

---

**CAIRNGORMS LOCAL OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM**

---

**Title:** Path Signs

**Prepared by:** Pete Crane, Senior Visitor Services Officer

**Purpose:** To update the Forum on development of a consistent approach to the design of path signs that meets Scottish Government guidance for core paths and to seek advice on key elements of the work.

**Advice sought:**

The Forum is invited to give its advice on the following key principles on which the work will be based:

- a) Path signs should primarily look to the needs of people wishing to use paths.
- b) Information presented on paths signs should be as simple as possible and should focus on destination, distance and direction.
- c) A consistent approach to path signs should be adopted in the Cairngorms National Park and this should apply, in time, to all signed paths.
- d) Sign design should reflect the character of the National Park including the use of sustainable materials.
- e) Guidance should cover three principle settings for signs:-
  - Signs to the start of path networks (often in urban situations)
  - Path signs
  - Use of intermediate way marking
- f) The following order of priorities should be used to decide on the installation of new signs:-
  - Core paths that are currently unsigned
  - Existing signs that are damaged and illegible
  - Existing signs that do not meet the new guidelines

**Background**

1. Scottish Government guidance on Part 1 Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 states; 'Signposting – Local authorities should ensure that all core paths will have signposting at key access points, in order to encourage the use of paths and create confidence in their use. The signposts should clearly show the word 'Path', and where appropriate also indicate the destination and distance (e.g. Clatto Country Park 1 mile). Waymarking may also be provided as appropriate at places where the route of a core path may not otherwise be obvious.'
2. The development of sign guidance is a discrete action in the Cairngorms National Park Plan: 'develop and promote technical guidance for way-marking of paths in line with Park-wide policy.' The action is designed to help in delivering the following outcome: 'there will be a more extensive, high quality, well maintained and clearly promoted path network so that everyone can enjoy the outdoors and move around the Park in a way that minimises reliance on motor vehicles.'
3. Policy on path signs also forms part of the CNP Outdoor Access Strategy, Policy OAS 11; 'The Park Authority will work with relevant partners to produce and keep under review technical way-marking guidance, in line with national best practice,

which will lead to high standards, a consistent approach and the promotion of a feeling of being within a National Park.’. This policy also states;’ There will be a presumption against way-marking in wild, remote or other sensitive areas, especially in mountainous terrain, where people value the sense of wildness and are expected to be self reliant.

4. The work covered by this paper only covers directional signs for paths and intermediate way marking. It does not include provision of route information, interpretation or signing of hazards/land management operations.

### Current Signage

5. No detailed audit of path signs has been undertaken. However, work undertaken during the core path planning process indicates that most proposed Core Paths have directional signs but many of these do not meet the new criteria. Annex 1 contains examples of signs currently in use in the National Park.

### Discussion

6. The examples in Annex 1 clearly show the lack of consistency currently in sign design across the Park. In producing guidelines for path sign design we have the opportunity to address a number of issues including:-
  - Designs that meet best practice guidelines on legibility (font size, colour and contrast)
  - Use of organisational/network branding/ advertisements
  - Consistent use of information (imperial distance, metric distance or time)
  - Use of sustainable materials in character with surroundings
  - Proportionality of signs
  - Opportunities to combine signs (reduction of sign clutter)
7. The advantages of developing a consistent approach across the National Park include:-
  - Consistent adherence to legislative requirements and national best practice
  - Clarity and consistency of information to users
  - Increased confidence in users leading to increased use
  - Increased awareness of promoted paths
  - Increased potential to encourage responsible behaviour (the feeling of being on a path that is looked after)
  - Improved landscape quality and user experience
8. Existing path signs have been installed and are managed by a wide range of stakeholders including individual land owners/managers, community path groups, public agencies and NGO’s such as Scotways and Sustrans.
9. We consider that the key area of work in producing path sign guidance is developing consensus amongst stakeholders. In order to assist us in this process we have contracted “Walking the Talk” (a locally based consultancy with experience in sign design, path construction and consultation) to facilitate the workshop and help produce sign guidance.
10. However, prior to consulting with stakeholders we feel that it would be very useful to seek advice from the Forum on the approach being adopted. This advice will help

shape our consultation with stakeholders. We have provisionally planned a stakeholder workshop in April to which all Forum members will be invited.

### **Outputs**

11. The main output will be a brief document providing technical guidance on path signs that will form a technical annex of the Outdoor Access Strategy for the National Park. The Forum will be asked for further advice prior to publication.
12. Adherence to the path sign guidance is likely to be a requirement for public sector financial support for outdoor access improvements.
13. The Forum is invited to give advice on the points noted above.

**Pete Crane**  
**Senior Visitor Services Officer**  
[petecrane@cairngorms.co.uk](mailto:petecrane@cairngorms.co.uk)

Annex 1 Some Examples of Current Path Signs in the Cairngorms National Park

