



## Progress Report for GeoparkLIFE steering Committee meeting 20/9/17

### C1 Monitoring- People Counters

16 people counters are active in GeoparkLIFE demonstration sites at Fanore (1), Black Head (1), Cahermore (1), Aillwee Cave (1), Poul nabrone (1), Old Carran Church (1), Burren National Park(6) and Slieve Carran Nature Reserve(4). A counter at An Rath earthen fort was removed when the site was shut down by the OPW for health and safety access reasons in October 2015.

There is now almost three years of data from all counters and it is appropriate to review the broad trends in the data, examine issues with the counter data and make suggestions for the future of the counters.

#### Trends.

While only three seasons of data are available any conclusions regarding trends must be considered as 'suggestive' or 'apparent' trends that will only become clear over the next few years. Nevertheless the data trends can be divided into two broad categories; (1)The Burren National Park (Gortlecka/Mullaghmore) counters which shows significant increase in numbers and (2) all the rest which are broadly unchanged or show a slight decline in numbers over the three years.

#### Overall numbers.

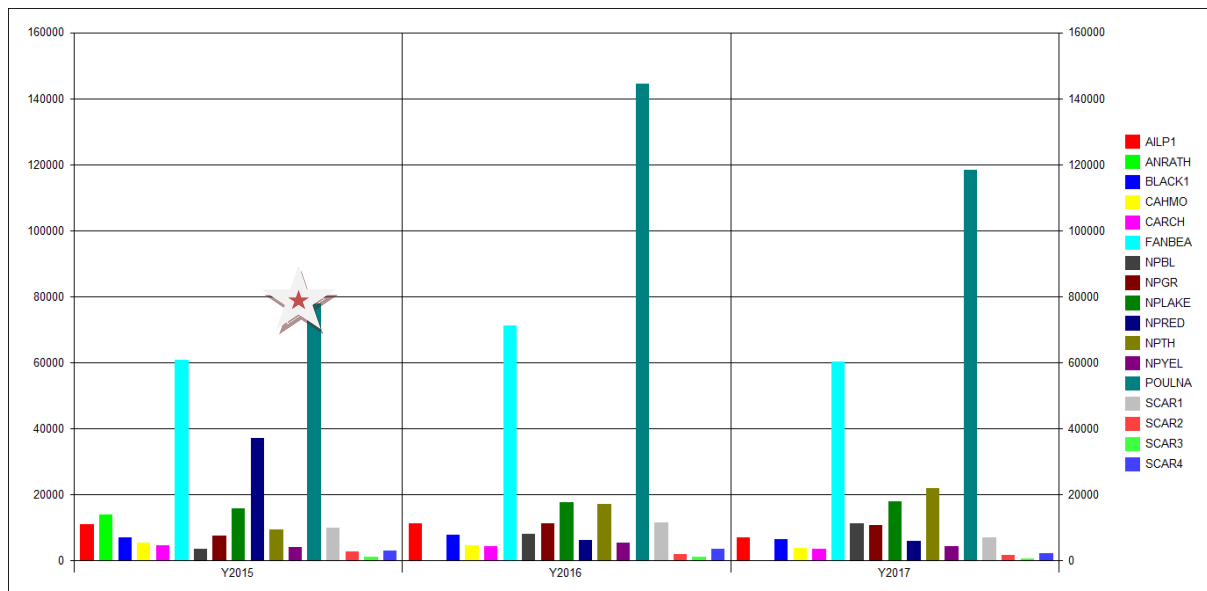


Fig 1. Annual totals for all counters.

It is very clear from the above graph that Poul nabrone and Fanore Beach are by far the busiest of the demonstration sites with six times and three times respectively, the numbers of the next busiest site (Burren National Park, Crag Road). Note: The numbers for 2017 are up to early September only and 2015 numbers for Poul nabrone are incomplete due to damage to counter.

## Monthly totals

### The Burren National Park (Gortlecka/Mullaghmore)

There is a broad increase in visitor numbers recorded by the counters with August totals rising from 2,200 in 2015 to 3,800 in 2017 at the main trail head for Mullaghmore on the Crag Road.

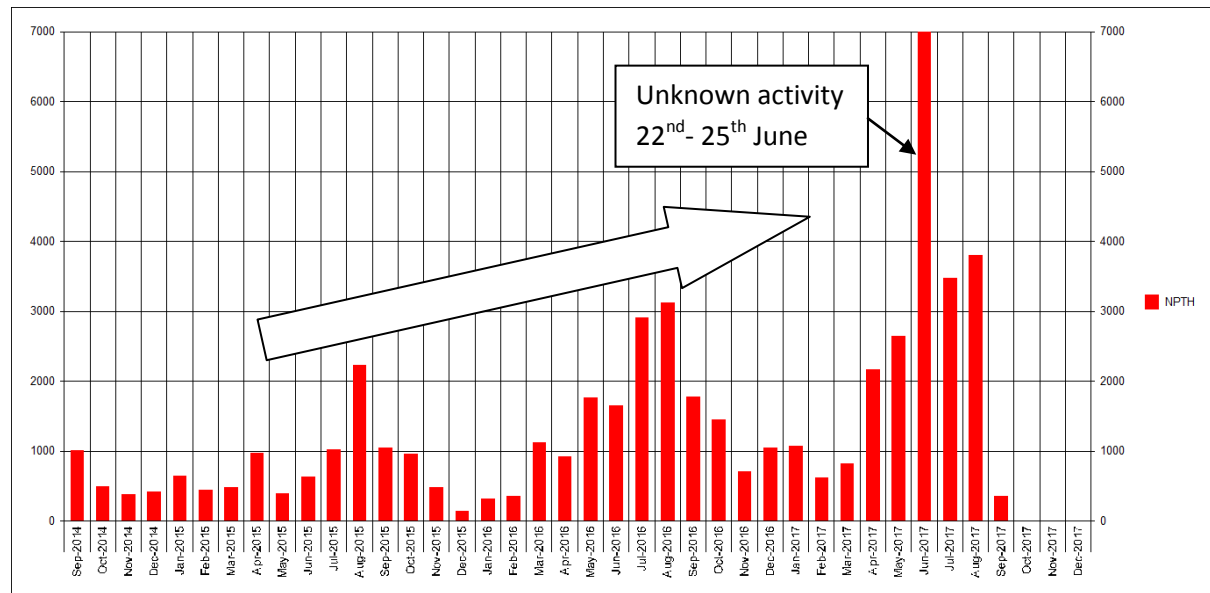


Fig 2. Counter data for Burren National Park main Trail Head on Crag Road.

A similar trend is seen at the second counter on the Mullaghmore trail at Lough Gealain

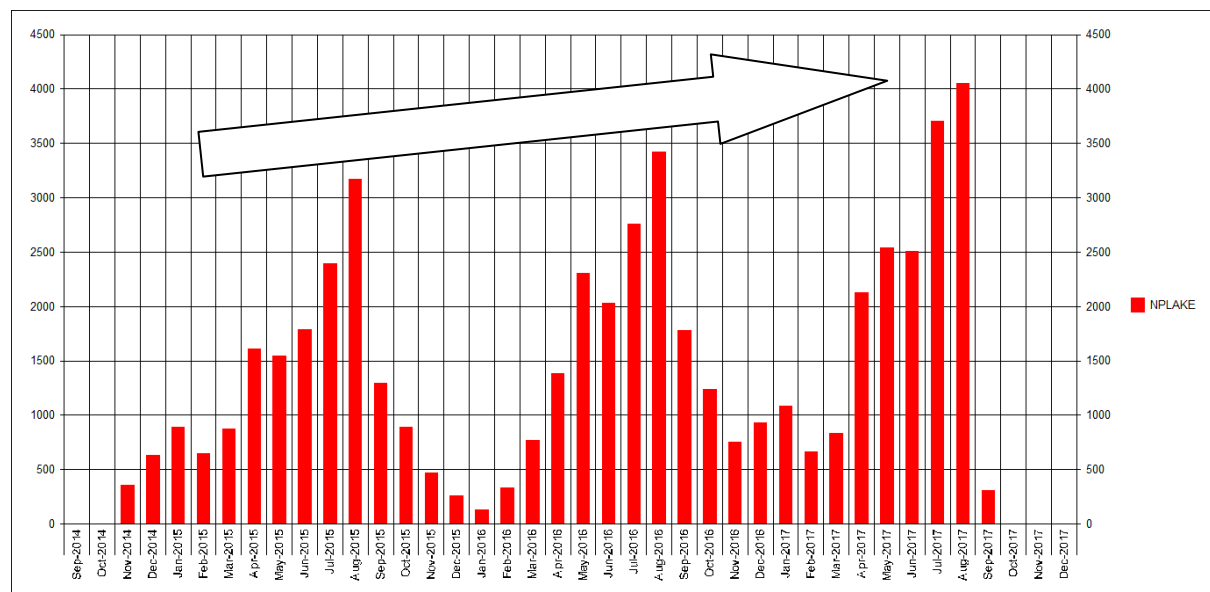


Fig 3. Counter data for Burren National Park counter on main trail at Lough Gealain.

And also for the counter at the Green Nature Trail at Gortlecka:

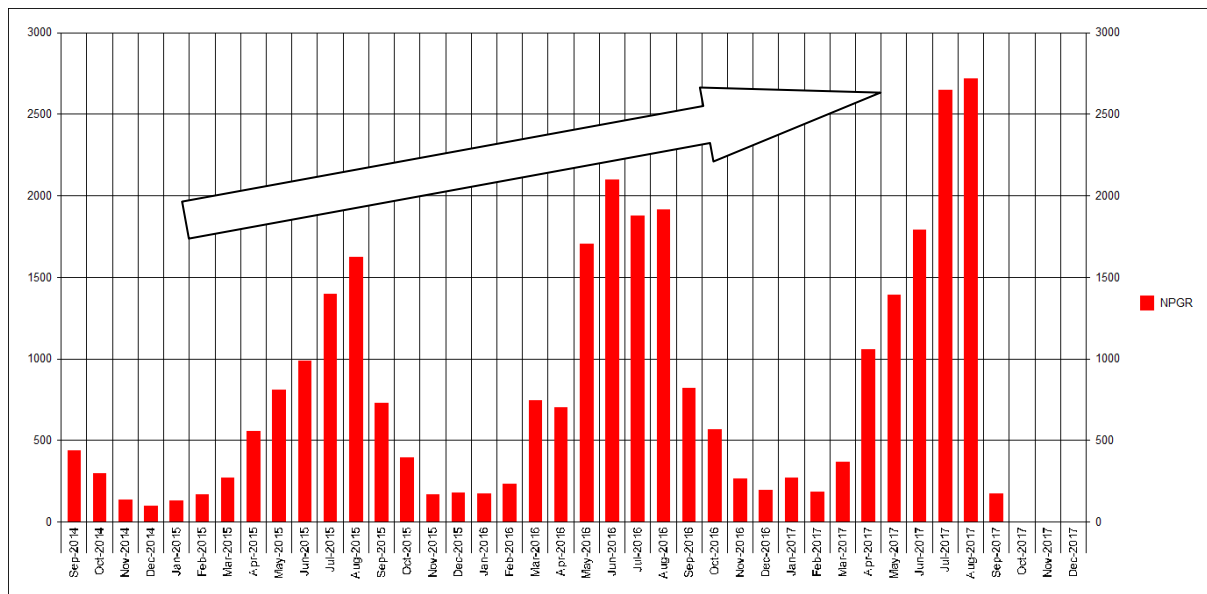


Fig 4. Counter data for Burren National Park Green looped trail at Gortlecka

A less obvious but broadly similar trend can be seen for the Orange Trail at Gortlecka:

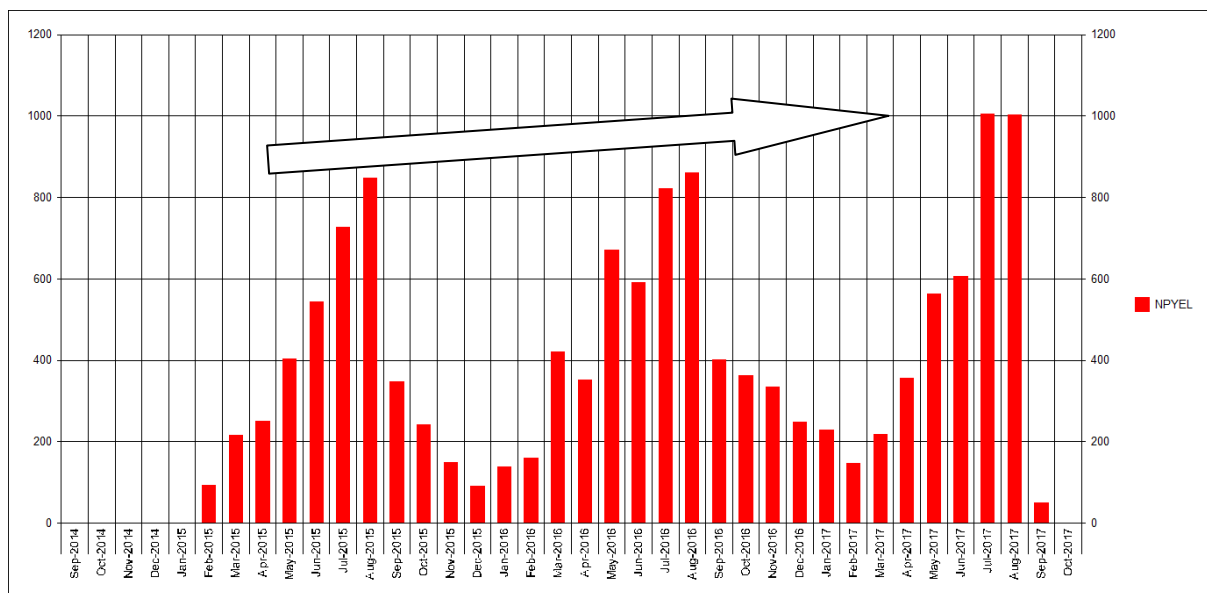


Fig 5. Counter data for Burren National Park at Orange Trail, Gortlecka.

A significant increase has been recorded at the counter on the Blue Trail:

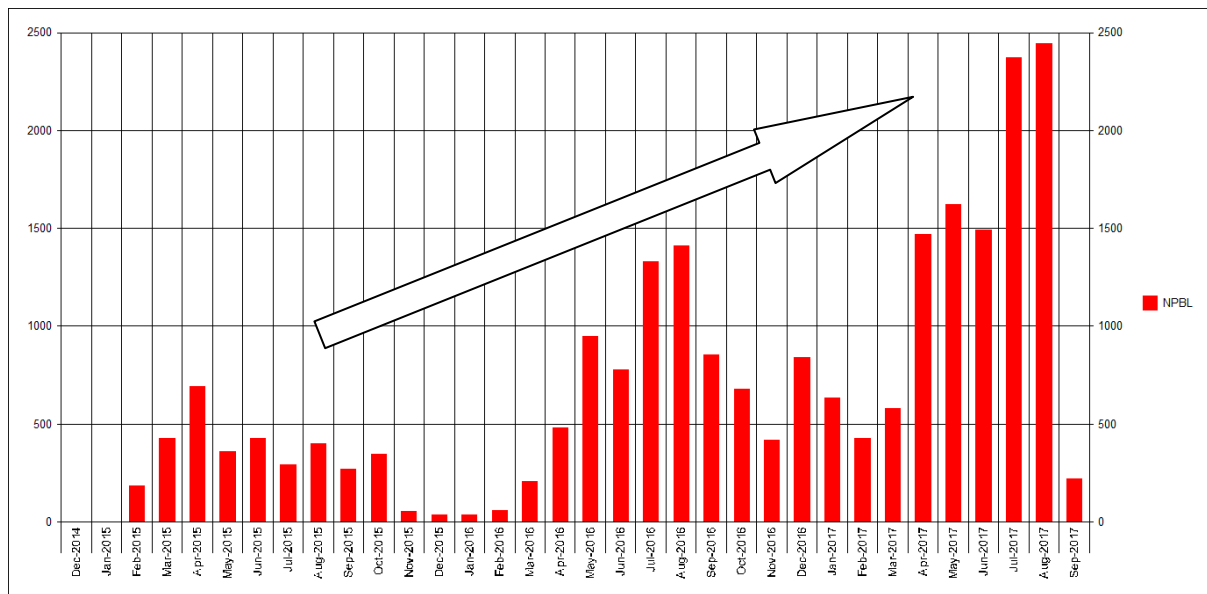


Fig 6. Counter data for Burren National Park Blue Trail.

While overall numbers are up at the counter on the Red Trail at Coolorta, there is some doubt about the impact of animals and also the behaviour of visitors; some use it as a single trail to/from Crag road and others as a shorter loop starting and finishing at Coolorta; which means these numbers should be treated as approximate counts:

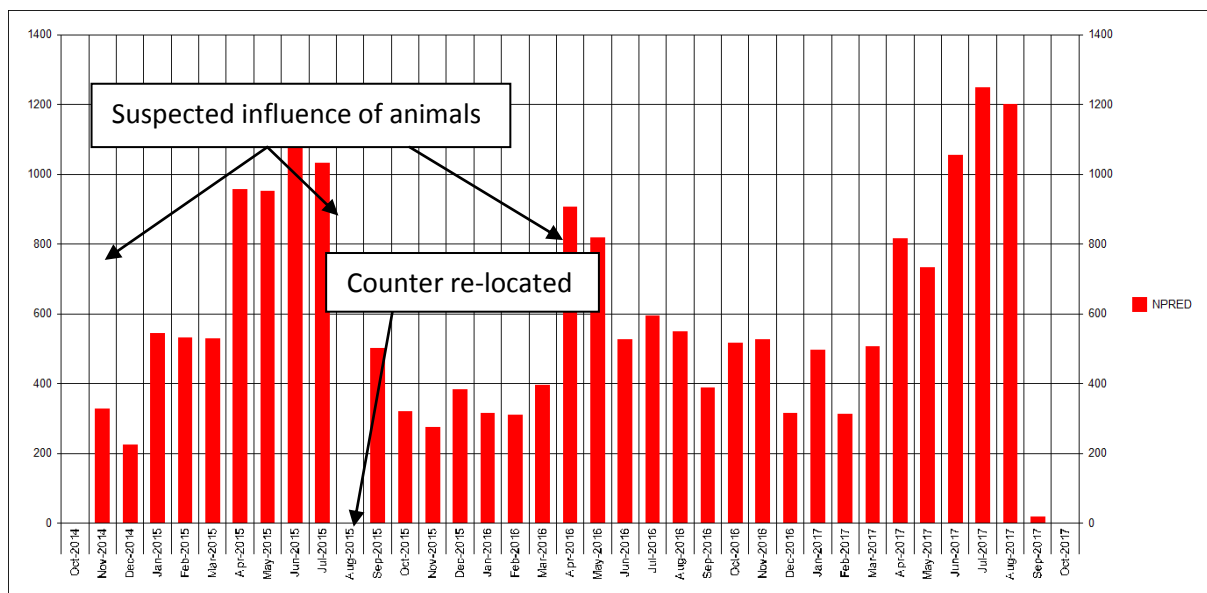


Fig 7. Counter data for Burren national Park on Red Trail, Coolorta.

## BURREN NATIONAL PARK (SLIEVE CARRAN NATURE RESERVE)

The four counters at the Slieve Carran Nature Reserve indicate much lower visitor numbers for three of the counters compared to the Burren National Park with maximum monthly totals of 650, 400 and 180, however the counter on the main route to St.Colmans Oratory (SCAR1) has a maximum monthly total (1,800) higher than some of the trails at Gortlecka/Mullaghmore site; Red Trail; 1,200, Orange Trail; 1,000. The numbers appear to be broadly stable over the three years, with a decline in visitors during peak tourist season.

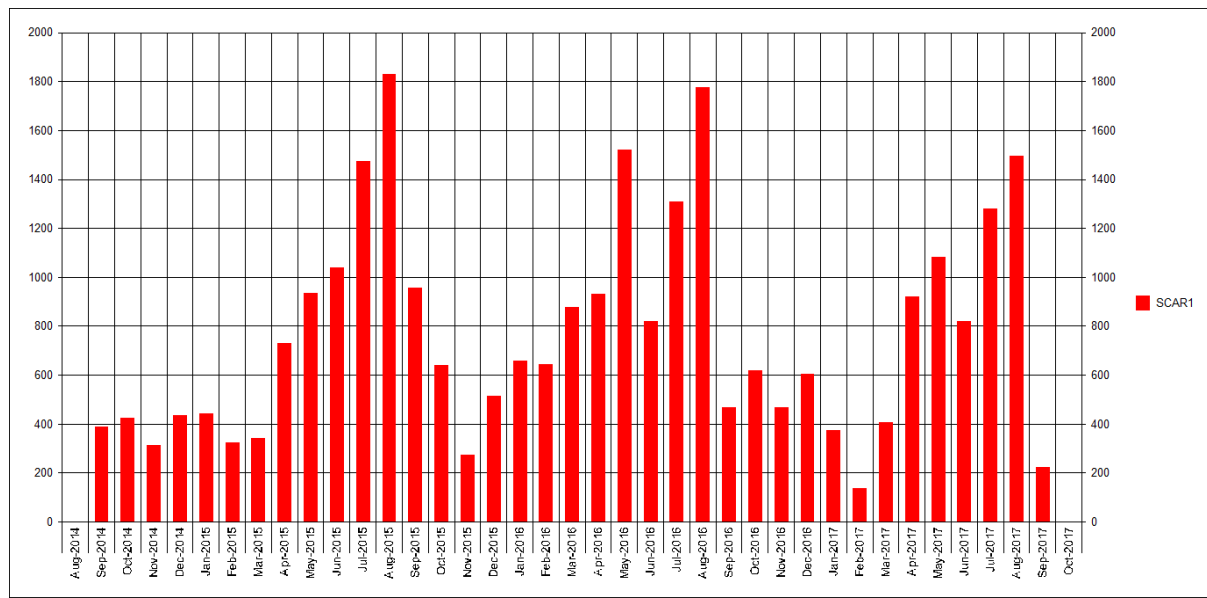


Fig 8. Counter data at Slieve Carran trail to St. Colman's Oratory.

Although located right beside the road and parking area, the counter (SCAR4) to the east of the parking area, just inside the stile shows considerably smaller numbers than the one on the trail to St. Colmens oratory.

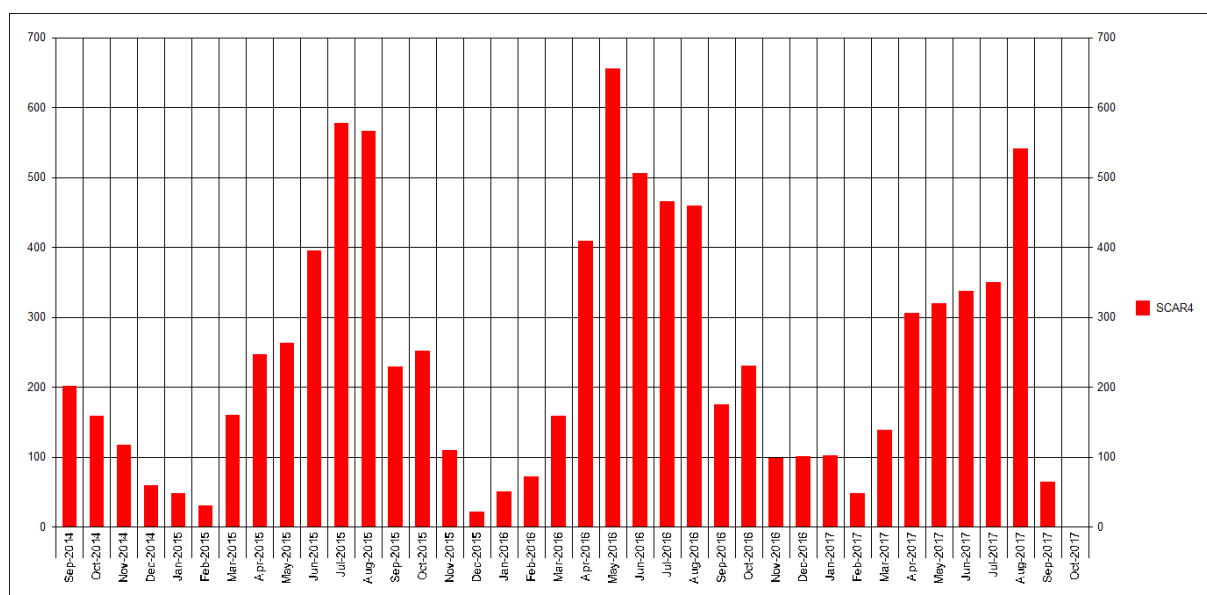


Fig 9. Counter data for Slieve Carran; trail to the East of Slieve Carran parking area.

The two other counters have less distinct trends; this is due to the lower numbers and therefore the bigger impact of animals or one-off groups. These isolated events can have a significant impact on total numbers and are difficult to identify, however it is clear that visitor numbers are low.

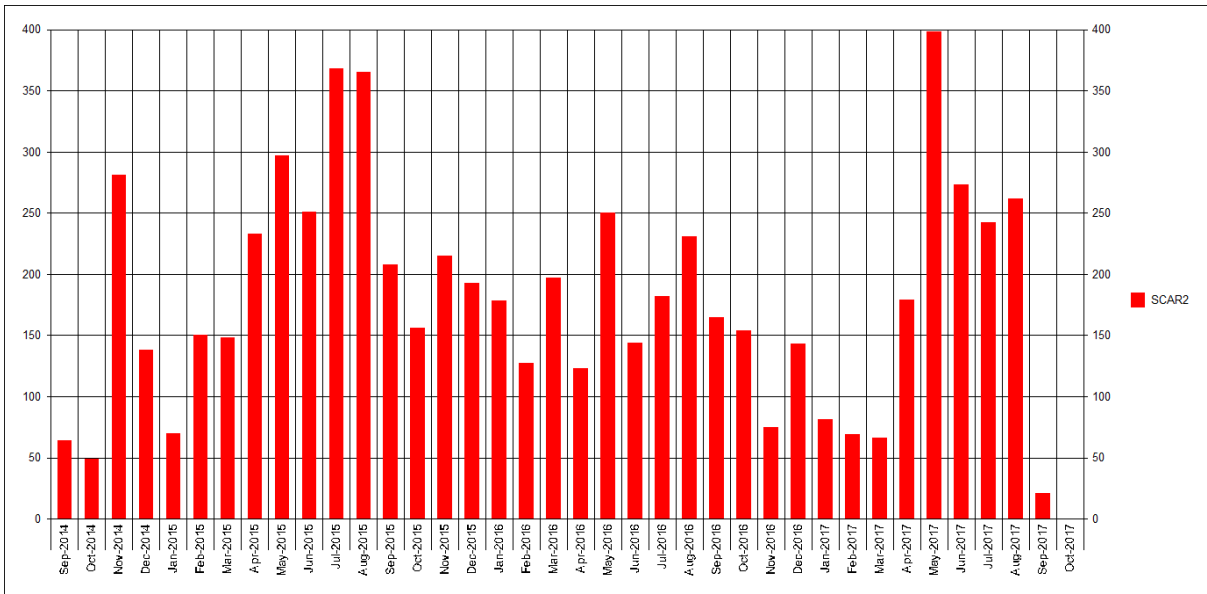


Fig 10. Counter data for Slieve Carran trail at Bothair na Mias.

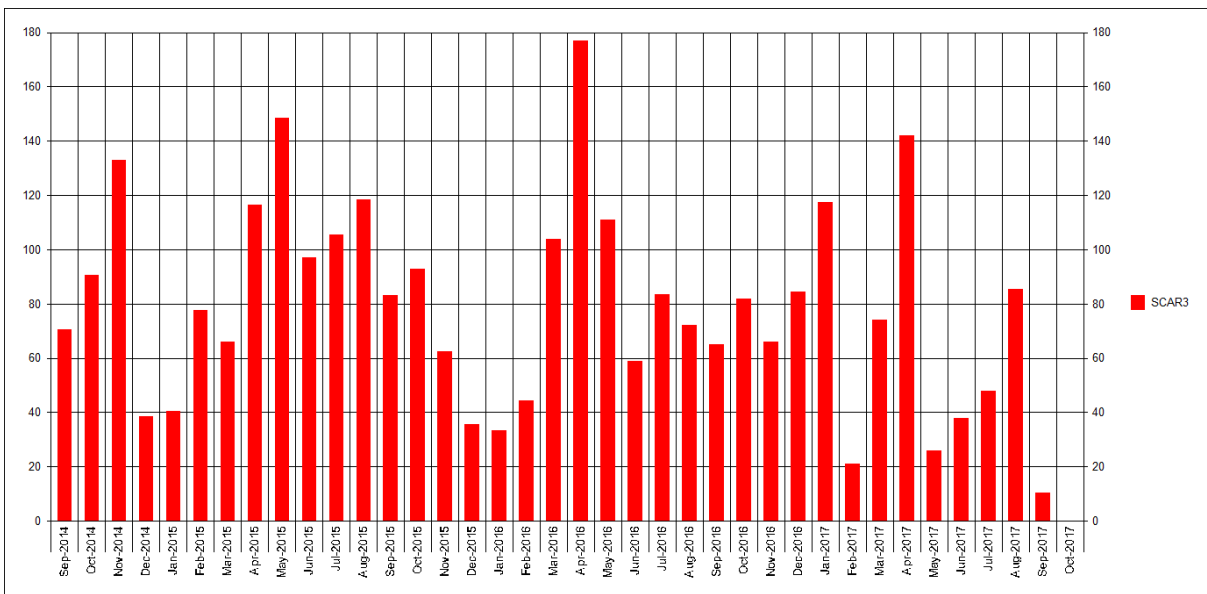


Fig 11. Counter data for Slieve Carran eastern trail on lower road.

## POULNABRONE

Poul nabrone is by far the most visited site monitored by GeoparkLIFE counters with a maximum monthly total recorded of 24,500. The numbers appear to be stable, almost certainly due to the limited parking available during peak tourist season when the car park is at capacity. Two separate on-site observation counts indicate that the counter is only counting 63-67% of the actual numbers of visitors here; this would mean that the maximum monthly total is actually 40,000. The maximum visitor number is unlikely to be exceeded in the coming years, although there is off-peak season capacity.

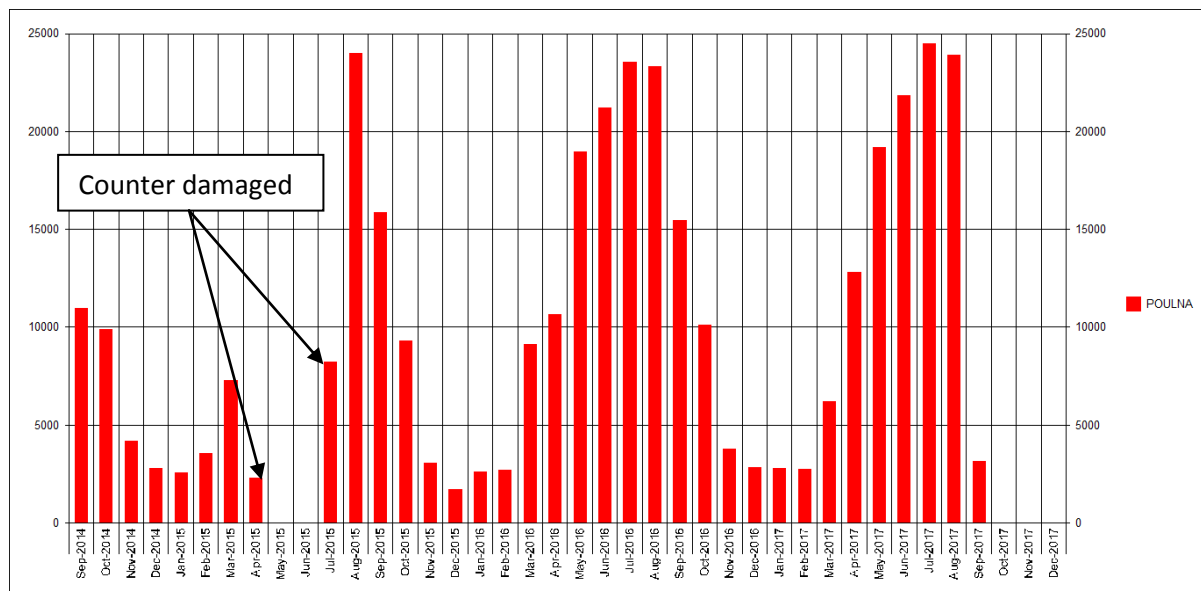


Fig 12. Counter data for Poul nabrone.

## FANORE BEACH

The counter at Fanore beach shows a consistent number of visitors over the last three years, with a maximum monthly total of 14,500. Like Poul nabrone, Fanore Beach car park reaches capacity during peak summer season, particularly during warmer drier weather and this means that this peak monthly total is unlikely to increase in the coming years, although there is off-peak season capacity.

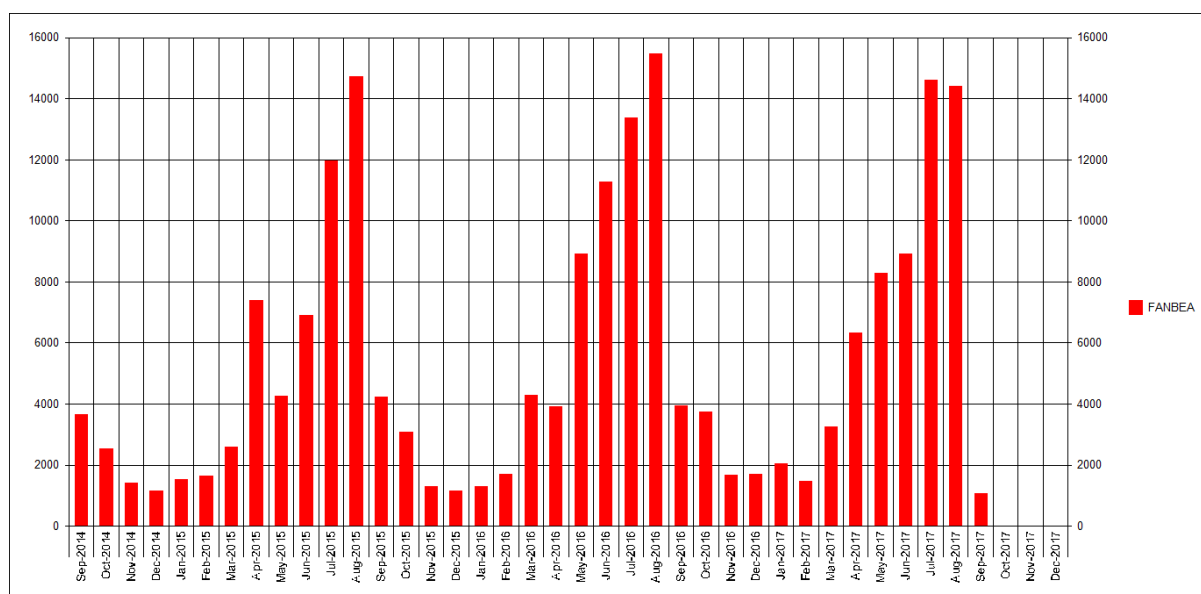


Fig 13. Counter data for Fanore Beach.

### AILLWEE CAVE MOUNTAIN TRAIL

Peak monthly visitors to the Aillwee Cave mountain trail have decreased over the three years. This is likely to be due to less promotion by staff members who preferentially direct visitors to the Farm Shop or Birds of Prey Centre. Visitor numbers to the cave are broadly stable over the last three years with a 4% increase (Source: Aillwee cave management)

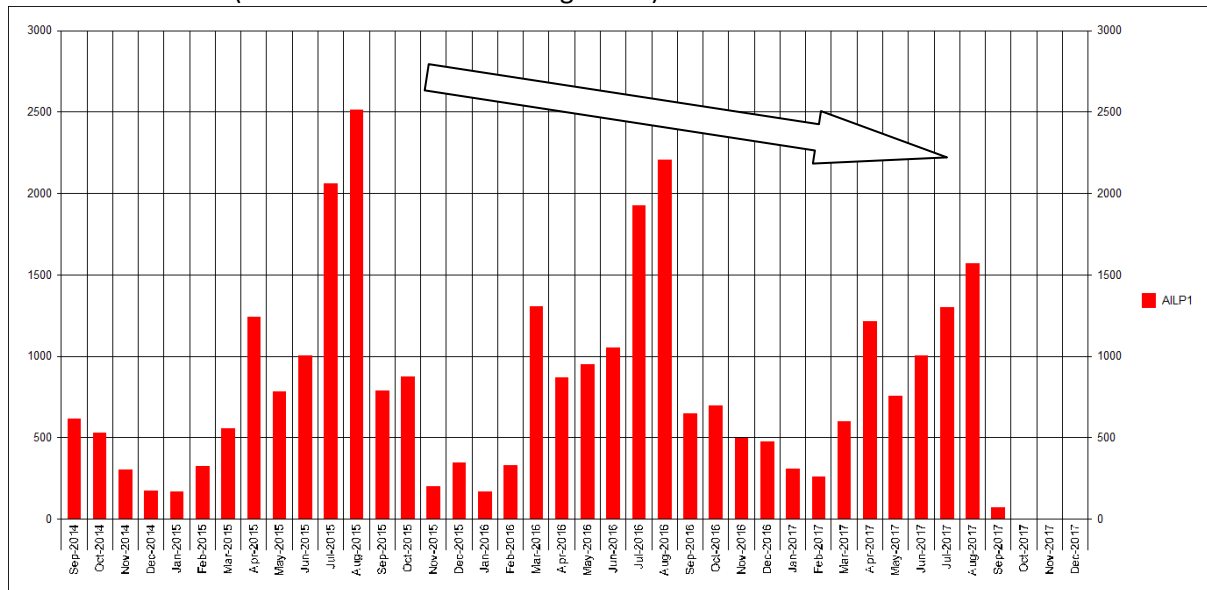


Fig 14. Counter data for Aillwee Cave Mountain Trail.

### BLACK HEAD

The counter on the Black Head looped walk records numbers comparable to those at the Burren National Park, with a peak monthly visitor total of 1500. These numbers should be considered a maximum as there are cattle in the field and they occasionally spend time close to the counter. Visitor behaviour is difficult to assess at this locality as some enter and exit along the path while others do the full looped walk and do not return passed the counter. Others access the walk from the coast road at Murrough and do not pass the counter at all.

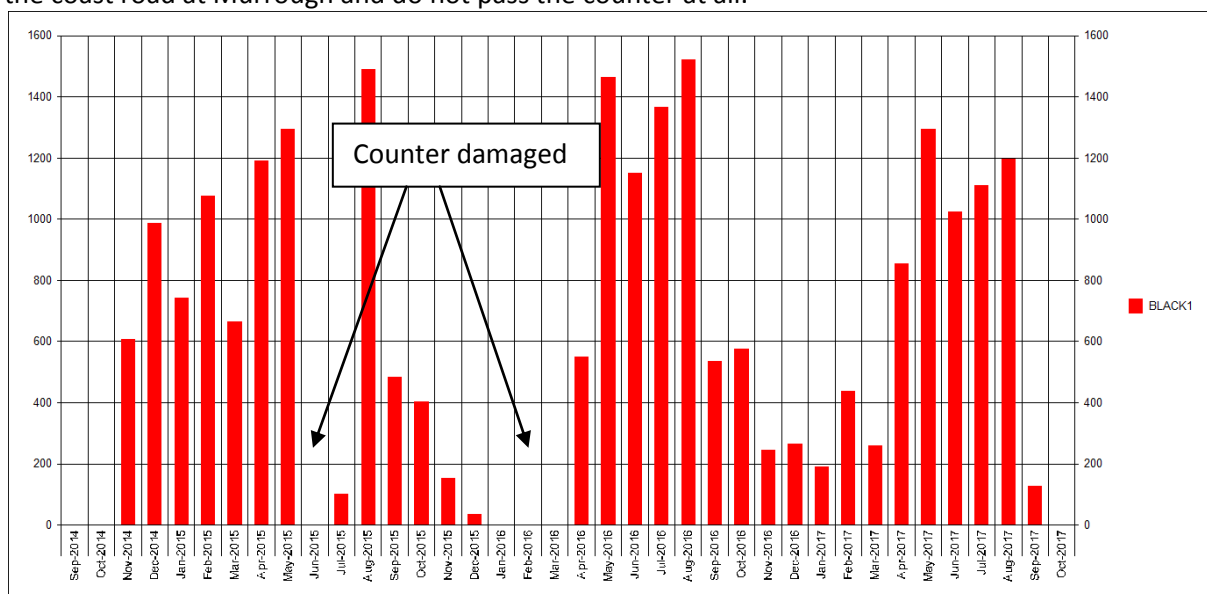


Fig 15. Counter data for Black Head Looped Walk.



## CAHERMORE

Like other sites with low visitor numbers, animals and one-off groups of visitors can have a significant impact on the data for any given day or month but broadly speaking there is no significant increase in visitor numbers for the last two years.

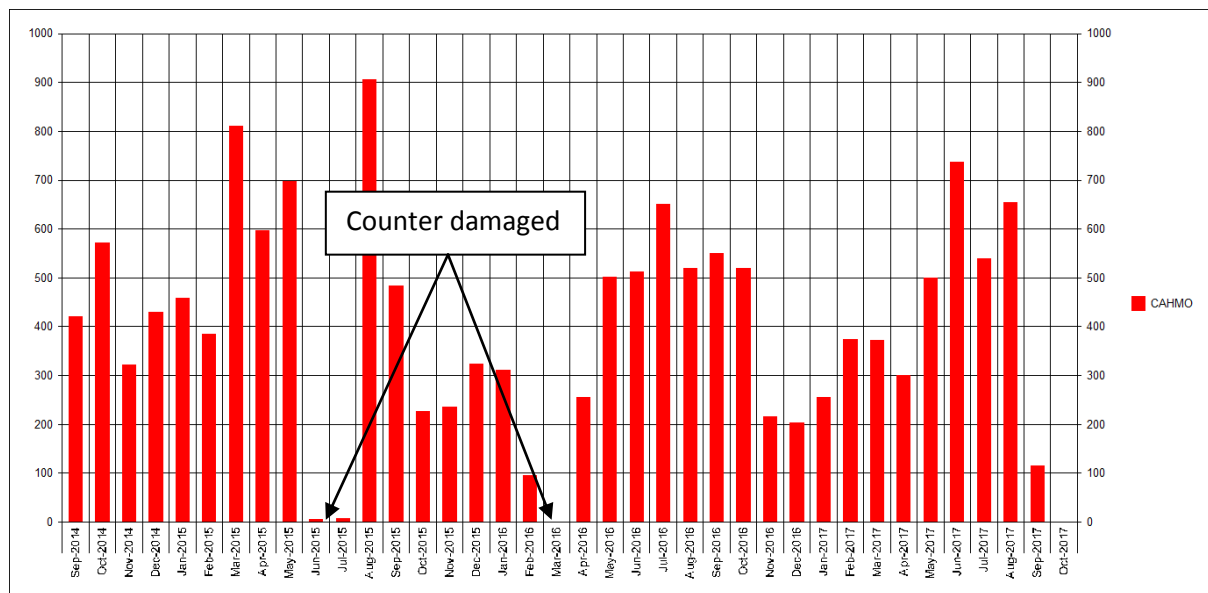


Fig 16. Counter data for Cahermore Stone Fort.

## CARRAN CHURCH

Carran Church is a site with low visitor numbers due to limited parking and virtually no promotion. There is a decrease in maximum monthly totals over the last three years.

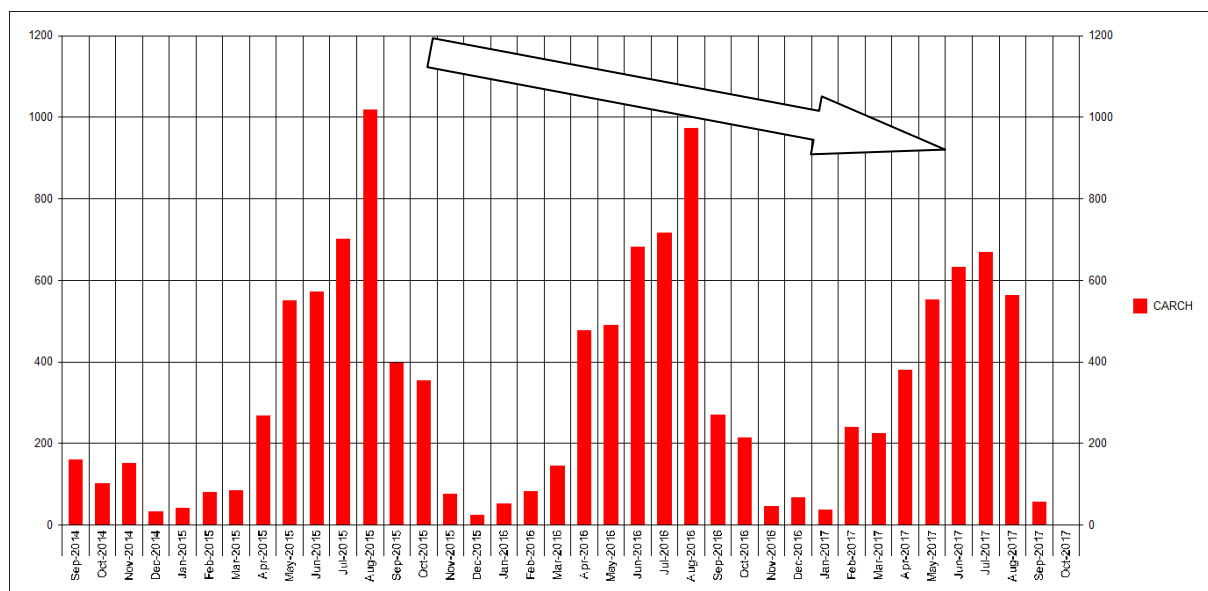


Fig 17. Counter data for Old Carran Church, Poulacarran.

## EVALUATION OF COUNTERS

The data provided by the counters has provided, for the first time, a baseline for visitor numbers to a variety of visitor sites in the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark. While there have been a number of issues due to damage to counters, animals being counted, visitor behaviour and under-recording at Poul nabrone, it must be understood that no automated counter is 100% accurate and broadly speaking the counters provide accurate records of visitors. The nature of the landscape means that farming activity, feral goats and multiple access points for visitors will always be an issue for the counters. At Poul nabrone the width of the path, even at the narrowest point means that groups can walk two or three abreast. Occasional on-site hourly observational counts that can be compared to the recorded counter data is the best way to monitor the counters.

## FUTURE

People counters are now a firmly established aspect of visitor site management for Geoparks, County Councils, NPWS, Coillte and others throughout Ireland.

The GeoparkLIFE counters have now completed the first objective of compiling baseline data for the seven GeoparkLIFE demonstration sites in the Burren. It is recommended that the counters are left to continue counting visitors until at least 31st December 2017, the end of the GeoparkLIFE project and that there should be a review of all counter locations to decide how the counters operate as part of the After LIFE project, it may be that other locations that were not monitored for the GeoparkLIFE project need baseline data and some counters could be re-allocated to accommodate this.

