



THE MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL OF SCOTLAND

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12/6/09

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Dear Mr Beattie

Alladale Estate Woodland Creation - Rural Development Contract

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCoFS) welcomes native woodland expansion in appropriate locations with appropriate safeguards for continued access and valuable moorland and upland habitats that are already present, along with a minimal ground disturbance approach.

This location is important for mountaineering, both hill walking and climbing (rock and winter). This includes bicycle access along tracks for long approaches. We therefore welcome the commitment to provide access through the deer fences that are to be constructed. It must be noted that the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and SOAC apply equally on and off paths. Off path access should not be unnecessarily restricted. The MCoFS accepts the problem of balancing landscape implications of the fence specification and the access difficulties posed by electrified fencing. The MCoFS very much support use of management tools other than fencing where at all possible, such as deer control. In the event that this option has been properly considered and found ineffectual, then the MCoFS accepts that the only option is fencing. We recognise the importance of fence crossings for both access and land management, including deer management.

Fence crossings on tracks should allow access for bicycles and less athletic walkers. This means that a stile is insufficient at these locations, and a self-closing gate at these locations may be the best option. This applies at either end of the An Sgaothach and the larger Gleann Mor enclosures.

An Sgaothach

The climbing crags affected are:

1. An Socach NH378870 – a stile at approximately NH384878 would be useful for approach / descent)
2. An Socach NH368875 - a crossing is necessary at the western point of enclosure as approach / descent is necessary beside the Alladale River to avoid significant unnecessary height gain
3. Lochan Pollaig crag NH390870 - a crossing is needed in the vicinity of where the Lochan Pollaig burn is crossed by the fence, preferably just to the east as this is the direction of approach / retreat

Gleann Mor

There are no climbing crags affected by these enclosures, but general access (pedestrian and bicycle) is important as a through route and easy-graded relatively wild route. For landscape mitigation reasons, the existing enclosure fence across the track (which will become redundant)

should be removed. It is not referred to, but it should be confirmed as part of the plan that despite not apparently marked on the map, an openable gate will be installed on the track where the new deer fence crosses the track at approximately NH401861.

The landscape quality of this area is high and the location is adjacent to an NSA, hence the most landscape-sensitive techniques should be used. This includes the ground preparation as for perhaps a decade or so, it is the ground preparation that will impact visually rather than the trees. In a planting project the size of this, it may be justified to mechanically mound/screef, but the visual impact of this technique is greatly affected by the size of bucket. There appears to be no specification of this. The MCofS would recommend that use of a a mini digger with an approximately 30 cm wide bucket would minimise intrusion while maximising efficiency. However, other planting projects have began by using larger buckets which have led to very visually intrusive holes / mounds of 50 cm+ depth as occurred initially at Loch Clunie. These would be unacceptably intrusive.

Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely

Hebe Carus
Access & Conservation Officer