Geopark, awarded UNESCO recognised Global Geopark status in 2011, and Loop Head, which was awarded the Irish Times Best Place to Holiday in 2013. The Burren Geopark estimates that in its catchment area with a population of circa 7,000, there are 550 tourism enterprises (see [www.burrenecotourism.com](http://www.burrenecotourism.com)). The engagement of the Burren Geopark with local communities (named "Burren Connect") resulted in the development of the Burren Ecotourism Network, now with a membership of 39 local businesses, funded by Failte Ireland and by Clare Local Development Company.

We currently are working in 5 destinations in Ireland Meath, Galway, Clare, North Cork and North Kerry and Ecotourism networks are emerging with certified members and supported by Local Development Leader Companies.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

EcoTourism Ireland: [www.ecotourismireland.ie/](http://www.ecotourismireland.ie/)



At World Travel Market 2013, two of the 8 finalists in this year's World Responsible Tourism Awards, Best Destination for Responsible Tourism category, were Irish. Indeed, both were from the County Clare –

  
EcoTourism Ireland



## A new Greek Ecotourism Society!

By Isabelle Trinquette, PRISMA

Ecotourism in Greece has a great potential as a mean of reconciling ecological conservation with economic development, but this sector still needs support and a better coordination on a regional and national level.

Initiated through the ECOLNET project, the Greek Ecotourism Network made great strides during its last meeting held in Athens. Representatives of ecotourism businesses, nature tour operators, nature conservation NGOs, as well as nature conservation and ecotourism experts, and other stakeholders promoting ecotourism, decided to create the Greek Ecotourism Society.

The main tasks of this non-profit organisation will be to promote professional training and the transfer of good practices; to improve the marketing of ecotourism in Greece; to strengthen networking between ecotourism businesses and stakeholders in Greece and in Europe; and to improve and ensure the quality of the ecotourism offer using the certification scheme of the EETLS.

Let's wish a great success to this promising initiative!



*Ecotourists gaze at a frozen river in Zagori mountains, Greece*



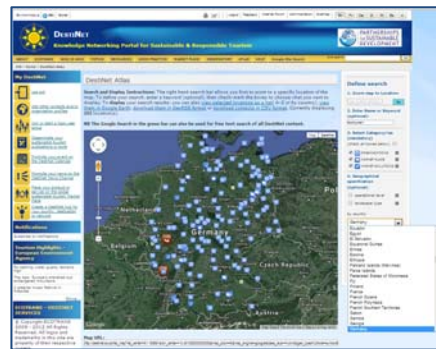
*Ecotourists visit the Greek islands during the winter – magic at Kythnos*

## Ecotourism for Professionals: Mapping the European Ecotourism Community

By Gordon Sillence & Herbert Hamele  
- Ecotrans-DestiNet

The ECOLNET project has been set out to build an online learning community for ecotourism quality standards, based on the European Eco-Tourism Labelling Standard (EETLS). Alongside EEN's main online community platform, <http://ecolnet.ning.com>, ECOTRANS, as co-leaders of the networking effort, created the *Ecotrans Network for Sustainable Tourism Development map*.

*Map of Ecotourism in Member States – Example of Germany*



You can see the practical results of the mapping by clicking through the following links to the EEN pages on DestiNet, which will take you from the [European overview](#) of the EEN with ECOLNET partners' information integrated at the European level, to a [country by country choice](#), then, focusing on the example of [ecotourism in Germany](#), you will see an example of how stakeholders and their expertise are being [mapped at the national level](#).

DestiNet has also its own set of on-line professional networking tools for stakeholders to use for themselves to build the EEN, including web space and targeted communications facilities for promoting your site, and importantly, organised document storage for collective knowledge-base building.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

EEN on DestiNet: <http://destinet.eu/who-who/civil-society-ngos/european-ecotourism-network>

If you wish to know more about using DestiNet for ecotourism development in your country, please contact Herbert Hamele or Gordon Sillence - [contact@ecotrans.de](mailto:contact@ecotrans.de)

## Scottish Consortium for Rural Research Seminar: How do we achieve nature tourism growth in Scotland?

By Kathy Velander, Edinburgh Napier University

Recently, at Our Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh, our partner, the Edinburgh Napier University, and other eight speakers (Forestry Commission, Scotland, RSPB, SNH, Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Tourism Alliance, Seabird Centre, Southern Uplands Partnership, Visit Scotland) presented their views on how to achieve growth in nature tourism in Scotland to an audience of around 40 representatives from the business, NGO, government and academic sectors.

Some of the potential mechanisms suggested included inspiring the next generation to participate in outdoor activities, the need for improved broad band services throughout Scotland, better protection of nature to ensure a high-quality experience for tourists and excellent habitats for wildlife, ensure the accuracy and comparability of data gathered by improving research methodology, develop human capital so local communities can benefit from additional tourism, consider more partnerships and ensure quality of products and experiences (e.g. standards and accreditation such as EETLS, GTBS, VisitScotland).

In addition opportunities and challenges were identified linked to education, infrastructure, the need for innovation and change, investment, marketing, collaboration, leadership, customer management, facilitation, research, etc. A prioritisation process will be carried out on the results with all participants invited to assist in this procedure. The results will then be used to develop strategic action plans and disseminated to individuals involved in all aspects of this sector.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Presentations are available on the SCRR web site: <http://www.scr.ac.uk/>

## ECOLNET is supporting the European Ecotourism Community...

By Fouli Papageorgiou, PRISMA

The project ECOLNET's main objective was to create an European Ecotourism knowledge network to bring together a variety of stakeholders for sharing knowledge on ecotourism in Europe and promote the quality standard in this sector. Now that the ECOLNET project has come to its end, its legacy is carried on to the future through the European Ecotourism Network – EEN and its home, the EEN online community, hosted at <http://ecolnet.ning.com>

This multi-disciplinary and transnational Network is now active, connecting ecotourism practitioners to exchange experience and facilitate the transfer of knowledge for the benefit of the ecotourism sector, nature conservation and policy making. The platform provides direct access to the training resources and the quality assessment tools developed by the ECOLNET project.

At this moment, the online EEN community counts 320 members and the "sister" LinkedIn Group "European Ecotourism Knowledge Network" 215 members, whereas more than 1500 persons follow the Facebook page of the EEN .

You can join the EEN platform  
<http://ecolnet.ning.com/>



the Facebook page  
<https://www.facebook.com/ecolnet>  
and



the EEN LinkedIn group  
<http://www.linkedin.com/groups/European-Ecotourism-Knowledge-Network>



## ... and the piloting businesses that complied with the EETLS!

The piloting phase of the ECOLNET project ended! 60 ecotourism businesses carried out the self-assessment and 30 of them proceeded to apply the Integrated Evaluation process, monitored and assisted by an external evaluator!

It was a great experience for both the ECOLNET team and the piloting businesses, who, not only tested the EETLS evaluation and learning tools, but also drew lessons for

the future and built up their enthusiasm for quality ecotourism.

Some of the piloting businesses received really good ratings on the EETLS criteria, thus demonstrating that EETLS is really a feasible and attainable standard.

You can discover some of these piloting businesses on <http://www.ecotourism-network.eu/en-ecotourism-standard/en-adopt-criteria>

## Take part in the ECOLNET Photo request!

By Elena Barka, PRISMA

After your very warm and enthusiastic response to our "What is Ecotourism. Say it with a photo" request, we decided to launch another photo race.

This time we got inspired by the festive spirit, and we asked you to welcome the brand new 2014 with an ecotourism picture. So, "SEND YOUR WISHES WITH AN ECOTOURISM PICTURE" was the best finishing touch for 2013!

Photos can be found on EEN's online community: <http://ecolnet.ning.com/photo/album/list>



*Ecotourism in Greece - Eumelia Agrotourism & Guesthouse*



*Ecotourism in Estonia, Vormsi island - Tarmo Pilving*

PUBLICATION

EEN/ ECOLNET

Newsletter

Issue 5

[www.ecotourism-network.eu](http://www.ecotourism-network.eu)

Published by the ECOLNET partnership

Editing: Isabelle Trinquelle, PRISMA

Text contributions by:

Mary Mulvey, EcoTourism Ireland  
Pekka Alhojärvi, Silvicultura Ltd  
Elena Barka, PRISMA  
Isabelle Trinquelle, PRISMA  
Fouli Papageorgiou, PRISMA  
and all the participants of the 2d European Ecotourism Conference (Declaration)!

Photos: Association Ecotourism Romania, Ecotourism Ireland, Norman Ojanen, Fouli Papageorgiou, Isabelle Trinquelle, Pille Saarnits

All rights reserved

European Ecotourism Network, 2013

Project Nr: 143418-LLP-12008-1-GR-KA3-KA3NW

With the support of the Lifelong Learning Programme, Key Activity 3, ICT of the European Union

This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein



Lifelong Learning Programme