

Eco Travel Network – 2012-2018 Review

Alison Kidd

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1 Overview

The Eco Travel Network (ETN) is a not-for-profit company launched in July 2012. For 6 years, the ETN operated a rental fleet of low energy, electric vehicles (Renault Twizys) in the Brecon Beacons National Park and beyond in collaboration with local tourism businesses as ETN members.

A grant of £25k from the Brecon Beacons Sustainable Development Fund helped cover the company's start up costs and part subsidised the first 5 ETN Twizys. The remaining funds came from the member businesses who paid for, hosted and hired out the Twizys under a common self-drive hire insurance policy.

The ETN had 4 Directors (all volunteers) with a mix of expertise in: electric vehicles, tourism, behavioural psychology and business.

In May 2018, we made the decision to cease operating the rental and membership side of the ETN for reasons we will discuss below. The remaining members though have all chosen to keep their Twizys as they love this fun style of eco rural travel and use them regularly.

The company is continuing with one Twizy research project still in progress under the sole Directorship of Ian Foster.

2 Aims of ETN

The aims of the ETN were:-

1. To enable visitors and residents of rural areas like the Brecon Beacons National Park to travel around in ultra-lightweight, low-energy vehicles which are fun to drive and use so little electricity that they can be powered by local solar and hydro schemes.
2. To promote low carbon, cheap alternatives to the car for short rural journeys.
3. To grow an electric vehicle rental and charging network across the National Park based on existing tourist businesses.
4. To attract more visitors to the National Park as an eco-tourism destination.

3 How did the ETN work?

The Eco Travel Network owned and insured a fleet of lightweight electric vehicles for self-drive hire. Members of the ETN (tourist businesses or small community groups) paid for a vehicle in the form of a one-off membership fee. They then hosted it, liveried it, used it themselves and rented it out to their customers or members of the public. Members kept all the rental revenue and paid the ETN an annual service fee which covered insurance, battery rental, vehicle maintenance and administration.

The reason for this rather strange arrangement was because of the extreme difficulty and high cost of an individual business trying to

obtain self drive hire insurance for a single vehicle. Zurich Municipal remains one of the very few insurance companies who cover self drive vehicle hire at all.

4 What did the ETN achieve?

1. At its peak, the ETN operated a fleet of 12 Twizys and 1 electric van including 2 Twizys in West Scotland and 1 in Cornwall.
2. The vehicles have covered ~150,000 zero carbon miles replacing local miles in petrol and diesel cars. 4 of the fleet have been powered thanks to micro hydro and/or solar PV.
3. Several thousand people have had the chance to experience driving an electric vehicle and learning about how low energy travel can be fun.
4. The member businesses made regular use of their Twizys for local staff travel as well as renting to their customers and other visitors.
5. The ETN set up a lightweight Twizy charge network across the National Park with 40 tourism businesses happily offering 13amp charging for visiting Twizys.
6. The members found their eye catching, liveried Twizys provided excellent promotion for their businesses and resulted in numerous press articles promoting the Brecon Beacons as a green tourism destination. One member Twizy featured and was used by The Hay Festival every year. These promotions and press coverage continue to happen.



7. The ETN also featured in a number of national newspaper and magazine articles and two TV programmes. We also produced our own short promotional video.

8. In May 2013, the ETN won first prize in the Green Transport Awards in Edinburgh. We used the prize money to explore more rugged designs of Twizy-like vehicles which are better suited to rougher rural environments including Scottish islands. This included the modification of a Twizy for rugged, rural use and we ran a trial of this on the Isle of Eigg and the Knoydart peninsula both of which generate all their own electricity renewably. This unique rural Twizy, Toro, was subsequently purchased by a resident of Eigg and is still in daily use on the island both for ferrying people and luggage to and from the ferry and as a First Responder vehicle.



9. We also experimented with a converted electric buggy which we donated to Edinburgh College where it was used for educational training of automotive engineering students. The final prize money is being used to convert a Twizy for side-by-side seating and better luggage carrying. This project is ongoing.
10. In September 2014, The ETN won the Low Carbon Champions Award for Low Carbon Road Transport Initiative of the Year.
11. Over the 6 years, the ETN Directors used their experience to help advise numerous putative electric vehicle schemes across the UK, Ireland and Belgium. We also presented both

academic, electric vehicle and tourism seminars, featured in a business case study and we both organised and appeared at numerous vehicle events, including the only Renault EV event held outside a city.

12. For 2 years, the ETN added an off-road wheelchair, a Boma 7, to their rental fleet. This was enjoyed enormously by a number of both slightly and severely handicapped visitors to the Brecon Beacons although the lack of challenging but accessible routes was a limiting factor. It did climb Pen-y-Fan on one occasion as well as taking part in 2 DofE exhibitions. The wheelchair has since been donated to a local Outdoor Centre who can more easily manage its operation, maintenance and transport.



13. The ETN has run an active website, blog, Facebook page and Twitter account with over 1000 followers.

5 Why is the ETN ceasing rental and its membership model?

The ETN Board decided to close its rental and membership operation from May 1st 2018. We have been considering this course of action over the past year for the following reasons:-

With only a couple of exceptions, our members have loved using their Twizys and the promotional value they bring to both their businesses and the National Park. However, none of them have found renting Twizys provides a worthwhile income stream. Very few visitors arrive in the Brecon Beacons without their own car and the admin involved in renting adds a considerable work load to a

small business's staff. At best, the rental may just about cover the annual membership costs. Some member businesses also preferred offering their customers use of the Twizy (as a promotional perk) without charging them extra.

Over the past 2 years, 3 members (who rented very little) asked to keep their Twizys but leave the ETN because that way they could get cheaper insurance. Self drive hire will always be considerably more expensive and therefore not worth it if one is not renting often. A couple more members had also started considering this option.

Meanwhile, the cost of self-drive hire insurance with Zurich has increased each year and no other company is offering it at a price we could afford. If our members were renting so little, then it made more sense for them to own and insure the Twizys themselves.

Another factor has been that our Directors have worked for the ETN for 6 years as volunteers and the admin load of insuring and managing 13 vehicles on behalf of our member businesses has proved increasingly time-consuming and onerous for a couple of the Directors in particular. Legally owning vehicles which are exclusively kept and used by others also has its challenges in splitting responsibilities. With the new arrangement, this load and attendant responsibilities are now handed back to the businesses to manage for themselves.

6 What next?

The ETN will continue as a company under the sole Directorship of Ian Foster. The other 3 Directors have resigned but continue to drive their Twizys and be active enthusiasts for low energy rural travel.

The ETN is using its final prize money to complete a prototype of a modified Twizy with side by side seating (more comfortable and sociable) and significant luggage carrying capacity (opening out its uses).

We wish all our erstwhile members many more years of enjoyable, low energy adventures in their Twizys.

