

PATHS FOR ALL - THE SCOTTISH WAY INTRODUCTION BY ROGER CROFTS

Introduction

'Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my great privilege to introduce to you 'Paths For All - The Scottish Way'. I shall describe our shared vision, explain the need for this stimulating initiative, and the benefits it will capture as it progresses, spell out the vital ingredients (involving all organisations represented here today), and set out SNH's contribution as an incentive to all others.

What's our vision?

'Paths For All - The Scottish Way' is a challenging initiative to help improve local access for walkers, cyclists, and horse riders, whatever their ability, age or skills. Our partnership aims to create networks of local paths, signposted, mapped and promoted, to meet local needs and in tune with local circumstances. This is not an imposed approach but very much a grass roots movement born out of partnership.

How many networks we eventually have depends upon the response of your organisations and local communities throughout Scotland and, of course, on the resources which these partnerships will be able to gather.

Our collective vision is for 200 networks over the next decade, but with a firm target of 40 in place by the Millennium.

The brochure illustrates our wider vision that is linking these local networks to the longer routes around the coast and across the country so that residents and visitors alike can access Scotland's countryside, in effect, from their back door.

So Paths For All is the unique Scottish Way.

Why do we need it?

By far the best reason is what people themselves have said to us. Listen to these 3 quotes:

"I live in a small village set mainly in arable farmland where there is nowhere to walk except on public roads."

"..... the real problem is that we do not remotely have the network of paths that England does"

"..... my home town is almost devoid of rights of way riders have a terrible time here we need a lowland footpath, foot and bridleway system"

In short, we do not know where to go, we are concerned about creating problems for farmers and landowners and - always a challenge for those of us who live and work here and are committed to Scotland - we are far worse off than England. Also those who make a living from the land - farmers and landowners - have legitimate

concerns about people stravaiging all over their land, and in so doing damaging crops and disturbing livestock. People are therefore, quite rightly, wary and do not want to cause trouble or get into trouble themselves.

The demand is certainly there. Our surveys have shown that a third of the population of Scotland walk at least once every month. Furthermore, nearly a fifth of our visitors go walking while they are here. In addition, cycling and horse-riding are growing fast as recreational pursuits. And most of the demand appears to be where people live. Indeed 40% of the walks are within 10 miles of home. Also, most of the demand appears to be for short walks usually less than 5 miles.

Our rights of way network is a help; but it cannot be the sole solution. England, for example, has 7 times the length of the Scottish Rights of Way network. Even within that limited provision the legal entitlement for horse riding and cycling is minimal.

What are the benefits of Paths For All - The Scottish Way?

It is clear from what people have told us that if we can provide the right assurance to users and to farmers and landowners, we shall take the heat out of some problem situations. Beyond that, we can provide a vital link between town and country which benefits both and, from the SNH perspective, increases people's knowledge and understanding of the management of Scotland's natural heritage.

Developing path networks and therefore encouraging more people to walk, cycle and ride must be good for the health of Scotland's people. We are all aware of the need to improve our physical health and we believe that "Paths For All - The Scottish Way" will help: in short it will let us drink country air and eat trail mix and allow us to forsake the booze, fags and fish suppers.

Footpath networks will also be good for bringing outside money into the community from tourists and from visitors from other parts of Scotland. Their development and maintenance will surely stimulate local jobs and help to encourage new business opportunities.

Creating more access opportunities in lowland Scotland, which must be our major target, will put less stress on the more vulnerable and fragile areas which are Scotland's contribution to maintaining and enhancing European and international wildlife and landscapes: one of our major assets and a major selling point for incoming industry and for tourists.

Making local provision will help to reduce the reliance on cars and will also link with public transport networks. This is an environmental, not a political point, of which we should all be conscious: reducing the amount of environmental resources we use for the benefit of our health and enjoyment.

What are the ingredients to make it happen?

To translate this vision into action requires many ingredients. By far the most important is partnership. It should be obvious from what I have said about benefits, that many national agencies represented here today -such as Scottish Enterprise,

Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Scottish Sports Council, the Scottish Tourist Board and Scottish Natural Heritage - have a clear role to play. So do many other groups based locally: user groups, local authorities, local community groups, local enterprise companies, farmers and landowners.

The essence of Paths For All - The Scottish Way is therefore local action - but with support and leadership through a national partnership.

Locally, let us remember that we are not starting from scratch. There are many pioneering examples with which I am sure you are already familiar. Just up the road from Battleby is the Birnam and Dunkeld network; around Glasgow are paths in the Clyde, Kelvin and Calders Valleys; around Edinburgh there are paths along the Water of Leith - and nearby at Roslin, Dalkeith and Penicuik; not to forget the footpath and cycle routes developed by Sustrans in Central Scotland, in the north east around Huntly, too and in the southwest around Straiton. Straiton, you may ask? Well, you will find out soon enough when David Gray describes what can be done through local energy, commitment and resolve.

But the scene is certainly not static. Many other projects are in gestation. I am aware of much determined activity in West Lothian, South Lanarkshire, the Highlands and Ayrshire, as well as in the Strathclyde and Edinburgh Green Belts. I am sure that there are many other projects which will themselves act as stimuli to those elsewhere who are saying "We want to do something, but how do we start?"

Working together locally is essential. We want to encourage the establishment of local partnerships. Talking together, understanding problems and opportunities, and combining enthusiasm and resources, will enable the identification of local needs, the recognition of what can be delivered on the ground and the development of local networks. Partnership should be able to secure local resources by sponsorship from local business, local authorities, local enterprise companies as well as national support. Once the networks are in place and people know where they are, we would expect to be able to develop local maintenance schemes involving the key constituent interests.

But none of this can happen on its own. National leadership and support is required. That is why we have established the Paths For All partnership. This is genuinely a partnership of all the key interests and as such I am sure it is unique and trail-blazing in Scotland. There are representatives of the users: the British Horse Society, the Cyclist Touring Club Scotland and the Ramblers Association Scotland. There are representatives of owners of land, particularly the National Farmers Union of Scotland and the Scottish Landowners Federation, not forgetting the Forestry Commission as a major landowner. Economic development interests are represented by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise as the local enterprise network co-ordinators, along with the Scottish Tourist Board. Sports providers, are there, particularly the Scottish Sports Council which has the additional role of administering the Sports Lottery Fund in Scotland. Bearing in mind the health aspects, the Health Education Board for Scotland is one of our partners. The media are involved and we are glad to welcome Scottish Television as one of the partners. And, vitally important, local representation: local authorities through the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and local communities through the Scottish Community

Education Council are partners. And, of course, Scottish Natural Heritage, a very powerful and all-embracing partnership indeed.

But partnerships need leadership and I am pleased on behalf of the members to announce that Gus Macdonald, Chairman of Scottish Television, has agreed to be the President, and that Magnus Magnusson, the Chairman of SNH, has agreed to take on the leadership role as Chairman of the partnership.

To formalise the arrangements of the partnership a company limited by guarantee and with charitable status has already been established. Partnership Directors will be nominated in the near future. And I can tell you with pleasure that Alan Blackshaw, a member of the SNH Board, will be SNH's nominated Director.

Partners need workers to translate thinking and debate into action and we have already made progress on this front as well. Today, it is my pleasure to introduce a full-time team paid for by SNH for an initial period. Our intention is that they will have a strong range of skills in community action, in working with owners and managers of land in the voluntary sector, and in access issues and conservation management. The team will be led by Pam Scott, as the Chief Executive Designate; she has been working on projects within the Sports Council. She will be assisted by Ron McCraw, who has shown what can be done in developing access in Clackmannan and more recently in West Lothian; and two others by Julie Proctor, who has been working on Rights of Way in Cumbria; and by Kenny Steele, one of SNH's Area Officers working in the north-east.

If these are the ingredients, what is this partnership going to do to help bring the vision of Paths For All into reality locally? Well, it will promote the project as widely and as loudly as possible. It will co-ordinate effort between local groups so that we do not have to start from scratch every time. It will help you to raise resources and, I hope, to garner resources from Lottery funds, European funds and the corporate sector in Scotland. It will provide advice and guidance and technical support and training through, for instance, the production of an action pack which will be available next month, and the establishment of a helpline. It will develop a maintenance scheme which we hope to establish next year, and it will finalise the model access agreements we have been working on with farming and landowning interests.

I have already mentioned Scottish Television as a member of the partnership and Gus Macdonald as President of Paths For All. Let me spell out the connection. Scottish Television has adopted 'Paths For All - The Scottish Way' as its Millennium project and will promote local projects through its social action division with a new series of Scottish Action beginning next month. Obviously, this will stimulate would-be sponsors nationally and locally who will wish to see their name on the small screen as part of the project, and help it to move forward faster. But I must not steal Gus's thunder - he will be addressing us himself shortly.

What is SNH doing to bring the vision into the reality?

SNH began this initiative. Indeed, almost 2 years I, personally, announced our intentions when launching our action programme on access to the outdoors. Since then, we have translated our intentions into a tangible reality. Our Chairman has

taken on the challenge to get the initiative off to a good start. Minister, with your very welcome approval, we have been able to commit up-front resources to get the initiative onto a firm financial footing. In the early period we shall pay for the Paths For All team whom I have just introduced. We shall provide funding as a challenge to get local groups to establish networks, and we hope they will use that as a challenge to garner resources from elsewhere. We shall provide pump-priming funding for local footpath and access officers with grants up to 50% of costs for 3 years. In total, and subject to future Government funding, SNH is committed to providing £400,000 per annum to this great initiative.

I am also especially pleased to be able to announce today that we shall be donating to the Partnership company a legacy of £130,000 which has been bequeathed to us and which will be for the promotion of paths, signs, maps and brochures.

We shall also give support through our local staff by operating an open door in our Area offices for local partnerships. Whether you are in Ayr or Clydebank, or Oban or Lanark, or Dalkeith or Galashiels, or Cupar or Stirling, or many other locations around Scotland, my colleagues will be there to provide advice and guidance.

Our intentions are clear, our commitment is high in terms of cash, energy and enthusiasm.

What Next?

To match our commitment, and the commitment of the Paths For All partnership, the next step is to get thinking, get working together, get raising funds and get going.

The challenge is to everyone present, and the organisations they represent, to celebrate the Millennium by providing paths for all. It is good for health, for pleasure, for jobs and for the natural heritage. It will benefit Scotland's people, its visitors and its environment. Paths for All is the Scottish Way to the Millennium.