

## **INTEGRATING ACCESS CASE STUDIES**

### **MEGGERNIE AND LOCHS ESTATE**

***Active encouragement of public access on preferred paths and sites without restricting general rights of access, accompanied by education campaign highlighting the importance of responsible access and appropriate behaviour to avoid conflict with wildlife, shooting, farming or conservation***

**Key facts** 15,000 ha Highland estate run on a mixed economy of farming (Highland cattle and Blackface sheep), forestry, sporting and tourism.

**Location** Glen Lyon, Perthshire

**Access issues**

- Conflict between stalking and public access
- Camping, particularly motorists leaving tents up for several nights adjacent to road/burn
- Disturbance to game and wildlife
- Campfires and associated fire risk – one incident resulted in burning of a large area of ancient Caledonian pine forest
- Disturbance to natural grazing patterns of deer
- Sheep worrying
- Risk to public from Highland cows with young calves
- Lambs separated from mothers by dogs

**Background** Glen Lyon attracts many visitors because of its natural beauty, relatively accessible location and hill walking opportunities. During the mid 1990s, public access to the hill was creating real problems for the estate, particularly during the stag culling period when income from paying guests is vital to the economic viability of the estate. There were also a range of other niggling problems which prompted the estate to consider how visitor access could be better integrated with other management activities in harmony with the environment. Introduction of the Land Reform Act has not made a significant difference to level or type of access but as people have more leisure time and become increasingly mobile, the number of visitors to Glen Lyon inevitably increases.

**Aims**

- To provide for public access without interfering with farm enterprises
- To minimise disturbance to game or wildlife
- To avoid conflict between public access and stalking

**Who wants access?** Mainly visitors to the area on foot – day trippers, long distance walkers, climbers

**Key attractions/hot spots** 3 Munros, 5 Corbetts  
Loch an Dhaimh  
rivers and burns (particularly visible and easily accessible from road)  
hill summits affording views of the Glen  
archaeological remains

**Sensitive areas/sites** Caledonian pine forest and other areas of native woodland  
Open hill during stalking season  
In-bye/enclosed farmland  
Lambing/calving

## Action Taken

- **Woodland walks** – approximately 9.5km of clearly waymarked paths have been created, largely in commercial forestry plantations able to accommodate large numbers of people with minimal risk of damage or disturbance. Path construction work cost approximately £5/metre, largely funded through Woodland Grant Scheme as an integral part of ongoing management to enhance the appearance and conservation interest of the woods.

Readily accessible and clearly signed from car parks and lay-bys, these woodland walks have been planned and constructed to incorporate viewpoints and other features of interest as well as offering a choice of routes. They have already proved very popular with people who wish to explore Glen Lyon but who do not necessarily have time, fitness, confidence, skills, equipment or motivation to walk on the hills. The capacity of woodland to absorb and camouflage people is important in enabling visitors to enjoy the serenity and comparative isolation of the glen without venturing too far off the beaten track. To minimise environmental impact, only minimal surfacing has been done but the paths are regularly inspected.

- **Hill paths** – preferred paths leading to the main summits are clearly identified on mapboards and leaflets, and signed off the public road.
- **Information boards** were erected in 2004 at key access points/car parks which include a map of the estate, identification of established paths, information on how, where, when and why access on the hill may conflict with stalking and how to avoid this. Text for the boards was discussed and agreed with the local authority and Forestry Commission Scotland, taking account of the implications of the Land Reform Act. Cost approximately £6,500 per information board/shelter including design, artwork, output, materials and labour to construct shelter
- **Leaflets** showing waymarked paths and providing basic information on responsible access are available from boxes attached to the information boards.
- **Gates** have been erected at the foot of the track leading up from the car park to restrict vehicular access
- **Toilets** constructed at main car park
- Litter bins have been removed and visitors are asked to take their rubbish home, which works well.

## Benefits

- ✓ Steers people away from sensitive areas
- ✓ Access opportunities clearly identified
- ✓ Increased public confidence of where they are welcome to go
- ✓ Concentration of access in pre-identified areas eases management
- ✓ Reduces conflict between public access and stalking

## Keys to success

- Sympathetic owner committed to positive management of public access
- Sympathetic factor who sees access as an integral part of sustainable estate
- Management
- Sufficient resources to invest in managing access
- Woodland of low conservation interest capable of absorbing high levels of

- Public access
- Education of visitors through provision of appropriate information about sensitive areas essential to enable walkers to be responsible

### **Lessons learned**

- ❖ Influencing where people go through location of car parking, information boards, signs, leaflets and path development has worked well on the ground
- ❖ “Longer term the cost of developing and maintaining paths, information boards and leaflets is less than letting people go anywhere at risk of interrupting management operations”
- ❖ Visitors have welcomed guidance provided by the estate on responsible public access
- ❖ Toilets are essential at popular honeypot sites.

### **Ongoing issues**

Camping – legitimate overnight wild camping by genuine hill walkers is acceptable but signs saying “no camping” have been left up along the roadside in an attempt to prevent ongoing issues with motorists pitching tents for several nights at a time

Fires – the estate remains concerned about the environmental risks associated with campfires, hence signs “No fires please”

Toilets – the estate is reluctant to litter the countryside with unnecessary signs but the increasing number of people who are not using facilities provided represents a health issue. Further mechanisms are required to direct people towards existing toilets

## **MEGGERNIE AND LOCHS ESTATES – INFORMATION FOR VISITORS**

### **Extract from information panels**

#### **For Hill Walkers**

There are several hillwalking routes on the estates and you are welcome to enjoy these at your leisure but we ask for your co-operation to ensure that this does not conflict with normal and essential operations on the hill for wildlife and conservation management. In particular, we would ask you to note the following:

1. Our stalking teams are under great pressure to achieve annually the essential deer cull and this becomes very difficult or impossible if deer are unduly disturbed. For this reason, DURING THE CRUCIAL PART OF OUR STALKING SEASON (20<sup>th</sup> July to 21<sup>st</sup> October) IT WOULD BE GREATLY APPRECIATED IF YOU WOULD KEEP TO THE ROUTES MARKED - - - - ON THE MAP.
2. Daily access to the hill by a number of individuals or parties, often walking in circular routes, tends to prevent deer from grazing extensive areas naturally. This encourages the deer to stay in large herds and appropriate selective culling becomes impossible.
3. Hill walkers can help to minimise disturbance by following:-
  - The main established hill paths
  - Prominent ridges and spurs, especially in descent
  - Main routes through glens
  - Principal watercourses when descending open hillsides
4. There is no stalking on Sundays.
5. During late April/early May when lambs are being born, please keep disturbance of the sheep flock to a minimum. During this critical period, newly born lambs are very dependent on their mothers for survival and will become distressed if separated or lost. This can quickly result in death.
6. Ground nesting birds such as gold plover, red and black grouse, curlew, meadow pipit and lapwing are all vulnerable during spring and early summer when they are at their nests, so please keep to the paths. These birds are often so well camouflaged that you might not know they are there and can be easily disturbed, particularly by dogs.
7. WE WOULD PREFER THAT YOU DO NOT TAKE DOGS ONTO THE HILL BUT IF YOU DO, PLEASE ENSURE THAT THEY ARE KEPT UNDER CLOSE CONTROL AT ALL TIMES.

Thank you for your co-operation.