

ScotWays

UPHOLDING PUBLIC ACCESS

MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER • SPRING 2024



IN THIS ISSUE

P2: Meet our people

– we hear from three new members of the team

P3: Scottish Hill Tracks

– can you help us to promote new guidebook?

P4: Walks update

– help us celebrate

P5: Volunteering

– the signs are promising

P6: AGM 2023

– review of hybrid meeting

P7: Calling all members

– plans for the future

P8: Dalwhinnie

– fencing is extended

Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society (ScotWays)
24 Annandale Street,
Edinburgh EH7 4AN
Tel: 0131 558 1222

www.scotways.com

@SCOTWAYS



“The preservation, defence, restoration and acquisition, for the public benefit, of public rights of access in Scotland including public rights of way, and related amenity”.



Reopening the Radical Road

We are hopeful of a breakthrough on Edinburgh path that's been closed for five years after positive talks with Historic Environment Scotland

READERS will be aware of the closure of the Radical Road, the iconic path below Salisbury Crags in Holyrood Park, by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) in 2018 because of rock falls. Five years later it remains closed. On 3 December 2023, the Cockburn Association, Edinburgh Geological Society, Mountaineering Scotland, Ramblers Scotland and ScotWays organised a public meeting to discuss the route, what HES had done and how to persuade HES to reopen it. More than 100 people, including local councillor Steve Burgess and Lothian MSP Sarah Boyack, attended but not HES who, although invited, chose not to attend. Unhappy with the current situation, all present agreed to launch a petition calling for the path to be reopened. Having amassed more than 3,600 signatures, the petition was submitted to HES on 19 December to coincide with the end of the public consultation on the future management of Holyrood Park.

Public access to Holyrood Park differs from much of Scotland in that statutory rights of access don't apply because of the Holyrood Park Regulations. That said, although it is a Scheduled Monument,

rights of way legislation does still apply, and the Radical Road is a recorded public right of way. Following the meeting, Sarah Boyack MSP asked related questions in the Scottish Parliament and in her response, Christina McKelvie, Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development, stressed HES must “comply with all relevant legislation”, specifically noting health and safety legislation as well as its duty of care towards people entering the Park under the Occupier's Liability (Scotland) Act 1960. She didn't mention rights of way law which HES has ignored.

At the end of January, the campaign partners met HES chair Hugh Hall and senior staff. In a very positive meeting, it was acknowledged that the closure has dragged on too long with public engagement being less than ideal. With that in mind, Historic Environment Scotland has committed to increase engagement and transparency and to move more speedily towards a safe reopening of the Radical Road, hopefully before the Hutton Tercentenary in 2026. We intend to maintain pressure on this: sign up for Strava to hear of our progress.

Meet our people

Craig Reilly

I'm Craig Reilly, the new Information Officer. My background is focused squarely on Information Management. Before joining the ScotWays team, I studied Information Management at the University of Glasgow, and have worked in the libraries sector for the past five years, in both public and academic libraries. As someone with different experience from working in the outdoor sector, I am excited to face this new challenge in applying my knowledge and experience to the protection of public access in Scotland.

As the Information Officer, I am responsible for managing ScotWays' hard copy and digital information, including creating and maintaining formal processes for holding and updating information. Currently, I'm undertaking a records survey, to produce a records inventory that will help develop important policies and data management controls to ensure the future resilience of ScotWays data.

My free time is spent watching films, pursuing my passion of playing (and defeating my friends at) various board games, and exploring the Edinburgh food scene.



David Dixon

I was elected to the Board at the 2023 AGM, having previously been a ScotWays director between 2011 and 2020, following which I was appointed an Honorary Adviser with regard to bridges, my particular interest. I suggested the Donald Bennet memorial appeal which raised money to replace and repair a number of bridges including at Derry Lodge, across the Quoich at Mar Lodge and ScotWays' first ever bridge, the Bedford Memorial Bridge in Glen Tilt. I also negotiated and fundraised to replace the Carnach Bridge in Knoydart and negotiated the replacement of the Sawmill Bridge at Cortachy. Using volunteers, I have organised major repairs to the Allt-Coire-na-Ciche and Eidart bridges.

I am a member of the Mountain Bothies Association and have been maintenance organiser of a variety of bothies for over 50 years. In 1967, I set up the Border Bothies Association to provide and maintain simple locked overnight shelters for youth groups and vulnerable children, and later also adults, so that they could explore the countryside. To date there have been over 40,000 overnight stays in these premises.

In all these activities, I have worked constructively with a wide range of landowners, farmers, shepherds and gamekeepers.

Jonathan Binny

I studied geography, trained as a surveyor, but the bulk of my career life was spent in education as a Head of Geography. Now retired, I hill walk, mountain bike and enjoy cross country skiing. I was a director with Mountaineering Scotland and Nevis Partnership. I come to ScotWays familiar with being on a Board and with the experience of different organisations. Hopefully that will enable me to contribute fresh ideas to the running of ScotWays.

Visits to New Zealand reminded me that we are fortunate, but not unique, in having our access rights. Looking at the landscape in New Zealand it was frustrating to know that I couldn't climb all the hills I could see. In Scotland we have moved forward (unlike England and Wales) but the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 did not resolve all access issues. It is frustrating to see in some places the right of access still being obstructed. Access is fundamental to all outdoor activities so the work of ScotWays is still important and relevant and needs to be adequately resourced.

We need to be vigilant over our access rights or we will lose them.





Walkers near Drumelzier on Hill Track 17

PHOTOGRAPH: ADAM WARD

Help us promote *Scottish Hill Tracks*

THE 6th edition of *Scottish Hill Tracks*, our guidebook to routes through the hills and mountains of Scotland, will be published this summer. 2024 is the centenary year of the concept of Scottish Hill Tracks because, in 1924, ScotWays' then president Walter A. Smith published *Hill Paths in Scotland*. Smith had led our signposting expedition through the Cairngorms in 1885. His compendium of Hill Paths drew extensively on ScotWays' records of rights of way and historic routes around the country. Many of these routes were featured in the first edition of *Scottish Hill Tracks* in 1947, compiled by D. G. Moir with extensive input from ScotWays.

The 6th edition will be the culmination of the efforts of three years' work by more than 130 volunteers who have traversed over 8000km of routes to produce new descriptions of 350 routes and 175 variant routes. The guide will be published by the Scottish Mountaineering Press, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Scottish Mountaineering Trust, and will include a great selection of photos taken by our volunteers, and a new set of maps showing how the routes connect within each region.

CAN YOU HELP US PROMOTE THE NEW EDITION?

Can you help generate interest in the upcoming new edition? We're especially keen to target communities of people who might be interested, for example, walking groups, local communities in areas near the routes, independent

bookshops and any other organisations or networks that might have an interest. Our target publication date is June, but this isn't yet set in stone.

At this stage, we're asking interested people to sign up to Stravaig, our e-newsletter www.scotways.com/sign-up-to-e-newsletter where we'll make announcements about the upcoming new edition and our launch celebrations.

SOME IDEAS

Could you:

- Write an article about the upcoming new edition for a local newsletter, newspaper or magazine?
- Tell other members of a club, group or organisation that you're a member of?

- Think about organising a walk along a Hill Track to showcase one of the routes featured? If you do this please note that ScotWays wouldn't be responsible for your walk.
- Document your own trips on Hill Tracks on foot, bike or horse, and share them in text, photos, video or audio online, e.g. on social media?
- Do you know any podcast producers, film-makers, bloggers or popular social media accounts who might help you spread the word further afield?

Make sure to sign up to Stravaig for all the latest information and for links to information to help you promote our new edition.



Approaching Craig Bothy on Hill Track 306

PHOTOGRAPH: RICHARD DOAKE

ScotWays walks

LONG-STANDING members will know that our Members Walks Programme has been a part of our offering for many years, with a selection of walks around the country led by volunteers. The programme was suspended in 2020 for the pandemic, and re-launched in 2022. That year we noticed that numbers of bookings were lower than they'd been previously, and a small number of walks had to be cancelled due to having too few participants to be viable. We surveyed members over the winter of 2022-23 and received lots of responses that we should continue to organise a walks programme, and so we put together a programme for 2023 with a range of walks around Scotland. Unfortunately, for very good reasons, many of the members who had booked onto walks had to cancel their bookings, often at short notice, and severe weather impacted one walk. As a result only five of the nine planned walks went ahead, and those that did comprised very small groups.

It takes a lot of staff time to put together a full walks programme and there is disappointment when walks have to be cancelled. As a result, the staff and Directors have decided not to continue with offering a large number of guided walks. We are very sad to see the walks programme go because we know how important it has been to many ScotWays members. However, as an alternative, we will be organising one or two 'big' walks this summer (see below).

Beinn Chabhair



PHOTOGRAPH: RICHARD BARRON

“We are very sad to see [the walks programme] go because we know how important it has been to many ScotWays members”

Celebratory walks this summer

WE will be organising one or two walks during summer 2024 to celebrate the release of the 6th edition of *Scottish Hill Tracks*. We hope these walks will attract larger numbers so you'll be able to meet a wider range of ScotWays people and share a sociable walk along a shorter route – or a circuit including part of some routes from the book. The dates of these walks will be set to coincide with the publication, so hopefully at the end of the walk you'll be able to buy a copy of the new book, hot off the press. No details have yet been set, and the Summer newsletter may be too late to publicise the details, so we will be announcing the details of these events and opening bookings in our e-newsletter, Stravaig.

If you don't already receive Stravaig, or you're not sure, please sign up now at scotways.com/sign-up-to-e-newsletter. We might also organise some other types of events to celebrate the book launch and Stravaig is where we'll announce everything! (If you don't have email, please contact the office if you would like to be kept informed of our arrangements.)



Volunteering Update

THE main current areas of volunteer activity are in repairing signs, surveying signs that haven't been checked for a few years and helping scan our paper signposting archives. We're very grateful for all the efforts and we're making great progress in all of these areas. If you're not already a registered volunteer and you'd like to get involved in these or future projects, please contact Neil Birch, Access Officer (Outreach) on volunteer@scotways.com.

We are seeing a number of vacancies advertised in Local Access Forums around the country. If you'd like to volunteer as part of one of these groups, to help advise on access issues and developments, check the website of your local authority or national park and get in touch with the relevant contact to see if there's a vacancy or a waiting list. If you do find a vacancy, please contact Neil Birch as he may be able to support your application and if you are happy to register as a volunteer, Neil will be pleased to support you as a ScotWays representative.



Storm Gerrit damaged our signs in Glen Feshie



Volunteers Thom and Ros re-setting a fallen signpost at Invergarry

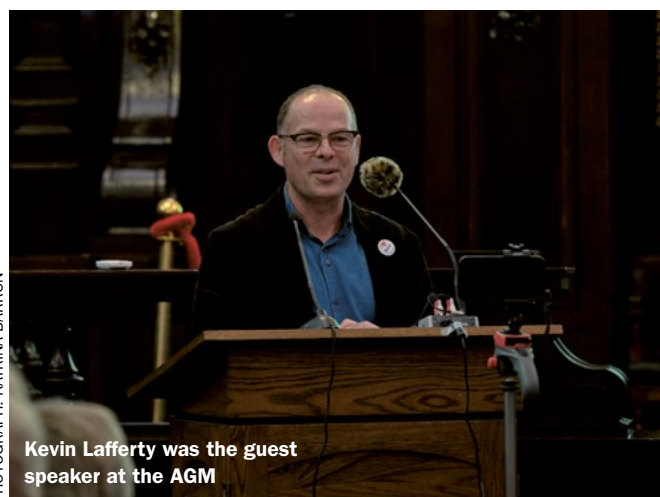
AGM 2023

Successful hybrid event sees ScotWays reflect on the year gone by, while looking to the future with fresh ideas and enthusiasm

OUR Annual General Meeting in 2023 was held as a hybrid meeting for a second year, with 33 attending in person and another 19 joining us online. The meeting was preceded by a light lunch, in response to members requesting the revival of this enjoyable social occasion.

Prior to the formal business, the enthusiasm of our guest speaker Kevin Lafferty, Chief Executive Officer of Paths for All, for getting everyone walking shone through his presentation about the work of that organisation.

Presenting the Directors' report, our Chair, Katharine Taylor, linked the year's activities to the strands of the Strategic Plan created in 2022. While recognising that the accounts for the year brought out a deficit, which was unsustainable over the longer term, she pointed out that ScotWays does have reserves which are there not to be hoarded but to deliver the Society's objectives. Thanking staff and directors for their contribution to the achievements of the Society during the year, the chair welcomed our new Information Officer, Craig Reilly, who had joined the staff a few weeks earlier – read



Kevin Lafferty was the guest speaker at the AGM



Voting taking place during the meeting

PHOTOGRAPH: KATRINA BARRON

more about Craig on p2. Treasurer Alison Riddell followed with a summary of the financial position and stressed that directors were actively considering how to address the deficit. Members could do their bit by spreading the word about ScotWays and encouraging others to support us.

Two new directors, Jonathan Binny and David Dixon, were appointed this year (they introduce themselves on p2) as well as Katharine Taylor, Stephan Hennig, Helene Mauchlen and Tim Simons all being re-elected for a further term.

The formal business was followed by various presentations under the banner of 'ScotWays in Action'. A major project over the last few years has been the work for the new edition of *Scottish Hill Tracks* with director Tim Simons leading a busy team of volunteers. Tim said how much he had enjoyed the project, despite the amount of his time it had occupied.

Next, Neil Birch, Access Officer (Outreach), spoke about following up the many ideas which emerged from the volunteer day held in July 2023, as well as his plans to manage all the survey information our volunteers are producing. He was pleased to confirm that most of the signs have now been checked since 2019 but the remainder are further afield and so harder to reach. As surveys are logged, Neil will be planning how best to carry out the signpost repairs they have identified, with an annual target of 20% of those needing repair.

After the formal business was concluded, there were group discussions about ScotWays' future work which allowed for further exchange of ideas and enthusiasm.

Cairngorms fire management consultation

“THE risk – and potential impacts – of wildfires in the Cairngorms is increasing and we want to hear your views about what should be done about it.”

The Cairngorms National Park Authority has launched a consultation process on fire management within the National Park and the potential introduction of fire byelaws. It is proposing three potential ways forward and are

seeking people's views on them.

1. No fire byelaw, but enhanced communication and education
2. A fire byelaw at times of high fire risk
3. A year-round fire byelaw

Read the consultation document and let them know what you think by 17 April 2024

www.cairngorms.co.uk/working-together/authority/about/corporate-plans/fires/

Coul Links Call in

READERS will remember that The Highland Council approved planning permission (No. 23/00580/FUL) for an 18-hole golf course and ancillary infrastructure at the environmentally sensitive Coul Links dunes in Sutherland. The granting of approval has now been called in by the Scottish Government.

This means that the Scottish Government planning team will now review the entire case and make a recommendation to Scottish Ministers as whether to approve or reject the planning application.

You can help us secure a strong future

Priority is to put our organisation on a more secure financial footing

CALLING all members, current and future!

Our chair, Katharine Taylor, pointed out at the AGM that world affairs have not been kind to our finances and we need to improve our financial position in the longer term. For 2024, a high priority for us is to put ScotWays on a more secure financial footing. There is no single option to do this: we will be looking at a range of ideas. You can help us.

The more members we have, the louder our voice! If you have any family or friends who love the outdoors, please encourage them to join us.

www.scotways.com/become-a-member It's not just individuals though; clubs or community councils can join as supporter members, so if you are a member of a group that would like to support our work, please spread the word there too. **www.scotways.com/become-a-member**

Remember that new members or supporters joining before the end of June this year are members until July 2025.

It is a few years since our subscriptions were last reviewed and, unfortunately, we may have to increase rates from the start of our next financial year on 1 July 2024, so there's even more benefit to joining now! A number of people who pay by standing order have not increased it for many years, despite repeated reminders. After two years of paying the incorrect amount their membership lapses. If you come into this category, we will be in touch to give you one last opportunity to adjust your standing order to the correct rate, after which we will stop sending you newsletters and will treat any further standing order payments received from you after that time as donations to ScotWays.

We always welcome donations of all sizes, whether a one-off or a regular gift. **www.scotways.com/donate**

If you are a UK taxpayer, you can make your membership payment or donation go further – 25% further – with Gift Aid at no extra cost to you.

Legacies, leaving a gift in your will, is another way people can help us and details of how to do this can be found on our website **www.scotways.com/leave-a-legacy**. You don't even need to be a member – one of our biggest legacies in recent years was from a non-member.

Perhaps that kind person decided to support us after our signposts guided them on a walk?

How else could we raise funds? Staff and Directors have a list of ideas they are working on, but what do you think we could do? Send your suggestions to **info@scotways.com**

Scottish Hill Tracks notecards – available from our webshop now



Far left: on the Bealach an Fhiona in Moidart, route 170 in *Scottish Hill Tracks*. Photographer Neil Birch
Left: in Gleann na Muice in the Fisherfield Forest of Wester Ross, route 310 in *Scottish Hill Tracks*. Photographer Dorothy Breckenridge

Now available in our webshop, pack of 10 cards for £6.50 plus postage and packing.

EASYFUNDRAISING

It's not all about you putting your hand in your pocket for us

We've teamed up with Easyfundraising. You shop, brands donate to ScotWays and it won't cost you any extra. From takeaways to travel and fashion to home improvement, over 7,500 brands are signed up so that as you buy from them, they donate to us.



There are just three simple steps to helping us:

1. Scan the QR code or visit www.easyfundraising.org.uk
2. Sign up and search for us
3. Your favourite brands donate to us whenever you shop with them.

Why not tell your friends and family and let them help support us with their daily shopping?



More fencing!

NETWORK Rail's latest move at the Ben Alder level crossing, Dalwhinnie has been to increase the length of the new height fencing at either side of the crossing. Apparently, the previous works carried out in Spring 2023 were left incomplete due to "a materials shortage". The new fencing was notified to the campaign groups just before Christmas and should be complete by the time that you read this article, weather and fencing supplies permitting.

We have once again written to Network Rail about their continued obstruction of a right of way and pointing out that their actions are only worsening the safety issues here rather than improving them. ScotWays and our partners are continuing to push for the reopening of the level crossing but, given the continued intransigent actions of Network Rail, it is highly likely that court action is the only means to persuade it to change its institutional attitude to public access. That is of course a very expensive option for organisations with coffers not nearly as deep as a non-departmental public body.

Keep up to date with our Network Rail casework at www.scotways.com/dalwhinnie

PHOTOGRAPHS: RICHARD BARRON



Blocking access to hillwalkers' car park



Inspecting the new gates

Questionnaire Update

FOLLOWING the closure of the Ben Alder Level Crossing in 2021, we launched a questionnaire exercise to gather additional evidence of how the public have used the right of way heading west from Dalwhinnie, to complement the existing information in our files.

We have so far received around 300 questionnaires. They represent a huge breadth of data from people of all ages that span several decades



When the gates were first locked

and while all very welcome, they have proved a challenge to process. Craig, our new Information Officer, with volunteer support, is now on the case

creating a special database of all your questionnaires. The data will be extremely valuable to ScotWays and its partners as evidence of long-standing public use.

Please don't think that you've missed the cut-off for submitting a questionnaire. Even now, we'd welcome your help! If you have used the level crossing at Dalwhinnie, simply complete the questionnaire, mark up its map and send it to us. All of the necessary information can be found at:

www.scotways.com/dalwhinnie



ScotWays – The Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society

Founded in 1845, ScotWays upholds and promotes public access rights in Scotland. We are widely recognised as experts in the law and practice of access and advise on access problems, provide information and training and maintain a vast database about routes in Scotland. Our recognisable green and white signs are on routes across Scotland. We are home to the Heritage Paths Project a unique archive of Scotland's old paths and roads.

We do not receive any public funds for our core activities. As a result, we are proudly independent and flexible in what we can do,

but must also raise enough money to survive. We couldn't operate without volunteers, who help us by researching path history and keeping our records accurate, representing us on local access forums, surveying and repairing signposts, and inspecting paths.

How could you help us?

www.scotways.com/support-us

Registered Office: 24 Annandale Street, Edinburgh EH7 4AN.

Tel: **0131 558 1222** • E-mail: info@scotways.com •

www.scotways.com