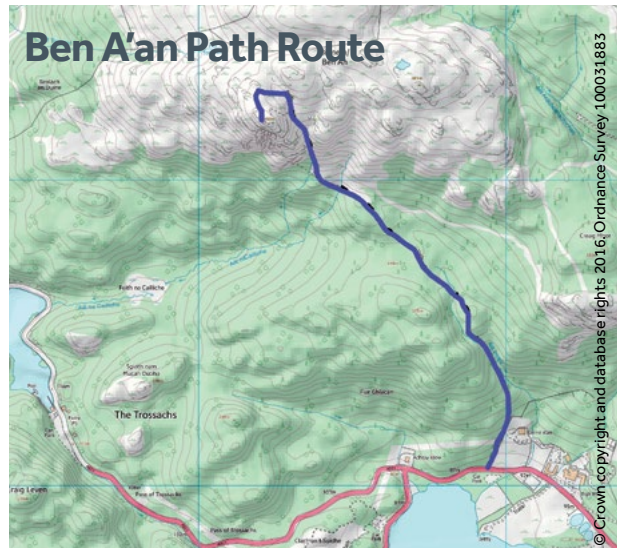


# Upland Path Management

## IMPACT OF FOOTPATH EROSION ON UPLAND HABITATS

The National Park is a fantastic place for outdoor recreation, with opportunities for many different activities in an outstanding environment. The area experiences lots of use by walkers which can result in pressures on some of our sensitive hill and mountain habitats. Ben A'an, (454m) is easily accessed and offers a range of walking and climbing experiences, it is the second most popular hillwalk in the National Park (after Conic Hill) and is climbed by approximately 70,000 people each year. It provides an easy to moderate walk for people of all abilities, however, the final ascent to the summit is steep and physically demanding. The popularity of this walk makes it a jewel in the crown of hill paths in the Trossachs area, with spectacular views from the summit of Ben Venue, Loch Katrine and on a clear day, the Arrochar Alps; it is worth the effort.

Ben A'an is owned and managed by Forestry and Land Scotland – the government department responsible for managing Scotland's public forests. In October 2014 work started to improve the habitat on the hill.



These works were part of The Great Trossachs Forest Project, which aimed to restore a large area of native woodland. During these works the non-native trees were felled and part of the area was re-planted with native trees.

### The Problem

The Ben A'an path had previously been worked on in the 1980s, but over the years it had suffered badly from drainage and erosion issues. Path erosion is caused by a combination of factors; boot treads, mountain bike tyres, horse riding and livestock grazing all play their part.

These factors combined with natural forces such as wind, rainfall, frost, type of rock and vegetation as well as the steep slopes, compounded the problem. The combination of erosion and drainage problems resulted in a boggy, rough path that was difficult to use and presented a barrier to people's enjoyment.

The majority of people hill walking prefer to walk on good paths as they feel safer and have a better experience, however, when the path is in poor condition, people start to walk around the edges. This results in a wider path with multiple routes - in places the path on Ben A'an had become 5m wide. This widening of the path had reduced the quality of the environment and was resulting in loss of the surrounding habitat.





**The Solution**



Due to increasing levels of the erosion on Ben A'an and the high volume of people using the path, it was identified as a priority for upgrading as part of The Mountains & The People Project, a flagship £6 million initiative to restore many of the best hill and mountain paths in the two National Parks.

The project was a partnership between the Heritage Lottery Fund, Forestry and Land Scotland, NatureScot and the two National Park Authorities,

(Cairngorms and Loch Lomond & The Trossachs) and the Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland. Following a detailed survey, it was decided to build a 'high and dry' type path using as much material that could be 'won' on-site. This construction method effectively 'lifts' users out of the boggy mire to create a usable and long-lasting path. The path was built using machines and hand tools, and 120t of stone from a local quarry was flown in by helicopter to construct the large drainage and path features.

The repaired path has greatly improved the route, making it easier and more enjoyable for people of all ages. The new path reduces the amount of maintenance required, meaning the path will be open to all for many years to come. This has many long-term benefits; supports the rural economy, community resilience and sustainability and helps conserve the sensitive upland habitat.



**Before**  
Section on hill with steep cross slope



**After**  
Benched raised path with stone features and catchment ditching



### Conflicting National Park aims:

As a National Park Authority we regularly have to make difficult decisions over what is the best way to proceed. At the heart of these decisions are two, sometimes conflicting, National Park Aims.

- To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the Park
- To promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the Park by the public

### Resolution and role of the National Park Authority

The National Park helps to address these issues in various ways:

As the Access Authority, the National Park Authority provides advice to land managers and the public on access rights, and promotes responsible behaviour in the countryside. The National Park Ranger Service promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and help people enjoy the National Park.

The National Park Authority have prepared a Core Paths Plan illustrating the network of routes for visitors and residents in the National Park - core paths have an important role to play by ensuring that people can enjoy recreational access and minimise the potential for conflict with farming, forestry etc.

➤ For more information on our [Core Paths](#) visit our website.

### Questions and pupil enquiry

- What are the main causes of footpath erosion?
- What are the problems caused by footpath erosion?
- What factors should be considered when importing stone to build the path?
- What are the main benefits to a well-constructed footpath at Ben A'an?

### FURTHER GUIDANCE

#### Online

- [Forestry and Land Scotland: Ben A'an](#)
- [The Mountains & The People project](#)
- [The Great Trossachs Forest](#)
- [Upland path work manual](#)

#### Interactive

- [360 view from the top of Ben A'an](#)

