

SITE VISIT TO DUMYAT 6 OCTOBER 2017

1. Introduction

1.1 About a dozen interested parties met to revisit the Dumyat path. Richard Callender of Stirling Council led discussion of current works and prospects for further work within the existing contract and for future management of the path. Although not all participants were able to stay for the duration of the visit, we walked up the path as far as the main bog section below the final rise to the top of the hill.

1.2 This note has been prepared by Bob Aitken, an independent retired footpath manager, and by Chris Cairns of McGowan Ltd, as an attempt to summarise the views expressed on the hill into a general consensus. We acknowledge that it inevitably cannot fully capture or represent the diversity of views expressed in what was a useful and generally constructive ‘full and frank’ discussion. It isn’t our intention to try to suppress any of that diversity, but to identify the agreed scope for further work to allow constructive practical progress both in the short term and looking further ahead. We hope the interested parties so passionately concerned for Dumyat will accept this approach in the spirit in which it is offered.

2. General points

2.1. It is clear from a prolonged period of consultation that the issue of erosion or damage to Dumyat is of concern to the community in its broadest sense. It is also clear that further survey work carried out by the Cairngorm Outdoors Access Trust confirmed such issues and in turn suggested a course of action in the form of a specification of work. This report seeks to build upon publicly expressed concern to that agreed approach and to propose an alternative set of measures which could be adopted in place of the current specification.

2.2. There was, as we judge it, broad agreement **that there is a need to undertake at least some remedial work on the Dumyat path**. Continued inaction would be detrimental to the quality of the hill, which to an outside observer on the path does subjectively look rather battered and in places sadly degraded. There is widespread ground damage at various places, particularly in and around the wettest sections of the path, and there is clear evidence at several points of the active opening of new braid lines and sideways spread of trampling extending over ten or fifteen metres. We would justify the need for work primarily on the key objective of most upland path management in Scotland to date: to reduce and contain dynamic landscape and visual impact, and to conserve the character of the hill environment. This is particularly important in the case of Dumyat with its status as an iconic local hill greatly valued for its accessibility and for its high-quality opportunities for diverse recreations. It is not normally any part of the aims of hill footpath management to make the path easier, though that can be an incidental effect of defining, draining and stabilising the line to reduce damage.

2.3. Similarly, we think there was agreement in the site visit that **the original specification on which the contract for the current works is based took too little account of the special values of the hill, and proposed a remedial regime that is generally viewed as too constructional and formal**, inappropriate to the scale of the damage, the character and setting of the path, and the aspirations of the recreation users and devotees of Dumyat. Here, as often elsewhere, the availability of one-off large capital funding has led to a radical intervention on the path, where a more modest and progressive approach founded on broad agreement among interested parties would seem much more appropriate and more acceptable.

2.4. It was argued, and we think accepted, that this situation has stemmed in part from **the lack of a fully developed countryside management framework for Dumyat** which would include the identification of its key values and would *inter alia* establish criteria and standards for path work. But it also follows from the summary diagnosis above that sound **future management of the path and the wider hill environment will need sustained, carefully considered, and suitably skilled maintenance, and probably further small-scale works** to respond to likely continuing change and damage. The framework for funding and delivery of that work and associated monitoring should be addressed as an early priority. That could be one constructive outcome of the current controversy.

2.5. Although varied and sometimes forceful views were expressed both on the principle and on details of **the work carried out on the first section of the path from the road**, there appeared to be a consensus that any attempt to reinstate that work would be unsuccessful in restoring the earlier ground conditions and would simply create conspicuous damage. That length of path should instead be finished and consolidated to maximise its durability and minimise its visual impact.

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3. A revised approach to current and future repairs

3.1 Guiding principles

3.1.1 The ruling principle for further works on Dumyat would be to apply **the least intrusive methods and materials compatible with resolving site problems**: ‘appropriate intervention’ in path-worker jargon. Machine construction should be applied only where a small machine (3.5 tonne excavator with tilting bucket, assisted by a 3 tonne tracked dumper for localised movement of material and transportation of fuel) can be brought to site by the least impacting route, usually from an access route uphill of the path. On the further sections, imported rock or surfacing material should be brought to site by helicopter.

3.1.2 As a general rule **the path width should be not more than 1.5m maximum** with as much variation down to 1m as can be reasonably achieved by finishing, landscaping, and use of natural features or ‘squeeze points’. A key underpinning assumption is that we should not aim for a path width that allows ‘parallel’ multiple use by walkers and mountain bikers: to be effective that requires a width of hardened constructed surface 2m wide or more that would be conspicuously out of place on the open hill. We work on the basis that the accommodation of potentially conflicting uses needs to be worked out by mutual goodwill, but also realistically by the use of diversionary MTB braid paths which may well need further work in due course. It is fair to state frankly that the intensity of MTB use on Dumyat, a hill already very popular for walkers, takes Scottish hill path management into largely uncharted territory: a degree of flexibility and goodwill is needed on all sides.

3.2 Priority Sections Proposed for Continued Path Work Under the Current Contract

3.2.1 These are the sites for which we felt there was a consensus in favour of suitably restrained early work, approximately in order of priority and acceptability as per the attached updated site maps. The route has been split into 9no subsections, numbered in a westerly sequence from below the Dumyat summit to the start of the route off Sheriffmuir Road.

- **Section 9 (356m): Initial section of path currently under construction:** finish the surfacing with imported Type 2 quarry gravel material to consolidate into a weather-resistant surface, an

important early measure to pre-empt winter damage. Import the material by powered carrier and helicopter.

- **Section 8 (46m): Beyond the current constructed section of path**, carry the built path forward by 46m to the bed-rock viewpoint overlooking the Forth Valley, to stabilise the upper slope to the point where its gradient eases off. Import Type 1 sub-base and Type 2 surfacing by helicopter and insert path surface drainage using stone waterbars constructed with imported stone to shed water leaching from exposed areas of bedrock.
- **Section 2 (427m) The approach to the fence bog and beyond to the first bedrock outcrop below the final summit approach**: Construct 427m of path on the section of route suffering from water erosion and localised wet areas on a direct line on the approach to and just beyond the fence wet section. This would involve helicopter importation of Type 1 sub-base and Type 2 surfacing to create a path line across the very wet ground, using well-established techniques based on geogrid and geotextile to 'float' the path across the vegetated surface, with through drainage by culvert pipes and scalloped turfed lateral deflection ditches and mounds; less intrusive and less hazardous than boardwalk. Path surface drainage utilising stone waterbars constructed with imported stone. A pedestrian gate would be installed in the fence line. This would help reduce current impacts on the long diversion paths around eroding and boggy areas.
- **Section 4 (43m): On the approaches to the small burn crossing**: Construct 43m of path on a direct alignment across the wet area and small burn crossing using Type 1 sub-base and Type 2 surfacing on geotextile where required imported by helicopter. Through drainage by culvert pipe and scalloped turfed lateral deflection ditches and mounds. Path surface drainage utilising stone waterbars constructed with imported stone.
- **Section 6 (411m): On the approaches to the first major bog hollow on the path and beyond to the junction with the major braid to the south**: Construct 411m of path around the very wet rightwards-draining hollow, using the cross-slope for definition and containment, clearing a path line by small machine to achieve a narrow dry path on a stable bench using imported Type 1 sub-base and Type 2 surfacing by helicopter on geotextile where required, cross-drainage by culvert pipes and scalloped turfed lateral and deflection ditches and mounds. Path surface drainage utilising stone waterbars constructed with imported stone. Assisted recovery of the extensive damage zone in the hollow by transplantation of spoil from the new path line and judicious placement of clumps of juncus rush as a visual barrier.

3.2.2 The actual scale of work that may be implemented on these sections is subject to formal agreement through Stirling Council on behalf of the interested parties, and necessarily on funding constraints.

3.3 Other Sections De-Scoped from the Current Path Work Contract

Section 1 (385m), Section 3 (115m), Section 5 (178m), Section 7 (541m)

Sections 1,3,5 & 7 have been de-scoped. Work will not be carried out here under the current path work contract. Any work would be carried out after further discussion and agreement as a future phase of the work by interested parties with training / supervision by a suitably experienced and competent person. Utilising 'appropriate intervention' hand techniques of shaping, definition and cross-drainage, stone waterbars and seeding. The aim would be not to formalise the path at all, but to achieve a degree of containment and pre-emption of further spread of substrate scour and vegetation loss.

4. Further recommendations

4.1 Remediation works on areas which are to be de-scoped would be accompanied by opportunities for **early informal training** to be given to interested parties such as the Friends of The Ochils and the Stirling Bike Club, to help foster the technical understanding and capacity for future volunteer management of the path mentioned at 2.3 above. The top section of the hill would represent an ideal opportunity to provide such an induction.

4.2 **Stirling Council** should put in hand the preparation of an **access and management plan** for Dumayr together with a robust strategy for managing the path in the future. Scottish Power may assist in securing this, but it will need the buy-in of the council to have any hope of success.

4.3 Finally, we also recommend that the interested parties form a group, or come together under an existing group, to provide a forum to develop a **consistent view and strategy** to preserve the long term future of the site and take some degree of responsibility for this resource. We envisage that the training discussed above would represent an ideal opportunity to galvanise and engage such a group.

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13.10.2017