

**DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY OUTDOOR ACCESS FORUM  
MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 5 APRIL 2022 AT 1.30 PM  
ONLINE, MICROSOFT TEAMS MEETING**

<b>Present:</b>	Peter Ross (Chair) Richard Clarke Teresa Dougall Ross Gemmell June Hay Catherine Makepeace Martin Page Bryan Scott Richard Smith Beverley Vaux	DGOAT Trustee / Health Walks SUP South West Scotland Coastal Path NFUS DGC Southern Upland Way Ranger DGOAT Trustee / Cycling Wigtownshire Ramblers Forestry and Land Scotland DGC Rhins of Galloway Coast Path NHS D&G Public Health Horse Interests
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Sheila Adams Louise Coupar	Minutes DGOAT Project Officer
<b>Apologies:</b>	Jonathan Barrett John Blaikie Cllr Katie Hagmann Tom Henry Richard Masters Jane McDowall John Nelson Margaret Peck William Oakes Vacancy	DGOAT Trustee / DGC Galloway Glens LPS Water Access DGC Elected Member DGC Southern Uplands Way Ranger DGC Access Officer BHSS D&G Land Manager DGOAT Trustee / Walker / Rambler DGOAT Trustee / Scotways and Dog Walking NatureScot

**1. Welcome, Apologies, Declarations of Interest**

The apologies above were read out. Peter welcomed everyone to the online meeting. There were no declarations or conflicts of interest.

Teresa advised that this would be her last meeting as she was leaving NFUS on 22 April to take up the post of Crop Assurance Scheme Managing Director with Scottish Quality Crops. She expects her replacement at NFUS to start in May. On behalf of the Forum, Peter congratulated Teresa on her new appointment but would miss her input at Forum meetings.

**2. Minutes of the last Forum Meeting of 18 January 2022**

The Minutes of the meeting of 18 January 2022 were approved as a true record and were proposed as such by Teresa Dougall and seconded by Richard Smith.

Amendment to Minutes, advised by Jane McDowall by email – Jane has stepped down as Chair of BHSS Dumfries and Galloway Committee but remains on the Committee and involved with access.

**3. Matters Arising and Update on Action Points**

1. Beverley had taken photos of the locked gate at Loch Whinyeon, Map 56, Core Path Plan 2013. Richard M had investigated and advised that this was not on a core path. He would try to investigate ownership – carry forward.

2. DGOAT is a member of the South of Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA) and will raise the issue of accommodation with the Alliance and try to facilitate a meeting between SSDA and the SUW Rangers – this had not yet happened due to Covid restrictions and capacity - carry forward.
3. Katie to email relevant DGC Officer requesting that Access Forum Minutes are available on DGC's website – Katie had emailed and was awaiting feedback from DGC Officer investigating this. Katie sent apologies for the meeting as she had another Committee commitment and this would be the last meeting before the local elections. Katie subsequently advised by email that she had escalated this request to Director level – discharged.
4. Peter to email Forum members with a view to setting up a Working Group to consider shovel ready projects and funding bids – not done yet due to capacity – carry forward.
5. Peter to discuss offline with Beverley and Jane the issue of additional wind turbines at Cornharrow Windfarm and how best to deal with this – not done yet – carry forward.
6. Katie to email Richard M to request GSAB membership or occasional attendance from a GSAB representative at Forum meetings – it was not known if this had been done – carry forward. Peter had completed a form regarding DGC Elected representatives – discharged.
7. Peter to write to DGC and NAF to suggest the provision of self-cleaning toilet pods to encourage visitors – carry forward.
8. Bryan/Richard to write to Hensol Estate again to explain access rights – Richard M had written but had not yet received a response. There had been no further reports to date – discharged.
9. Peter and Bryan to discuss options for the future of the Mull of Galloway Trail website – this is ongoing - discharged.
10. Teresa and Peter to find out where letters between Beckfoot and DGC have got to before meeting again – included in Access Officer's report - discharged.
11. Beverley to investigate the sign on the track to the beach at Cairnholy, Kirkdale, and discuss with landowner – Beverley had looked but did not understand the issue as there is still access. Catherine clarified that the problem is the sign that says 'Private – no access to foreshore'. Beverley will take another look – carry forward.
12. Peter to look at the erosion on the path at Garlieston – carry forward.

Peter apologised for not being able to carry out some of his actions due to personal commitments and challenges.

*Louise Coupar entered the meeting at 1.50 pm and introductions were made.*

Peter welcomed Louise who is Stewartry Active Schools Coordinator from Monday-Thursday and works for DGOAT on a Friday. Peter thanked Galloway Glens LPS for funding this post.

#### **4. Questions on Reports**

##### **4a. Access Officer's Report**

The Access Officer's Report was circulated with the meeting papers. Richard M was not present at the meeting due to holidays and previously having Covid. Bryan would try to answer any questions. Peter noted his appreciation of the very comprehensive report. Although still living in a hiatus since Covid, life is still very busy and Peter was pleased to see that the Stairhaven – Auchenmalg path had been cleared. Bryan added that Richard is putting together the core path cutting list for this year and hoped that Contractors would start in May. Beverley asked about the Broch at Stairhaven which has not been accessible for some time. Peter advised that he visits annually at low tide and climbs up to it. As far as he is aware, it has never been accessible from the path and access is from the shore.

##### **4b. Southern Upland Way (SUW) Report – Ross Gemmell**

The SUW report was circulated with the meeting papers. Ross advised that the report was kept brief as he could provide an update at the meeting.

He had lost count of the number of trees that he had cleared on the SUW this year. The route is fully open apart from one small section. The focus in winter was getting the route open for spring and feedback has been good. Someone was doing a charity run the following day from Portpatrick to Cockburnspath and back. Peter thanked Ross for all his hard work.

Peter advised of water ingress at the Beehive Bothy for which options are being considered. It is gratifying to see nothing but praise in the visitors log book. Peter reminded members that DGOAT bought the land on which the Beehive sits.

June was interested to see the level of volunteers and asked what familiarisation is done and if they already have skills. Ross advised that some do and some don't. Volunteering activity includes painting and building boardwalks and stiles. Mileage is paid but is restricted to a 40-mile round trip to keep people local. More volunteers are required in Dalry and Sanquhar but Ross has limited time to put into the administration of volunteers. Information is available on the dgtrails website [DG Trails](#).

There is also a cycle route page on the website [CYC Home \(CYC\) – DG Trails](#). A group from Upper Nithsdale had intended to road bike the SUW route towns and villages before Covid. There is a SUW Coast to Coast Cycle Ride on the May Bank holiday weekend, covering 200 miles in 3 days. The Roman Reivers Trail can be used for mountain or gravel biking. The 7Stanes Trail is being promoted. Mossdale Path is bike friendly. Day routes and cycling venues are on the website. Louise asked to be kept in the loop of any events. Richard S was please to see the increasing cycling activity and encouraged people to promote this. Camp sites, tea rooms, cafes, shops, etc would benefit from more cyclists visiting the region. Peter had met a Sustrans Ranger putting up a sign at Bruces Stone, Glentroll. He asked if the various organisations are talking and aware – Council Departments, Sustrans etc. Peter advised of a discussion at the National Access Forum on e-bikes and how they fit into the infrastructure. Peter noted that there is a lot of buzz around cycling and the Forum should be trying to incorporate this and could invite more cyclists to sit on the Forum. Bryan agreed that non-motorised activity should be encouraged and information on safer routes for cycling, forest routes etc, provided. Martin referred to the South of Scotland Cycling Strategy Group which comprises Dumfries and Galloway Council (DGC), Scottish Borders Council (SBC), South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE), Sustrans and other partners and promotes active travel and all forms of cycling. Martin advised of the Raiders Gravel Event from 25-29 August 2022 which starts in Gatehouse and is a high profile event including cycling and a food festival. The Borderlands 7Stanes project has had a £5M investment in the 7Stanes network enhancement. Martin will bring highlights to the Forum and keep members updated. Martin advised Peter that the contact person for DGC on the South of Scotland Cycling Strategy Group is Lee Seaton.

Peter mentioned physical activity groups within Dumfries and Galloway and the D&G Move More campaign which had recently been launched. A Wigtownshire group is being set up.

#### **4c. Galloway Glens LPS Paths Report**

Jonathan was not present at the meeting but his report had been circulated with meeting papers. A funding application has been made for Threave Estate path and everything is going well.

#### **4d. National Access Forum Report**

There was no report available but Peter will forward any relevant information by email.

#### **4e. Rhins of Galloway Coastal Path Report – Bryan Scott**

Bryan had circulated his report and photographs by email just before the meeting. Bryan, Karen Morley, Anna Johnson and Solway Firth Partnership are working on delivering the project, which has been challenging over the last few years. Two contractors are on site in the North Rhins. Bryan provided a map of green (completed) sections, with some red sections, where details are still being finalised with landowners as original agreements were several years old.

Informal discussions with National Lottery Heritage Fund suggest that the project will be extended to March/April 2023. A range of activities are taking place over the summer, run by Solway Firth Partnership.

June commented on a big Whithorn Way sign in Ayr which she had been pleased to see recently and wondered if there were opportunities to promote the project in Ayrshire. Bryan confirmed that the Mull of Galloway Trail is promoted in Ayrshire and the intention is for the dgtrails website to become a one-stop-shop covering all routes, in a low-key way. Peter sits on the Rhins of Galloway Coastal Path Steering Group. Bryan pointed out that it is not possible for DGC to do everything and other organisations can also promote e.g. Walk Highlands promotes Dumfries and Galloway. Louise referred to an overhaul of the website by a digital strategist and suggested linking the Trust's website with the dgtrails website, to provide one portal for all to be represented in one place. Bryan noted that the dgtrails website is new and is amalgamating the SUW and Annandale Way to have one portal to signpost users.

Louise asked what activities there are. Bryan advised that these include nature walks, guided historic walks and a programme of school activities.

Bryan advised of some great designs produced by designers, which are now being costed. DGC is working with Stranraer Development Trust on start and end features and the community is being included in conversations. It has been specified that signage has to be livestock proof.

#### **5. Dumfries and Galloway Outdoor Access Trust (DGOAT) Report – Peter Ross**

The short DGOAT Report was circulated with the meeting papers and there were no questions.

#### **6. Round Table Discussion - Updates**

Richard S advised that 1,708 people across the region took part in the NHS virtual NC500 Walking Challenge in February. 60% of the teams completed the challenge. Richard will circulate information on the D&G Doing More website.

Martin updated that Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) have been working round the clock to deal with the aftermath of the storms and the implications. FLS is working as hard as it can with the resources available but there is months of work still to do and a challenge in getting contractors. Good progress is being made in Galloway, at Glentroot and Kirroughtree. Eight seasonal rangers have been employed – four of whom are in Dumfries and Galloway. The priority is to help visitors to the region have a good experience. Beverley pointed out that Screel path is very bad. She was distressed that places of interest will be closed for a year, for example Threave Castle which will be closed during the holiday season. Martin advised that the forest at Screel was devastated by the storms. He asked everyone to bear with FLS as it works with DGC to overcome the challenges. The car park will be closed for the foreseeable future and it will take some time to make everything right again. Peter asked if it would be worthwhile the Forum writing to Historic Environment Scotland (HES). But he noted there is no other option than to be closed where there are health and safety issues. Beverley noted that tourists and visitors will be disappointed if all castles are shut. Martin was aware that HES colleagues had been hit very hard with Covid implications, in terms of both staffing and budget resource. He stressed that this is not a lack of will but lack of resources and ability to get out. It was noted that many community organisations are struggling to keep operating. Richard C updated on the SSDA Conference, which took on board what Beverley had raised. It was disappointing that the Easter holidays were approaching and everything was shut. An Action Plan was required to get venues back up and running. South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) may also have a role to play here. Martin suggested asking HES what its plans are and asking the question before trying to find the solution. The situation is the same across the south of Scotland and all regions in Scotland are finding challenges.

He suggested focussing on what **is** available and putting a more positive spin on it. VistiScotland and SSDA are the primary drivers for getting the message out.

*Teresa left the meeting at 2.55 pm due to another commitment. Teresa was wished all the best in her new role.*

Richard C updated that he has been busy on the ground since taking up post in January. He had had good meetings with the Ministry of Defence and local landowners. A funding application has been submitted to Sports Scotland. A second Steering Group meeting was held on the ground to discuss pinch points, management plans, etc. The long distance trail from Gretna to Portpatrick will utilise the existing core path network and link in the bits in between, working across MOD land, agriculture and forestry. This is a two year project, focussing on Gretna – Dumfries as the first stage. The project will link with Annandale Way, Southern Uplands Way and Rhins of Galloway Trail. Talks are also taking place with Cumbrian Coastal Way to look at collaborative marking of the end of one route and beginning of the next, from one country to another.

Catherine was pleased to advise that the Newton Stewart Walking Festival is back this year.

Louise is promoting outside access opportunities and meeting people and taking photos for promotion. Please let Louise know of any photo or publicity opportunities. As part of the D&G Do More campaign, every GP surgery will receive little cards with a QR code 'prescribing' fresh air and exercise.

## **7. Any Other Business**

Bryan advised that the VisitScotland application was successful, which paid for most of the Criffel and Otter Pool improvements. A Rural Infrastructure Tourist Fund bid has also recently been successful in attracting funds for Dumfriesshire Uplands Scenic Routes (£35k) – an arc from Upper Nithsdale to Moffat to Langholm; and for Dumfries and Galloway Coastal Gateway Sites (£35k) for developing an investment plan for car parks. Galloway Glens was also successful in securing funds for a signage strategy and improvements at Loch Ken. Bryan advised that previously applications to the Rural Infrastructure Tourist Fund were considered on a first come, first served basis but there was now consultation to see where the investment is best placed to ensure value for money. Bryan advised that Jonathan is also working an application to the Improving Public Access Fund and Ross is working on one for the SUW. The closing date for the Better Places Fund is 22 April 2022.

Richard C noted that there are huge potholes in the car park between the two camp sites at Powfoot and the toilet is locked and asked Bryan if there is a timescale for when the WC will open for the season. Bryan thought this would be open for easter but undertook to check. Bryan added that car parks are the main access points for the coast so need be welcoming and have facilities. As an aside, Peter noted that when he met Stranraer Rotary at the Mull of Galloway there was an angry outburst from visitors because the Galle Craig tearoom was closed.

## **8. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on **Tuesday 28 June 2022**. It was hoped that this would be in person, either outdoors or indoors. Louise suggested Crichton Central in Dumfries which is outside but under cover if required.

Peter thanked everyone for attending what was a useful, constructive meeting and closed the meeting at 3.20 pm.

## SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

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