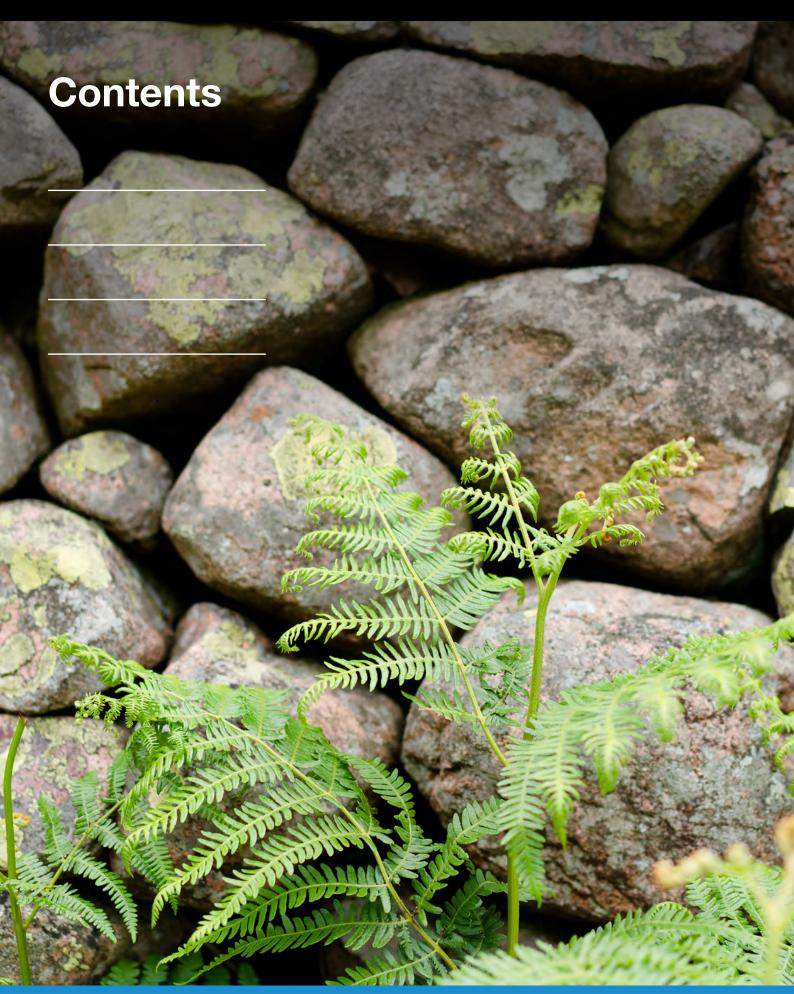


# activetravel group

**Sustainability Report 2024** 









# Introduction

After more than two decades in the industry, our collective passion for delivering our guests inspiring and memorable holiday experiences remains undiminished. Over the same period, our shared ambition to ensure our holidays deliver a wider positive impact has grown.

The necessity for all tourism businesses to ensure that the places we love are protected through responsible and sustainable travel has never been greater or more pressing. When done right, tourism can be an incredibly positive force for good, providing not only fantastic memories for travellers but vital benefits for host communities, economies and environments. In a post-pandemic world with a greater appreciation of health, the outdoors and community, we believe there are more people out there than ever before seeking travel experiences which not only enrich their lives but also the destinations they visit.

By taking the significant step of publishing The Active Travel Group's first annual sustainability report, we are making a commitment to providing greater insight and transparency on our sustainability performance sharing progress against the goals and targets we have set.

Sustainability is a process of continuous improvement rather than an end point. As this first report illustrates, sharing our progress isn't designed to solely celebrate success (although there are some successes we are proud of) but to highlight some of the challenges the industry is currently facing and how, through collective action, we may be able to create solutions which benefit communities, environments and customers.

While this publication is the first annual report on our sustainability performance, it is important to recognise the collective efforts on climate, conservation and community action that have been an integral part of each business within the Active Travel Group for many years. In several cases, these individual and team efforts go back more than 20 years and illustrate just how committed our teams are to ensuring our business leaves a positive impact in the places where we work and visit.



Craig Burton
Chief Executive
Officer



**Paul Easto**Chief Sustainability
Officer



# Key Highlights



Detailed Carbon Audit completed for all ATG Brands TOTAL carbon footprint Scope 1, 2 & 3 7,165t CO<sub>2</sub>e



Wilderness Group
Scope 1 & 2
emissions
reduced by

16%

4

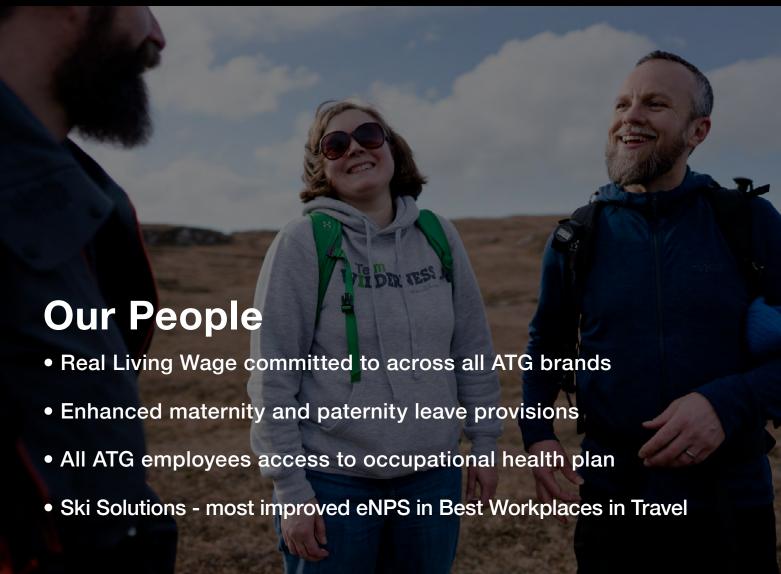
4 pilot EVs introduced to the fleet

400 hrs volunteering completed by ATG Staff in 2023

Wilderness Conservation & Community Fund exceeds £100,000 since launch with 5 key environmental and social projects supported in 2023.







### **Our Customers**

We welcomed over 25,000 guests across the ATG brands delivering exceptional levels of customer satisfaction:







Wilderness Ireland
Trustpilot: 4.8

Wilderness England

Trustpilot: 4.4



The Active Travel Group is the UK's leading independent travel group delivering active and authentic travel experiences to customers from around the world. The Group comprises five brands spanning a range of activities, destinations and seasons. From office and operational bases across the UK, Ireland, France and Italy, the Active Travel Group hosts over 25,000 guests per annum who seek high quality human powered adventures.

# 25,000 human powered adventures

The Active Travel Group ("ATG") is committed to being an industry leader in sustainability performance and Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance ("ESG"). With a comprehensive, forward-thinking and tailored approach across the group's brands, the ATG holds the core belief that travel and tourism can be a positive force for good and for change in the world. The environmental and social impacts of our business are as important as our financial performance. Our business activities and operations are designed to deliver positive benefits to local economies and communities and minimise any adverse impacts on the environment.

Operating on a transparent basis and being held accountable is equally important. This annual sustainability report is the first we have produced and serves not only to highlight progress but also share the learnings and challenges we have faced over the past 12 months in becoming a better business.

The ATG's Sustainability and ESG policies are supported by our investment partner, Mobeus Equity Partners LLP, who are signatories to the Principles of Responsible Investment.







# **Our Approach**

The ATG's strategic approach to sustainability is defined by action in the following three areas:



### Climate

Taking bold steps to set an example to the tourism industry on climate change with the goal of achieving a minimum of 50% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030.



### Conservation

Supporting grass root campaigns, action and other work relevant to each of the ATG brands.



### Community

Building a great place to work and collaborating with communities where we work to maximise the benefits of tourism.

Each year the Management Teams of the respective brands agree objectives, targets and actions for these three sustainability pillars. These are then reviewed and approved by the Board as an integral part of the organisation's commitment to robust Environmental and Social Governance ("ESG").

This report provides a comprehensive insight into the implementation of this strategy over the past 12 months. Our carbon reporting covers the period 1 May 2022 to 30 April 2023 to align with the financial year of the ATG. In this report we share progress and achievements alongside challenges and ambition which we hope will help inspire and inform our travellers, our team, our partners and others within the travel industry and beyond.



### **Our Brands**



The highest ranked tour operator on Trustpilot, Wilderness Scotland offers an inspiring range of guided and customised adventure holidays, in the most remote and beautiful regions of Scotland. The Wilderness Scotland team know how to create enriching adventure holidays and know the wild places of Scotland better than anyone.



Specialists in offering a range of adventure holidays, tours and incredible wilderness experiences. Wilderness Ireland takes their clients to the most remote and beautiful regions of Ireland, all while staying at the most welcoming accommodations and delivering outstanding customer service.



Wilderness England creates incredible journeys to the wild and magical outdoor spaces across Yorkshire, the Lake District, Northumberland, the Cotswolds and Cornwall. Providing inspiring active experiences, immerse yourself in the unique landscapes, history, culture and wildlife on a Wilderness England adventure.

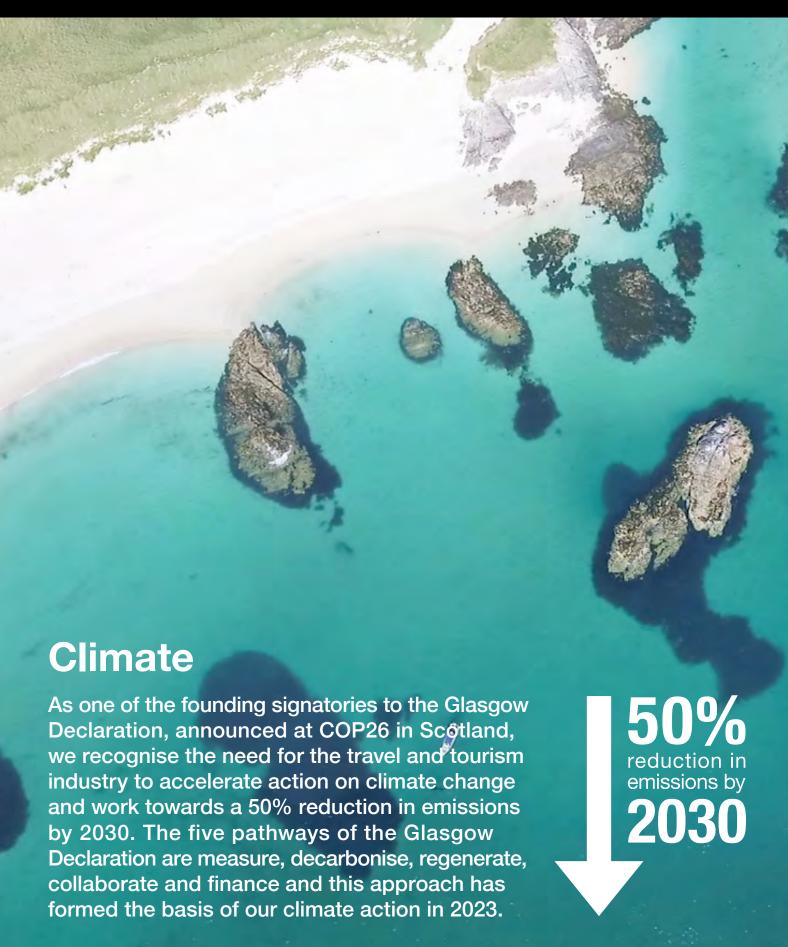


Cycling for Softies is a luxury cycling tour operator providing gourmet cycling adventures in Europe. These are leisurely cycling tours winding through vineyards and staying in high end accommodation where the emphasis is as much on the food and wine as the cycling. Welcome to life in the easy lane...



Britain's original ski tailor-made ski tour operator, Ski Solutions has been arranging ski holidays for over 30 years across Europe and North America. The Ski Solutions team are all skiing experts, and their wealth of knowledge and passion for the mountains will ensure their clients experience a truly memorable ski holiday.







Accurate measurement of an organisation's carbon footprint is the fundamental starting point for developing a robust and science based approach to climate action. Having a baseline understanding of our carbon emissions across the brands has been a priority over the past year. Empowered with this knowledge, we are able to set accurate and ambitious targets for emission reductions across all areas of the business.

Leading the way for the Active Travel Group ("ATG") has been The Wilderness Group (comprising the three Wilderness brands in UK & Ireland). One of the very first tour operators worldwide to fully disclose its calculated carbon footprint and include a "carbon score" for each and every trip, The Wilderness Group are at the forefront of the group's action on climate change. Initially calculated in 2021 (using a 2019-20 baseline), the year from 1 April 2022 to 30 May 2023 has provided the first opportunity to audit progress towards reduction targets and these are detailed below.

Following close behind Wilderness, our European cycle brand, Cycling for Softies completed its carbon footprint calculation in 2022 and published the carbon score for each trip on the website in the same year. 2023-24 will be the first year in which this calculation can be audited and targets reviewed.

Ski Solutions is the ATG's biggest brand by customer volume and, as such, has presented the biggest challenge to robustly calculate its carbon footprint. This project commenced in Summer 2023 and was successfully completed at the end of the year.

### 2022-23 Carbon Footprint by Brand

The data shared below is shown in absolute terms for the 12 months to 30 April 2023 i.e. total CO<sub>2</sub>e and on a CO<sub>2</sub>e per guest per night. The latter is our chosen intensity metric to determine progress towards climate change targets, recognising that we are a business which is growing on an annual basis.

The baseline year for The Wilderness Group and Cycling for Softies is 2019-20 having regard to the disruption caused by Covid-19 in 2020-21 and 2021-22. For Ski Solutions the baseline year is 2022-23. Year on Year change is only reported for The Wilderness Group this year but will be available across the ATG in 2023-24. Full details on the framework methodology used for calculation can be found on The Wilderness Group websites.





# CO<sub>2</sub>e Audit Data 2022-23

Footprint	Wilderness Group		Cycling for Softies		Ski Solutions	
Scope 1 & 2	95t CO₂e	+13%	21t CO <sub>2</sub> e	N/A	None	
Scope 1 & 2 per guest	0.02t CO <sub>2</sub> e	-16%	0.03t CO <sub>2</sub> e	N/A		N/A
Scope 3: Business	31t CO₂e	N/A	20t CO <sub>2</sub> e	N/A	71t CO₂e	N/A
Scope 3: Trips ex flights <sup>1</sup>	544t CO <sub>2</sub> e	+45%	86t CO₂e	N/A	1,481t CO₂e	N/A
Scope 3: Trips per guest	0.12t CO₂e	+7%				
Scope 3: Included Flights		N/A	82t CO <sub>2</sub> e	N/A	4,721t CO <sub>2</sub> e	N/A
Scope 3: Guest's Own Travel <sup>2</sup>					39t CO <sub>2</sub> e	N/A
Total CO₂e	671t CO <sub>2</sub> e	+46%	210t CO <sub>2</sub> e	N/A	6,313t CO <sub>2</sub> e	N/A
Per Guest Per Day kg CO₂e	19kg CO₂e	+5%	18kg CO₂e	N/A	63kg CO₂e	N/A

Scope 1 & 2 emissions reduced by

16%

<sup>1.</sup> The Wilderness Group data does not include travel to and from the destination. Since customers come from the UK, Europe and around the world and book travel independently this is excluded from the audit data. Given the overall contribution of travel to the total carbon footprint of a holiday we recognise the limitations of this approach but currently have no way of accurately measuring mode of travel and distance travelled.

<sup>2.</sup> These emissions related to flights or other travel booked independently by customers to known Ski Solutions' destinations.





# **Progress & Reflection in 2023**

Following completion of The Wilderness Group carbon footprint analysis in 2021-22, the ambitious target of a 9% p.a. reduction (on the 2019-20 baseline) in Scope 1, 2 AND 3 emissions was set for the next decade. We knew this target, effectively a 90% reduction by 2030, was ambitious but wanted to challenge ourselves and galvanise action. These emission reduction plans were submitted and verified by the Science Based Targets Initiative in 2022.

Based upon experience over the past year, it is evident that while this target remains relevant for Scope 1 and 2 emissions, achieving a similar level of reductions in Scope 3 is more difficult than we appreciated at the point of setting the initial targets.

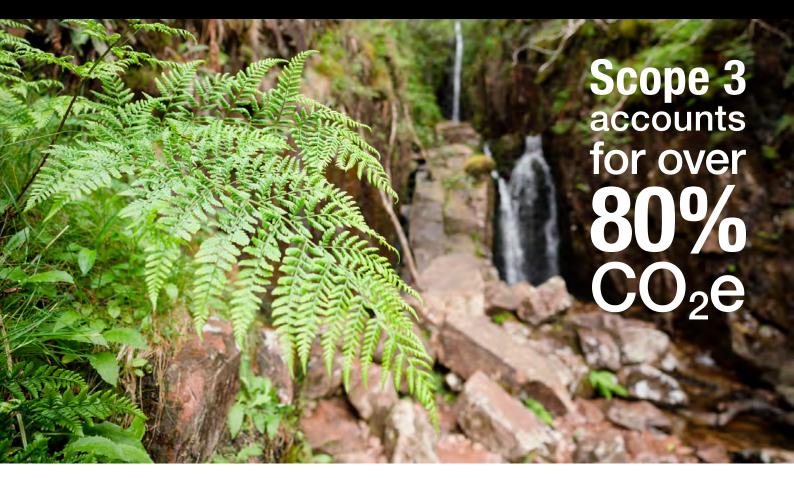
# activetravel



During 2022-23, using our per guest per day intensity metric, Scope 1 & 2 emissions reduced by 16% over the period reflecting smarter planning with the Wilderness vehicle fleet and the introduction of a pilot fleet of Electric Vehicles. However, over the same period Scope 3 emissions per guest per day increased by 12% which we consider likely due to the following: i) higher quality actual emissions data from suppliers; ii) greater demand for small group (2-4 persons) custom travel experiences and iii) higher than expected growth in the luxury travel segment. Therefore, while we have been successful in reducing Scope 1 & 2 emissions and increasing trip length (both key pillars of our carbon reduction strategy), our capacity to effect positive change in supply chain emissions with the Wilderness brands has been limited.







While achieving reductions in Scope 3 remains critically important across all of the ATG brands, it is evident that achieving the same level of reduction as Scope 1 and 2 is beyond our immediate control. For example, we can encourage and educate our suppliers to transition to low-carbon alternatives (e.g. renewable heating systems in hotels) but we cannot compel or finance such change. The challenge is significant since, with the progress made on Scope 1 and 2, Scope 3 trip emissions account for over 80% of the organisation's entire carbon footprint.

For 2023-24 and beyond we will continue to target a 9% p.a. reduction in Scope 1 & 2 emissions with a revised 5% p.a. target reduction for Scope 3 emissions. As the 2022-23 data suggests, a 5% reduction is still very challenging but remains in line with the 50% reduction in emissions by 2030 identified in the Glasgow Declaration and generally accepted as the level needed to limit global warming to 1.5°C. These targets remain consistent with our commitments made to the Science Based Targets Initiative.

The revised targets set for The Wilderness Group will be reflected in the first annual reduction targets set for Cycling for Softies in 2023-24. The reduction targets for Ski Solutions will be determined once analysis of the full carbon footprint audit has been completed in Spring 2024.





While our strict focus and priority is on emission reductions, we continue to evaluate the role carbon mitigation and removal projects can play in our carbon strategy. By 2030, our headline goal is to invest in projects that permanently remove carbon from the atmosphere for those business emissions which we cannot eliminate. Based upon investigations over the past year, it has become evident that viable options for carbon removal which will have an immediate positive impact are limited and this is likely to remain the case for some time. Therefore, during 2024 we will determine if alternative investment in carbon mitigation projects is an appropriate course of action.







Across the Active Travel Group	2024
Develop and embed staff awareness	Conduct carbon literacy training for all staff across the ATG brands
Reducing Scope 3 supply chain emissions	<ul> <li>Proactively work with accommodation partners to obtain precise emissions data</li> <li>Prioritise the best performing accommodations in new product development and custom itineraries</li> </ul>
Reducing Scope 3 business emissions	<ul> <li>Introduce departmental carbon budgets for regular business travellers</li> <li>For staff travel prioritise high performing accommodations with a verified carbon footprint</li> <li>Use only fish and plant-based menus at all business events</li> </ul>
Carbon Removal	Further investigate the viability of meaningful investment in carbon
Advocacy, Leadership & Collaboration	Continue to develop our role and presence within the industry, providing inspiration, sharing information and encouraging innovation on climate action





Ski Solutions	2024
Complete full audit of carbon footprint	<ul> <li>Complete full analysis of first carbon footprint for the Ski brand</li> <li>Develop emissions reduction strategy for the brand</li> </ul>
Reduce Scope 3 supply chain emissions	<ul> <li>Informed by the data from the carbon audit, identify those high performing accommodations and incorporate into new product development</li> <li>Re-activate action plan on train accessed ski itineraries disrupted by the pandemic</li> <li>Highlight and facilitate for guests transfers by rail and EV in the Alps</li> <li>Develop inventory of most carbon efficient aircraft and European routes</li> </ul>





The Wilderness Group	2024
Decarbonisation of the Wilderness vehicle fleet	Extend the EV pilot to replace more ICE fleet vehicles with electric in the UK
	Install further dedicated EV charging infrastructure at Scotland HQ
	Work with hotel partners to encourage more destination charging in key locations
Reduce Scope 3 supply chain emissions	<ul> <li>Develop plans to incorporate ½ of included meals as fish and plant-based in all itineraries</li> <li>Work across the food supply chain to reduce food waste in restaurants and picnic lunches</li> </ul>





Cycling for Softies	2024
Reduction Strategy	Develop emissions reduction strategy for the brand
Consumer Awareness	<ul> <li>Focus more marketing content and campaigns on the benefits of train travel - both in terms of experience and low carbon</li> <li>Develop positioning as one of the leading companies providing low-carbon active travel in Europe</li> </ul>

# **Climate Change Action**

### **Net Zero HQ**

The Wilderness Group's HQ is located in Aviemore in the heart of the Cairngorms National Park. Constructed on a brownfield site in 2018, the building was designed with environmentally sustainability at its core. Combining ultra-energy efficient materials and local timber, the office and operations building is powered by on-site renewable energy which provides heating and hot water. Externally there are multiple EV charge points and dedicated bike storage for staff commuting to work. The electricity used is from a renewable tariff which also powers the EV charge points used for business and staff vehicles. On an annual basis, the building delivers over 15,000kg of CO<sub>2</sub>e savings per annum compared to the business' previous office.



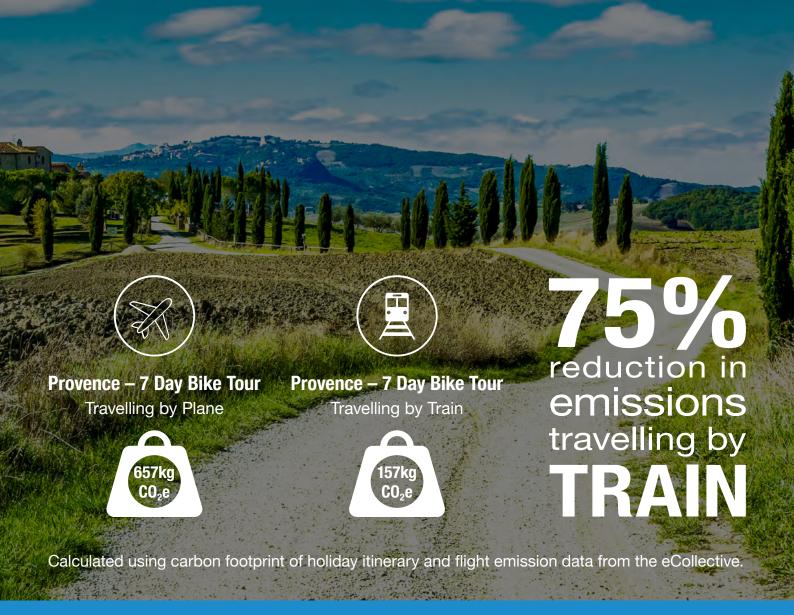


# **Climate Change Action**

### **Low Carbon Europe**

Cycling for Softies has been promoting low-impact travel for over 35 years. Having measured the brand's carbon footprint in 2022-23, the data revealed that the average Softies holiday has a footprint of 126kg CO<sub>2</sub>e per trip, or 18kg CO<sub>2</sub>e per day. With over 30% of guests choosing to travel by train to their destination (on average 30kg CO<sub>2</sub>e return), Softies offers one of the lowest carbon options for exploring Europe.

For context a 7 day bike tour in Provence staying in 4 star hotels and including return train travel from London would be 157kg CO<sub>2</sub>e which equates to a 75% reduction in emissions compared to taking the same trip by plane.





# Conservation

Each of our brands was made in the great outdoors. The mountains, forests and coastline of Europe are our home and never has the necessity of protecting the places we love been more important.

Across the Active Travel Group we work in many different ways to ensure the environmental impact of our business is minimised and, where possible, the benefits are maximised through responsible leadership and support for grass roots conservation.





At the core of the Active Travel Group's conservation efforts is the Wilderness Conservation and Community Fund ("WCCF"). Founded in 2010 by The Wilderness Group, this initiative allows travellers to give back to those environments and communities which are at the heart of the travel experience.



Since its launch in 2010, the WCCF has raised over £100,000 for grass roots environmental and community organisations dedicated to making the world a better place. The Wilderness Group absorbs all the administration costs of the fund and the projects, meaning the contributions made deliver maximum impact. In addition, the Wilderness staff team has the goal of committing 800+ hours of volunteering time per annum to those projects supported as part of our "Big 100" volunteer programme in 2024.

This volunteering commitment is now shared across all brands in the ATG and detailed further below in the Community section of this report.







# **Progress & Reflection in 2023**

During 2023, the emphasis has been on reactivating partnerships with long-standing conservation partners which were difficult to maintain during the pandemic.



For nearly two decades, The Wilderness Group has supported the conservation charity, the John Muir Trust in their work to protect and preserve the wild places of Scotland. We were delighted to continue as a Peak Partner with the Trust in 2022-23 and this will continue into 2023-24. Previous conservation projects with the Trust have included mountain path restoration on the Isle of Skye and native reforestation in Knoydart.

# Trees for LYfe

In a similar vein, our partnership with Trees for Life was renewed in 2022-23. With a vision of rewilding the Scottish Highlands, Trees for life are an ambitious charity with a big mission. During 2022-23 it was agreed that our support over the next three years would be committed to the Affric Highlands wild refuge project.



In the mountains of Europe, Ski Solutions, is a long-time partner of Protect our Winters (POW). POW's mission is to help those with a passion for the outdoors to achieve change, protecting the world today and for future generations. A priority for 2024 will be deepening our relationship with POW and supporting their work through partnership activations linking POW's mission with Ski Solutions' brand.

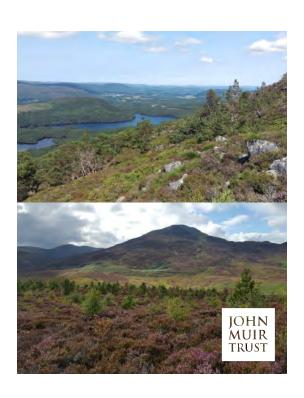
# **Our Key Projects**

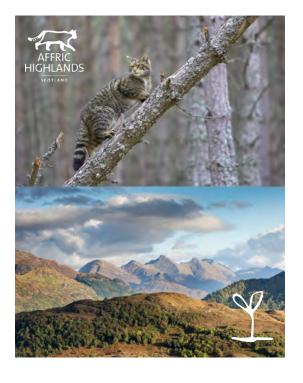
### The John Muir Trust

### Mountain Woodland

Over the next three years, we will be supporting the John Muir Trust on a Mountain Woodland project on the slopes of the iconic Perthshire mountain of Schiehallion. True mountain woodland habitats are largely absent in modern day Scotland due to herbivore grazing pressures. The project on Schiehallion seeks to change that by creating a varied habitat that links low-level woodland to the alpine zone bringing biodiversity, aesthetic and carbon benefits.

The financial support delivered via the Wilderness Conservation & Community Fund (WCCF) will be bolstered by regular volunteer work groups from the Wilderness team to provide resources to undertake groundwork and assist with tree planting.



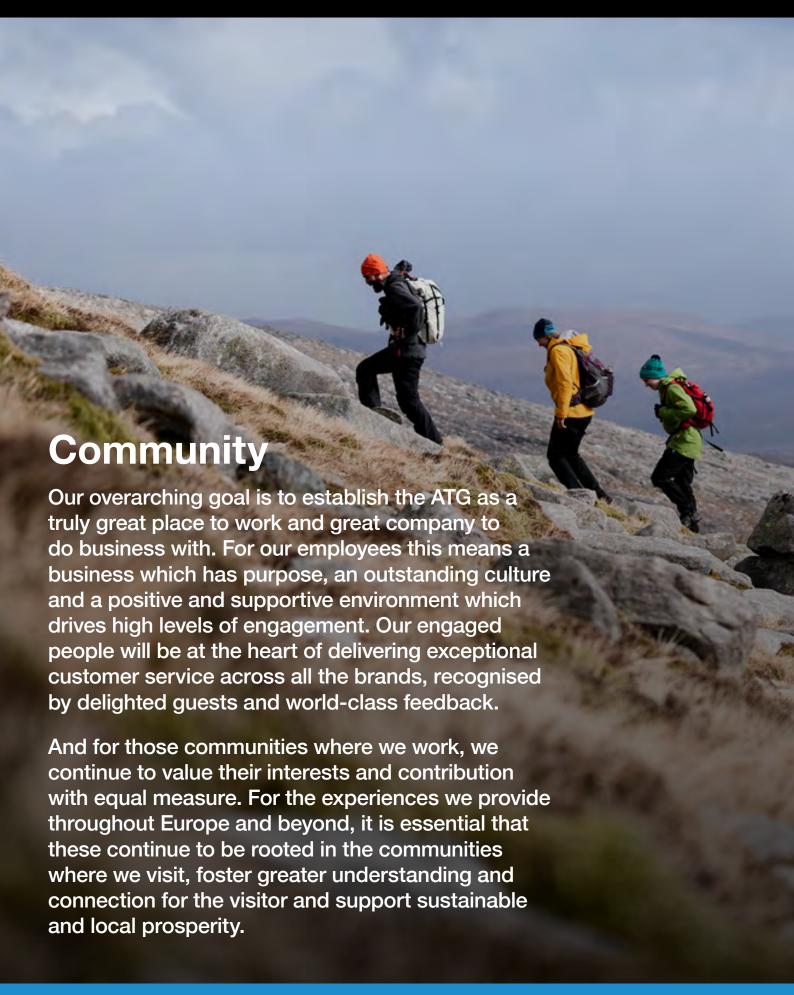


# Trees of Life Affric Highlands

This project is an ambitious 30 year vision which will transform Affric Highlands into a wild refuge for many iconic species, enriching the local economy with nature-based initiatives that form more resilient ecosystems and communities. The project work is varied and includes transforming bare hillsides into native forest, restoring damaged peatlands, connecting wildlife corridors, supporting local education and fostering partnerships with enterprise to create a new model of business growth.

In a similar vein to our partnership with the John Muir Trust, Team Wilderness will also be donating volunteer support to the Affric Highlands project throughout the year.









Our brands welcome guests from around the world to rural communities in some of the most beautiful and loved places in Europe and beyond. Well considered, responsible, tourism has an invaluable role to play in supporting these communities and providing opportunities for economic development, social cohesion, cultural appreciation and connection. Such responsibility has always been at the heart of our business but we recognise the requirement for cooperation and collaboration has never been more important.

### **Progress & Reflection in 2023**

Our supply chain partners such as hotels, restaurants, activity providers, resorts etc are key in defining the travel experience for our guests. Across all brands the emphasis is on local and it has been helpful to validate this through a deeper understanding of the "economic nutrition" of our holidays. This work has already been completed for The Wilderness Group and shows that, on average, 95% of the holiday price paid by our customers remains within the destination. We will continue this work across the ATG to build a similar picture for all brands.

# active**travel**



During 2023, The Wilderness Group added a community dimension to their environmental and social fund and rebranded this as the Wilderness Conservation and Community Fund. With this greater clarity, the Fund supported several exciting initiatives throughout the year including the following projects on a financial and in-kind volunteer basis:



Staff commitment to these and other projects illustrate the important role staff volunteering plays in helping to provide valuable additional resources. For 2024, we aim to formalise this commitment by targeting 100 cumulative days of volunteering time across the ATG, with this increasing to 2 days per employee in 2025 (200+ days in total).





# Community Impact - World Bicycle Relief



Cycling for Softies has partnered with World Bicycle Relief ("WBR") to help provide bikes to farmers, entrepreneurs, healthcare workers and children in developing countries.

To address the challenges of distance and mobility in these countries, WBR manufactures and distributes specially-designed and locally-assembled bicycles. They invest in and partner with communities by promoting local ownership and oversight of their programs, training community-based bicycle mechanics to ensure ready access to maintenance services and connecting each community to a sustainable supply chain of spare parts.

Since 2006, WBR has distributed 450,000 bicycles and trained 2,000 bicycle mechanics across 19 countries. The results have been profound. Students attend more classes, remain in school, and perform better academically. Community health workers travel to more distant households, conduct more patient-visits per month, and continue to serve in their roles for longer. And, farmers transport more goods to market, experience less post-harvest loss, and boost their incomes.

With every Cycling for Softies holiday booking, we donate £5 on our guest's behalf. Since introducing the scheme in 2019, we have donated over £19,000 which is equivalent to the provision of 239 bikes through WBR.







# **Our People**

Like much of the tourism industry, 2023 was a period of rebuilding as travel behaviours normalised and all destinations fully reopened. Across the ATG brands we were in a strong position as a result of retaining nearly all staff throughout the pandemic. The existing team was complemented by further staff joining in 2023. The latest team members bring a welcome diversity to the group across a range of ages and backgrounds.

As we emerged from the pandemic we saw the re-establishment of action and the introduction of new activity to support our goal of being a great place to work. These initiatives include the following:

- Real Living Wage Employer a commitment to 100% of staff (including modern apprentices) on the Real Living Wage across all brands.
- Enhanced Maternity/Paternity Provisions maternity and paternity leave policies were harmonised across the ATG in 2022-23 with significantly improved terms to support working parents.
- Enhanced Flexible Working as a long-term supporter of flexible working we have further embedded hybrid and flexibility policies across the business including innovative policies on WFA Work from Anywhere.
- Employee Health Plans all employees throughout the ATG now have access to an Employee Health Plan which encourages staff to think proactively about their health.
- **Support Workshops** various workshops throughout the year on topics such as mental health, the menopause, financial wellbeing and stress management.

As a tool for gaining further insight into the critical issues and drivers with staff engagement, all brands took part in the Best Workplaces in Travel 2023 assessment. This was a valuable exercise which has helped inform an organisational development plan over the next year. Ski Solutions recent progress was recognised in the awards with the most improved year on year Employee NPS.





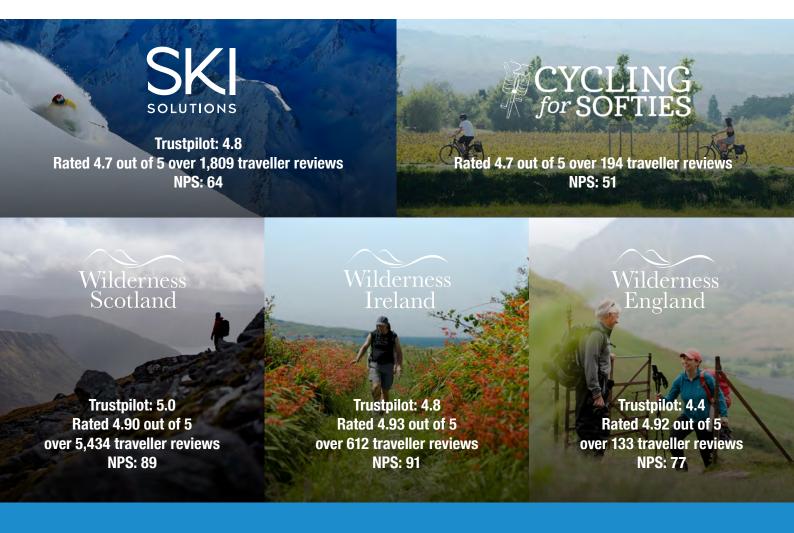
Across the Active Travel Group	2024
Employee Engagement	<ul> <li>Build on engagement initiatives over the past 12 months focusing on employer communication and employee voice</li> <li>Establish a development pathway for aspiring leaders and managers</li> <li>Further investment in supporting employees' physical and mental wellbeing</li> <li>Creating a regular mechanism for measuring and monitoring staff engagement e.g. eNPS</li> </ul>
Employee Learning & Development	Post-pandemic reinvestment to re-establish Personal Development Plans for all staff in 2023-24
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion	<ul> <li>Development of a DEI action plan across the ATG</li> <li>Review our approach to recruitment to expand our reach and appeal to potential staff from under-represented backgrounds</li> <li>Seek expert input on how to better market all brand trips to guests from under-represented backgrounds</li> <li>Formulate an action plan to support the development of more women guides in the Wilderness brands</li> <li>Continue to champion women in the outdoors through relevant trips, content and outreach activities</li> </ul>
Positive Impact in the Community	<ul> <li>Initial target of 100 days staff volunteering across the ATG, rising to 2 days per employee in 2025.</li> </ul>





# **Our Customers**

Across all of the ATG brands we have built our reputation on providing the highest standard of personalised and professional service in the industry. This service is driven by our people with the goal of being truly consistent throughout 12 months of the year. It's a role we take seriously - our guests have entrusted us with their holiday and in return, we aim to deliver travel experiences which will live long in the memory and, in some changes, even change lives.



# Our 2023 Awards







We Try Harder Winner Ski Solutions





SILVER TRAVEL AWARDS 2023

HIGHLY COMMENDED











