

The outcome

More people in Scotland are more active and healthy in their daily lives, especially through enjoying the benefits of outdoor recreation, and are also more confident in exploring Scotland's wonderful nature and landscapes.

The issue

Scotland has fantastic access rights but lacks a national, publicly accessible path network which appears on all maps and is appropriately waymarked and promoted. To bring these two elements together would set Scotland up as offering internationally renowned opportunities for outdoor recreation and active leisure trip as well as helping people to take functional journeys on foot or by bike.

The project

To achieve this, Ramblers Scotland is proposing the development of:- **a nationally consistent dataset of paths in Scotland** which goes beyond the 21,000km of core paths to include a much larger proportion of the recorded 84,000km path network, and which is publicly available. And as a step along the way of achieving this:- **a national definition of what constitutes a path** (in terms of agreed standards for mapping).

Background to the issue and the extent of NAF involvement to date

Scotland's world class access legislation, established through the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and the accompanying Scottish Outdoor Access Code, was a major achievement of the Scottish Parliament in its first term. The fundamental basis of Scottish access rights is that people are not restricted to staying on paths, but can be on any land which is not specifically excluded, as long as they are acting in a responsible way.

Yet paths are still crucial facilitators of access. For those enjoying the outdoors paths are ways of getting to places by the most direct, safest or most pleasant route, especially in lowland areas. Many people feel more comfortable and confident in enjoying their access rights on a path – especially when they are shown on maps. Paths can be a stepping off point to enable people, particularly beginners, to make the most of our landscapes and our nature. Two in five people in Scotland fail to meet recommended activity levels, and paths can play a crucial role in improving the nation's health. Importantly, paths have a role in assisting land managers to ensure that access does not unreasonably interfere with their operations.

The importance of paths was recognised by the Scottish Parliament, by the requirement for every local authority to draw up a core paths plan. In 1998, SNH's advice to government stated four aims for the proposed measures for paths and tracks and clearly showed the intention behind the creation of core paths as well as their role within the wider path network:

- a) ensuring their use does not adversely affect land managers;
- b) ensuring they are fully used to create local path networks;
- c) ensuring new routes for all users can be developed more easily;
- d) ensuring that these routes and networks are properly mapped and promoted.

As the Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development, Allan Wilson MSP, said during the parliamentary Stage 3 debate on the Land Reform Bill on 22 January 2003:

'We have always made it clear that a system of core paths throughout Scotland is an essential element in the new arrangements for access introduced by the bill. Most people prefer to walk on paths and a well-marked system of routes will encourage more people into the countryside. Equally important is the fact that the provision of paths will assist in the management of access, particularly over agricultural land'

It had always been anticipated that core paths plans would eventually be shown on Ordnance Survey (OS) maps with an attribution showing their special status. However, this didn't happen for various reasons and so several years ago this point was raised with OS by the NAF. OS declined to add the core paths dataset to their maps saying there was no business case for them. As a result, the NAF set up a sub-group which held a series of meetings between May 2016 and September 2017 to engage with OS and other stakeholders to make the case for core paths mapping. Ultimately the sub-group failed to make any significant progress and went into abeyance.

While the NAF work had been focussed on core paths mapping, it had long been the belief of Ramblers Scotland that Scotland was poorly served in terms of the number of paths shown on OS (or other nationally-available mapping systems). By way of comparison, in England and Wales 224,000km of rights of way are protected through depiction on "definitive maps" held by each authority under legislation dating from 1949. This is the basis for the mapping of paths on OS maps; and seeing paths on the map gives members of the public considerable assurance about their rights and their route. Scotland's core path network is 21,000km but even these paths are not all shown on OS maps (approximately 10-20% are not shown – including some popular, promoted and well-maintained routes). In principle, core paths plans are all publicly available through access authority websites, but they are not all in a user-friendly format. Until 2018 when SNH brought core paths together in a web portal¹, finding core paths plans involved a lot of searching of local authority websites for individual maps; a cumbersome user experience.

Of course, many more paths exist on the ground than are shown in a core paths plan, and the wider path network is equally important. SNH estimates the path network at 84,000km in length², according to the Scottish Paths Record held by each local authority and developed in 2005. Many of the paths which form part of the Scottish Paths Record are also mapped on datasets held by other organisations, for example Sustrans, Forestry Commission Scotland and ScotWays and are separately promoted as Scotland's Great Trails, the National Cycle Network, heritage paths, etc. Core paths are part of this record too. While some of these paths are shown on national, publicly available maps such as the OS Leisure maps, the map extracts in Appendix 1 below show three examples of how even some core paths don't appear on maps. It is clear that if shown they would give many more options to users of paths in these areas.

Ramblers Scotland actions

Surveys: Following the pause in the work of the NAF sub-group, in December 2017 Ramblers Scotland commissioned a major independent survey of 1,444 people in Scotland which showed that 75% of respondents believed that more paths on the ground and on maps would help more people enjoy Scotland's outdoors.³ Consistently, the younger the survey respondent, the less knowledge they had of where to walk in Scotland. While confident, experienced walkers may be less worried about the lack of paths, the National Walking Strategy⁴ has shown that 'knowledge

¹ <https://www.nature.scot/enjoying-outdoors/places-visit/routes-explore/local-path-networks>

² SNH, Scotland's networks of paths and trails: key research findings (2018)

<https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2018-09/Research%20Consolidation%20Report.pdf>

³ <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/news/news/2018/january/poll-shows-huge-demand-for-investment-in-paths.aspx>

⁴ Scottish Government, National Walking Strategy (2014) <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0045/00452622.pdf>

barriers', including lack of information, signage, websites, are one of the barriers which discourage more people from walking, and are particularly linked to socio-cultural factors.

These results reinforced our belief that better mapping and promotion of paths will help many more people to enjoy the benefits to health and wellbeing of being outdoors in our natural environment as well as helping land managers to better predict and manage where the public are likely to be on their land. We also believe that better mapping and promotion of paths would support many of the Scottish Government's priorities, especially those relating to public health – to help create vibrant, healthy and safe communities, improve our mental wellbeing and increase physical activity.

Research: It was clear from the response of OS to the NAF sub-group that their involvement was not going to be forthcoming in achieving our ultimate goal which went beyond simply getting core paths attributed on maps to actually getting more quality paths of all types on maps. Therefore, in the summer of 2018 Ramblers Scotland commissioned a report to explore the barriers to this goal, and to identify how these barriers could be overcome. Our consultant spoke to many NAF members as well as Scottish Natural Heritage, access authorities and bodies involved in promoting physical activity.

The findings showed a clear consensus and support for the development of a national database of paths which it was believed would bring a range of benefits to Scotland. There was also a recognition of the need to collectively decide criteria for what paths should be mapped. However, there was currently seen to be a gap in leadership to steer the project through to fruition.

Engagement: Ramblers Scotland has since held a series of meetings with potential stakeholders, including government divisions and agencies, to test whether the support for the initiative shown in response to the consultant when preparing the report is still held at an organisational level. These meetings are on-going – and we are particularly keen to ensure that NAF partners understand our approach and have the opportunity to engage with our aims.

Who benefits from having more paths/on maps?

Everyone! – we know that people in Scotland believe that they would be more active if they were aware of more walking opportunities. A mapped database lends itself to many applications, whether for tourists and visitors searching for paths to explore an area, residents searching for green links with nearby communities, or someone using a fitness app to search for a circular route near their house of a particular length.

Local authorities and community path groups – there are plenty of path leaflets online and in visitor centres and their popularity shows that they help to encourage more people to get out and about. We believe that getting more paths shown on maps would help organisations to better promote more paths and more routes, by producing leaflets and web resources, and making sure paths are signed through greater community involvement. This would help even more people to explore their local areas as well as those further away.

Land managers – paths help land managers to manage their land in a responsible way which respects access rights. Farmers and other land managers can do this much more easily when they know where people on their land are most likely to be and then plan their operations accordingly. They could also use the mapped paths to promote routes on their land.

Next steps / role for NAF

We anticipate the timeline for this project to be 3 years, with progress made as follows:

- Set up a project sounding board from a range of organisations to ensure the project is delivered through a partnership approach. Ramblers Scotland can also play a leadership role on the project to ensure progress is made. This group could be the re-instated NAF sub-group with each organisation bringing particular strengths. Co-opted members with specific expertise could be approached to join the group as needed.
- Together develop a set of nationally agreed criteria for depicting paths on maps (eg, must be signposted at either end, constructed paths, promoted routes, vindicated/asserted rights of way?).
- Continue to build support from a wide range of stakeholders for the concept of a universal database of Scottish paths.
- Oversee proof of concept testing by inviting organisations to give permission for 2-3 existing datasets of paths to be transferred to a central map database in order to identify those routes which would meet the criteria for national mapping.
- Sequentially work through datasets to “ground truth” the paths, potentially with volunteer input and use of Ramblers Scotland reporting technology.

Clearly the lack of involvement of OS or other mapping organisation has been a stumbling block in the past. However, we feel it is more important at this stage to focus on the outcome we want to achieve first – an accessible database of Scottish paths, consistently depicted upon a single digital mapping layer.

In the meantime there are a number of options for where to hold the national database, including Ramblers GB’s own digital platforms, currently in development, which could act as a (potentially temporary) repository for the various datasets of paths which will together make up the national path database. As part of the Ramblers digital project we are also developing an Insight Hub, which be able to offer analytics relating to the path database which contribute to the proof of concept, and would also be accessible to partner organisations. The base layer could be Open Street Map which is free to use, or historic OS maps which are no longer under copyright. In due course, once the concept is tested, a government body (or indeed OS) may become the database manager.

Funding

Following discussion at this NAF meeting, Ramblers Scotland will begin to develop an indicative budget. We will then move towards setting out detailed costings for the concept. This is likely to be significant, but Ramblers Scotland has some resources to offer, and we are confident that external funding could be available given the wide range of potential benefits, in terms of public health outcomes, tourism and rural development. There are potential funding sources for innovative digital projects. We will be looking to develop partnerships or collaborations and would welcome any thoughts around potential funding streams.

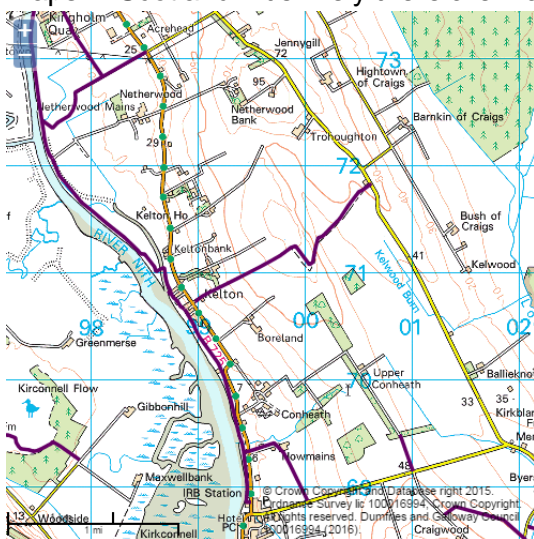
Action required from the NAF

It would be helpful at this stage if the NAF members could:

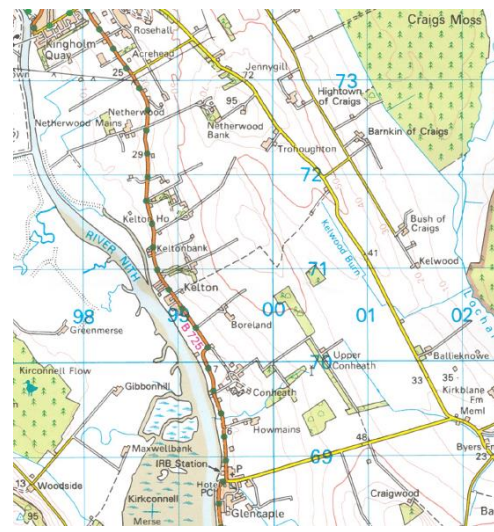
- confirm ‘in principle’ support for the approach and concept;
- set up/join the NAF sub-group to act as a sounding board for the project;
- offer use of an existing paths database (held by a NAF member) to use for testing the proof of concept for the initiative.

Helen Todd, Ramblers Scotland, January 2019

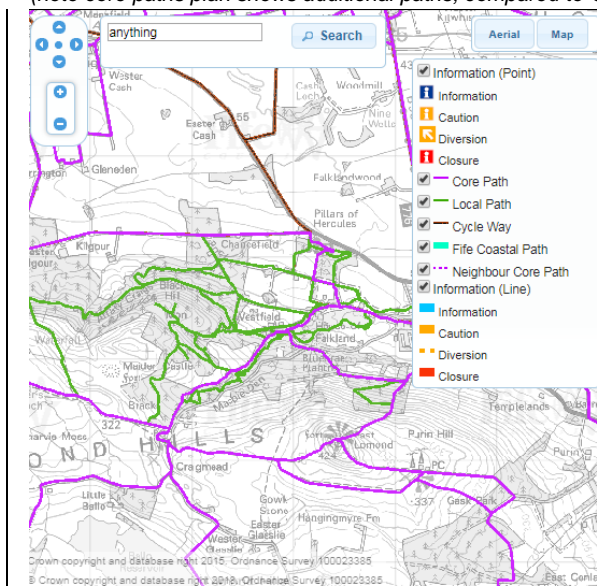
Appendix 1: These three map excerpts show how even some core paths aren't shown on OS maps in Scotland. It's likely there are many other unmapped paths in the wider network.



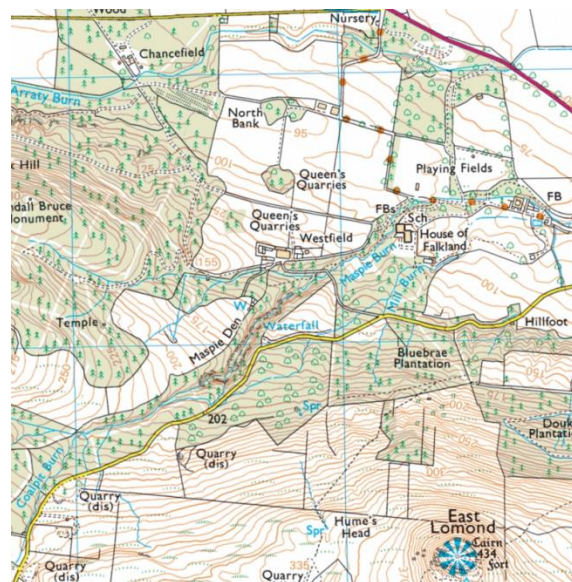
Copyright Dumfries & Galloway Council core paths plan
(note core paths plan shows additional paths, compared to OS)



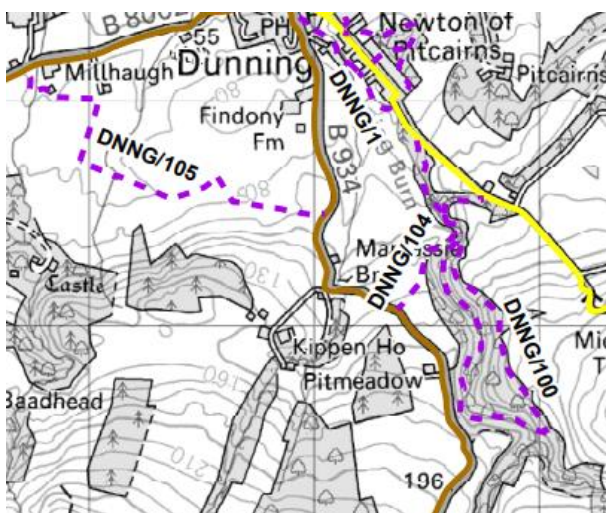
Copyright Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 (2006)



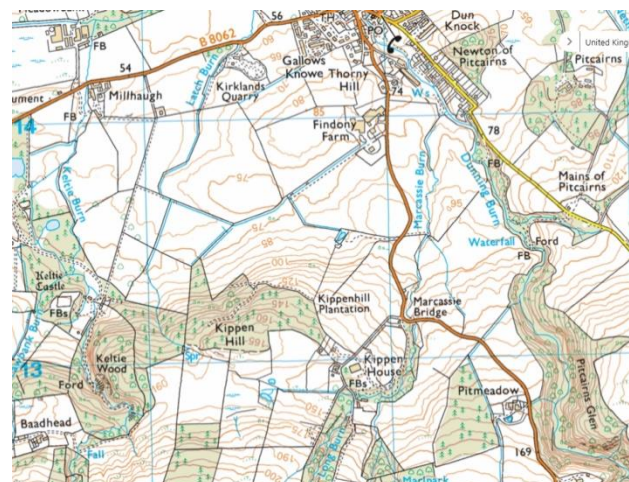
Copyright Fife Council core paths plan
(note Maspie Den core path/local path not shown on OS map)



Copyright Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 (source: Bing)



Copyright Perth & Kinross Council core paths plan
(note core paths 100, 104, 105 are not shown on OS map)



Copyright Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 (source: Bing)

Appendix 2:

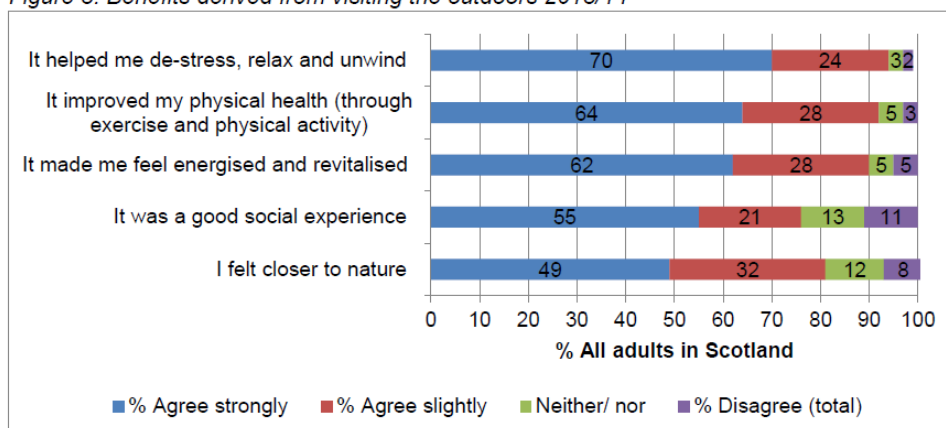
How does this agenda support the Scottish Government's public health priorities?

Priority 1: A Scotland where we live in vibrant, healthy and safe places and communities. The Scottish Government wants to create places and environments to support people to be healthy and create wellbeing. We know that 90% of urban Scots say it's important to have greenspace in their local area⁵, and these are often the places where we are active on a regular basis, but there's so much more to explore in Scotland. Our vision is of a Scotland where walking is part of everyone's daily lives, as a way of spending time with friends or just keeping healthy, as a mode of transport or simply for the joy of being outdoors. We need to capitalise on our unrivalled natural heritage to transform the culture of our country, so that everyone feels they belong in our countryside and greenspaces and values our landscapes and wildlife, enjoying the many benefits of being outdoors. To do this our places need investment in paths, bridges and signage, along with information on where to go, promoted through the internet and in other materials.

Priority 3: A Scotland where we have good mental wellbeing.

There is a growing body of evidence that being active in the natural environment has many benefits for our mental health and wellbeing⁶. We also know that people are very much aware that being active outdoors in a natural environment has particular benefits to health and wellbeing, as shown by the table below⁷:

Figure 3: Benefits derived from visiting the outdoors 2013/14



Source: Scotland's People and Nature Survey 2013/14

Priority 6: A Scotland where we eat well, have a health weight and are physically active.

While overall 65% of Scots are meeting the recommended guidelines for physical activity, only 56% of those in the most deprived areas reach this level as compared to 72% of the least deprived areas⁸. Similarly, on average 52% of Scots visit the outdoors at least once a week, but this is different for those in the most deprived areas where it is 41% and the least deprived areas at 63%⁹. While we acknowledge that there are many barriers to being more active, we believe that the lack of well-maintained and promoted paths and the knowledge of where to find paths is one such barrier which could be removed. Whether they are used for active travel, leisure and socialising or for outdoor recreation, paths are essential in helping people live more active lifestyles, with all the benefits this brings.

⁵ <https://www.greenspacescotland.org.uk/statistics>

⁶ <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/abs/10.1089/eco.2014.0027>

⁷ SNH, Scotland's networks of paths and trails: key research findings 2018
<https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2018-09/Research%20Consolidation%20Report.pdf>

⁸ Scottish Health Survey 2017 <https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/09/9247>

⁹ <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-people-annual-report-results-2017-scottish-household-survey/>