

"Ochilbank", Muckhart, Clackmannanshire, FK14 7JW

Martin Dean
Access Officer
Clackmannanshire Council
Kilncraigs
Greenside Street
ALLOA FK10 1EB

20th September 2008

Dear Martin

Final Draft Core Paths Plan

May I offer the following comment on the above Plan? I say 'comment', though what I have to say may be verging on an 'objection'. However, I hesitate to use that word, in that I realise objections are likely to trigger a different train of events from comments.

In earlier versions of the Plan, the routes numbered 137 and 138 were linked to routes 139 and 140 by means of an additional route running from Grid Reference 933 976 a short way SW of Harviestoun Home Farm to Grid Reference 943 980 at the track junction south of Kennel Cottage. This linking route has been omitted from the Final Draft Plan.

By way of background to my comments, I should say that I have resided in the area since 1975 and have used all these routes from time to time over that period. I view the evolution of the Core Path Plan through the eyes of one who has worked in the field of outdoor recreation for several decades and who holds academic qualifications in Geography, Physical Education and Environmental Studies. In addition, I either am or have been involved, in a voluntary capacity, in the Scottish Countryside Access Network, Friends of the Ochils, the Scottish Rights of Way & Access Society, the Clackmannanshire Local Access Forum and the Clackmannanshire Heritage Trust. I either chair or have chaired four of these five bodies.

The early versions of the Core Path Plan, in response to public 'demand' expressed through the consultation process, included the now 'missing link'. There was obvious logic in that, in that the area between Tillicoultry and Dollar thus offered a choice of long connecting links between the two settlements or shorter loops, and this had every appearance of providing the 'sufficiency' required by the guidelines and, at the same time, that element of choice, which is necessary to sustain user interest.

Although there are other connecting links between Tillicoultry and Dollar, i.e. Melloch Wood, the Devon Way and the A91 roadside footway, these do not detract from or negate each other, in that each offers a different 'countryside experience'. Indeed, they support each other. What the Harviestoun route adds – and what the other three do not have – is elevated views out over the Devon lowlands to the

south. It is also sufficiently distant from the A91 that the traffic noise experienced on the A91 footway and on the Devon Way is much reduced, if not absent. Unlike many farm routes, it also follows a firmly-bottomed vehicular track for the whole of its length, which is bound to be an attractive feature in users' minds.

The 'missing link' is well known locally and is well used. Public use and agricultural operational considerations appear to have co-existed for many years, without incident. The principal – perhaps only - activity of Harviestoun Home Farm is cattle rearing, and the Farm's Charolais herd is to be seen in the fields adjacent to the route. In recent weeks, I have asked both the long-serving Senior Countryside Ranger and the equally long-serving owner of Harviestoun whether there has, in their experience, ever been any cattle-related injury to any member of the public, and the answer from both was that there has not. I have never seen any member of the public seeking to pass through the grazing pastures, even in recent years under the Land Reform Act, so that possibility is no ground for removing the route from the Plan.

I am aware of the argument that there is undue danger to members of the public while cattle are being moved along the 'missing link' track, but I have to say, based on long experience of the countryside and having met cattle in a variety of situations over many years, I believe this view to be overstated. Within the agricultural industry, there are well-established systems for controlling cattle, and good practice is disseminated by the NFU, the SRPBA and the Health & Safety Executive. On occasion, cattle are even driven along public roads; if the right methods are employed, with appropriate numbers of farm staff, then such operations can be carried out safely.

As to other possible difficulties, the route does lead close past a number of cottages, but I am not aware that public passage has ever caused a problem to the householders there. Domestic privacy is not, therefore, an issue. The working area at the Home Farm is off to one side of the through route, so working curtilage is not an issue either.

Conclusion: For all the above reasons, I conclude that there is no sound argument for having removed the 'missing link', which turns on its head the value of earlier public consultations. In the public interest, and in the spirit of the Core Path concept, I urge the Council to re-instate the missing section.

Yours sincerely

Alistair Lawson