

Scotland - An exemplar of best practice in up-land path management



Errigal Stakeholders at Coire nam Beith Path

STUDY VISIT & THEMATIC SEMINAR

STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING 2

27TH TO 30TH MARCH 2017

SCOTLAND

Engaging with key stakeholders during study visit to Scotland

Exchange visits with upland path experts enhanced the rate of knowledge development and facilitated greater engagement with key users and stakeholders, across the five ASCENT partner regions.

In Scotland, upland paths have been managed for over 40 years and as result significant expertise, methods and training can be found there. To exemplify a model of best practise a programme was developed, in conjunction with leading path experts, that encompassed site visits, a thematic seminar by a visiting delegation of 30 in March 2017. The group comprised of Project Partners, Stakeholders and Community Representatives across the European Partnership.

The study visit was designed to provide a comprehensive introduction to path management in Scotland and in visiting Ben Lomond, Glen Coe, Coire nam Beith, Ben Nevis and Ben A'an, project partners and stakeholders viewed first hand the many approaches to path management taking different pressures including land

management, visitor numbers, terrain and funding, into account.

At Ben Lomond, the need to contain the impacts of recreation was emphasised, with focus on the landscape and natural heritage protection clearly demonstrated. Over 40 years, path management has evolved from volunteers to specialised contractors to a dedicated path team there.

The very popular Glen Coe path, which is owned by the National Trust, exemplifies minimal intervention. Path management was primarily concerned with stabilising steep slopes and dealing with higher rainfall.

Owing to its popularity, the Coire nam Beith path experienced significant damage caused by water erosion. The repairs reduced the impact on the landscape and in stabilising the steep

ground with the result of the path blending very naturally into its natural environment, which has since resulted in lower footfall.

Ben Nevis is the UK's highest mountain, with over 100,000 climbing to its summit per annum and over 200,000 visits on lower ground. Plans are currently afoot to draw together potential sources of revenue and donations from public use. Path repairs are predominantly by hand by specialised contractors and supervised volunteers with path material imported by helicopter.

At Ben A'an, repairs have involved machinery and manual labour. Due to increased footfall, the more regular path line has experienced trampling with plans for remedial works to be completed.

Outcome

The thematic seminar involved a mix of presentations and lively discussion allowing all 30 delegates to engage with path experts concerning strategic thinking and prioritised actions, people and paths, the path industry in Scotland, interventions and techniques and finally building technical capacity and funding.

It was further outlined that in meeting challenges understanding the size and nature of the problem and the importance of highly skilled specialist skills for path repairs is essential. If an intervention is required, the physical condition, the damage of sensitive habitats and the landscape impacts are all key determinants of such.

In the Scottish experience, path repairs are often driven by acute site damage and tend to be reactive, locally focussed

with one off funding. Most path work is however viewed as beneficial to conservation values even on sites with Natura designations.

Key topics in terms of managing the interactions between people and path centred on who manages the land, what are the objectives for management and what is needed to protect any significant features.

The seminar concluded by advising to adopt a strategic approach when embarking on a path management project like ASCENT. It was recommended to ideally be objective led, inventory based with clearly defined priorities, having a proactive approach and if possible, a sustained funding stream.



Key Findings & Learning Points

The study visit to Scotland set the context for the Project Partners, Stakeholders and Community Representatives across the European Partnership, to commence activity equipped with knowledge from an exemplar of best practise. The involvement of stakeholders and community involvement in path management for long term maintenance was venerated.

As identified by the stakeholders in attendance, the key learning points were focussed on the principles of upland path management, establishing a management trust, considerations for the development of a Management Plan, implementing and monitoring maintenance and training programmes on uplands.

From the Scottish experience, it was evident that there is not one single solution to address the impacts of visitors on the natural landscapes. It is therefore necessary to consider how paths are promoted along with the development of associated resources and infrastructure.

Path management is an ongoing process and not a final solution requiring only capital investment; it is a long term commitment. The primary aim in path management is landscape protection, whereby paths are built to protect the landscape from erosion.

Site Visit to Glen Coe



FURTHER INFORMATION

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