



Policy Statement on Recognition of ‘Scottish Pilgrim Way’ Routes

1. Context

1.1 When SPRF was first established in 2012, there was no blueprint for how many pilgrim walking routes could be created across Scotland, their location, or the timescale involved. Twelve years later, we can now identify nearly 1,000 miles of long-distance walking routes connecting places of historic pilgrimage importance which are widely regarded and promoted as established pilgrim routes or under active development as such.

See 2024 edition of Scottish pilgrim routes map attached.

1.2 Over this same period, the growth and scale of public interest in outdoor pilgrimage travel across Europe has surprised many and led to an explosion of online promotion of pilgrim routes of widely varying provenance and authenticity. It is extremely simple for anybody to identify a favourite walking or cycling route, call it a ‘pilgrim way’ and create a digital map and website to promote it virtually online to an international audience. Such routes can be advertised without the knowledge or consent of relevant landowners, which can have negative repercussions for all concerned. Failure to address infrastructure issues such as gates and drainage on ‘virtual’ pilgrim routes, and the lack of physical maintenance or signage on the ground will disappoint many users and all too easily deter people from using authentic pilgrimage walking routes. There is a real risk that users of virtual routes will find that they are difficult to follow, are poorly maintained and lack the kind of interpretation and support facilities which should make an outdoor pilgrim journey a rich and memorable experience.

1.3 We believe that SPRF accreditation in the form of public recognition of Scottish Pilgrim Way (‘SPW’) routes benefits both path developers and users alike by clarifying their actual status and condition on the ground. We see this as a gradual process, with individual routes reaching standards which are compatible with those required for Scotland’s Great Trails accreditation supported by Scottish Natural Heritage (see <https://www.scotlandsgreattrails.com>) or those of the European Green Pilgrimage Network (see <https://www.greenpilgrimageeurope.net/>). The map of Scottish pilgrim routes published by SPRF names all accredited Scottish Pilgrim Way routes as well as those which meet our basic criteria for recognition and potential accreditation, and our aim is that these will be the routes that most pilgrim walkers, cyclists and horse riders will choose to use.

2. Scottish Pilgrim Ways – Recognition and Accreditation

2.1 In fulfilling its core purpose, SPRF fully subscribes to the implementation of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code which forms an integral part of the Land Reform Act (Scotland) 2003. This recognises a public right of responsible access across Scotland – often, but arguably misleadingly, referred to as the ‘right to roam’. Although the legislation itself does not require prior permission to be obtained before developing or promoting a route for public use, it is common courtesy to consult with all relevant farmers and landowners, and usually essential to developing good long-term relationships with them.

2.2 At any one time, each pilgrim route will be at a different stage of establishment or further development. In line with best practice for all paths, one of SPRF’s key objectives is to enable all pilgrim

route users to identify in advance what to expect in terms of ground conditions, gradient, infrastructure (gates, seats etc.), hazards, signage and interpretation, public transport links, local accommodation and other support services, amongst other information. These aspects of pilgrim routes can and will vary widely due to geography, terrain and local path management structures.

2.3 Experience clearly demonstrates that the most successful routes are those where local people take 'ownership' of what are key assets for promoting better countryside access facilities for local communities and visitors alike. Indeed, for us this is what being a Forum is all about. SPRF strongly advocates establishing and maintaining effective local volunteer Steering Groups dedicated to co-ordinating the long-term management of specific pilgrim routes and providing a local point of contact for landowners, local access authorities and project funders. SPRF has produced a toolkit document to help establish effective local Steering Groups, which can be downloaded from the SPRF website – see <https://www.sprf.org.uk/new-routes-toolkit>

2.4 SPRF firmly believes that encouragement of high standards among route managers is of mutual benefit to all involved, from route users and local volunteers to farmers and landowners. To support local Steering Groups and development of pilgrim routes, and drawing on experience elsewhere, SPRF has introduced defined criteria designed to help people determine whether a route meets their needs and expectations. Accreditation by SPRF of any route meeting these criteria as a designated Scottish Pilgrim Way will also attract future use. In recognition that sustainable management of any route is a long-term commitment, in discussion with our members SPRF Trustees have agreed on three different levels of accreditation - Bronze, Silver and Gold - progressing where appropriate to the level required to achieve parallel accreditation as one of 'Scotland's Great Trails' (but recognising that not all pilgrim routes will necessarily be long distance ones).

2.5 SPRF shares a responsibility with local Steering Groups to promote relevant standards of safety guidance and signage on accredited Scottish Pilgrim Way routes, and this is mandatory for Silver and Gold standard accreditation. We specifically endorse the Outdoor Access Design Guide and Signage Guidance for Outdoor Access published by Paths for All and expect all local Steering Groups to do likewise. The philosophy of the Land Reform Act and the Outdoor Access Code that underpins it is based on a combination of (1) requiring risk assessment and clear communication on hazards to be carried out by landowners and others deemed responsible under the Act and (2) the exercise of common sense and responsible behaviour through their own actions by those making use of access, including acceptance of any obvious risks that are inherent in the activities they are undertaking.

See 'Scottish Pilgrim Ways Assessment – Useful Resources for Pilgrim Route Accreditation' attached.

2.6 SPRF has considered the potential inclusion of suitable overnight accommodation, e.g. bunkhouses or hostels, under the Gold standard criteria but has rejected this as setting the bar too high. Our long-term goal ambition is that the increasing popularity and public usage of a given pilgrim route – getting boots on the ground - will lead to provision of new hostels etc, similar to those found across Europe on the Camino routes. There is a real need for such facilities across rural Scotland. We strongly encourage Steering Groups to promote the availability of accommodation in general and to contact current and potential providers, including church groups or farm camp sites, and publicise and develop local accommodation options. SPRF is currently investigating the establishment of a national network of low-cost pilgrim accommodation providers on all Scottish pilgrim routes recognised by SPRF.

3. Scottish Pilgrim Ways – Minimum Criteria for Accreditation Standards

3.1 The criteria for the three different levels of SPRF accreditation of a Scottish Pilgrim Way route are summarised below. Initial SPRF recognition of a pilgrim route will entitle a Steering Group (see where this exists) to apply for Bronze standard accreditation.

3.2 We define the term Steering Group to mean any group of volunteers who operate collectively, either as representatives of an unincorporated association or as a Board of trustees of an independent local NGO and registered charity formed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a pilgrim route. A Steering Group may also be a member organisation of SPRF, and in practice all Steering Groups have so far opted for this status.

3.3 The minimum criteria for Bronze level accreditation are:

- Local ownership of the route establishment and maintenance process. The existence of a locally recruited Steering Group responsible for the continuing development of the pilgrim route is mandatory for SPW accreditation. We will also look for some degree of local project funding to be secured for route management, negotiated by the Steering Group.
- Some degree of historical authenticity of the route based on a recorded connection with earlier religious activity. In most cases, this will probably involve medieval pilgrimage to a specific shrine or shrines commemorating a Christian saint, a holy well, chapel or pilgrim hospice, but it could also involve joining sites connected with post-Reformation Christian activity, for example a Covenanters' trail. This does not require proof that pilgrims followed a particular route many centuries ago, although this may be construed from the historic sites still associated with it.
- Existence of a readily identifiable route on the ground, i.e. by virtue of a physical path and/or clear directional information. We do not expect all routes to be recognised as core paths by local access authorities, although we encourage such practice. The degree of waymarking provided will vary widely and may initially be limited.

3.4 Silver level accreditation will embrace all that is required for Bronze level plus:

- Consent to the route sought from / agreed with all relevant landowners; agreement of a route waymarking plan to comply with best practice for signage - see <https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/signage-guidance-outdoor-access-guide-good-practice>.
- Provision of interpretation and user information, whether on the ground or in literature or digital formats, to convey the historical pilgrimage heritage interest of the route. SPRF can provide examples of a range of resources from existing pilgrim routes (see www.sprf.org.uk)
- Compliance with published guidance on provision of route safety information and infrastructure to identify potential reduction of unnecessary restrictions on use, in line with best practice and equalities legislation. See <https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/resources/resource/outdoor-access-design-guide>
- Operation of some form of 'pilgrim passport' scheme along the route to facilitate self-evidence of physical progress by individual users to merit the issue of individual completion certificates. The type of evidence required may vary, e.g. use of stamps or photographs at pre-determined points, by agreement between a Steering Group and SPRF.

3.5 Gold level accreditation builds further on Bronze and Silver level standards and will require:

- Confirmation of all relevant landowner consents and full waymarking of all of the route under an agreed plan.
- A commitment to ensuring all route infrastructure reflects best practice in adopting the least restrictive option for users – see 2.7 above.
- Publication of a detailed route guide with local support services identified; and provision of ‘pilgrim companion’ literature for the route.
- Provision of route information updates for users.
- Provision of an agreed route maintenance plan.

3.6 These criteria are summarised in the table of Standards below:

Criteria / Standards	Bronze	Silver	Gold
Local route ‘ownership’ by a Steering Group	✓	✓	✓
Evidence of some historical authenticity	✓	✓	✓
Physically identifiable on ground / accessible directional information	✓	✓	✓
Confirmation of landowner consents and waymarking plan		✓	✓
Route interpretation and user information (digital /physical / printed)		✓	✓
Compliance with published guidance on route safety information		✓	✓
Review / provision of least restrictive route infrastructure (gates, stiles etc)		✓	✓
‘Pilgrim passport’ scheme to facilitate self-evidence of progress for issue of individual completion certificate		✓	✓
Waymarking plan implemented on all of route			✓
Route guide published; local support services identified			✓
‘Pilgrim companion’ route literature published			✓
User information updates available online			✓
Physical route maintenance plan in place			✓

4. Operation of Scottish Pilgrim Way Accreditation and Standards

4.1 SPRF will operate the accreditation of recognised ‘Scottish Pilgrim Way’ routes to encourage their use by people of all ages and abilities and also the longer-term development of infrastructure and local support services, which are both key to their future viability. Where appropriate, we will implement and monitor these standards in consultation with the Long-Distance Route Managers Forum. This also applies to the key criteria adopted for the different standards as summarised above.

4.2 SPRF recognises the online existence of ‘virtual’ pilgrim routes which do not have any physical signage or interpretation to convey their status; these may follow existing walking and cycling routes which carry a variety of alternative identities. Our policy will be to encourage all such routes to seek

'Scottish Pilgrim Way' accreditation and SPRF recognition, subject to meeting the minimum Bronze standard criteria above.

4.3 The Trustees of the Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum SCIO will assess each pilgrim route against the above criteria on receipt of a completed application from available on request, and will confirm Bronze, Silver or Gold level accreditation status as appropriate. The assessment process will be led by one of the SPRF Trustees, who will meet the relevant Steering Group to discuss the application and consult others, including local authority access officers, as they see fit. The final decision on accreditation will be taken by the full Board of Trustees following a report from the assessor. The award of Scottish Pilgrim Ways accreditation will be marked by presenting a certificate to the relevant Steering Group, preferably at a public event held at a location on the pilgrim route in question.

4.4 SPRF will review all accreditations at least every five years, and sooner if necessary in response to a Steering Group request or if SPRF considers a review is required.

4.5 SPRF will publicise this policy statement online and by other means, along with a map of all currently SPW accredited and other recognised SPW routes with supporting summary information – see <https://www.sprf.org.uk/route-summaries> The Trustees will encourage discussion by route developers or Steering Groups with SPRF member consultants in cases of dispute requiring a final decision.

4.6 SPRF will make available the Scottish Pilgrim Way brand name and logo to promote public awareness of accredited routes and increase their usage, in the format shown below:



The Scottish Pilgrim Way™ logo and brand name are owned by the Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum SCIO and trademarked under copyright law. By definition, pilgrim routes which are not accredited Scottish Pilgrim Way routes will not be allowed to use the logo or brand name.

3.7 This policy statement will be kept under review by the SPRF Trustees and updated after consultation with Steering Groups and assessors as necessary. It will also be issued to all Forum members and publicised online via the SPRF website – see <https://www.sprf.org.uk/scottish-pilgrim-ways-accreditation-scheme> .


5. Benefits of Scottish Pilgrim Way accreditation

5.1 The SPRF Trustees recognise that the growing popularity of outdoor pilgrimage travel can lead to existing core paths and long-distance walking routes, already managed and promoted for that purpose by Scottish local access authorities, being adopted and used by local churches and faith groups as pilgrimage resources. We see this dual purpose being fully compatible with Scottish Pilgrim Way accreditation of such routes, provided the criteria set out in this policy statement are met. It is essential that, in this context, a Steering Group set up to act on behalf of local churches and communities also

acts in the interests of pilgrim walkers and cyclists. We will expect the Steering Group to collaborate fully with the public or other body responsible for maintenance of the route in question.

5.2 SPRF recognises that, in comparison to many parts of Europe, the infrastructure of Scotland's pilgrim routes is relatively new and under-developed, especially where provision of budget / hostel accommodation and baggage transport is concerned. Much new investment is needed. Accreditation as a Scottish Pilgrim Way is not a one-off award scheme but a means of enabling and encouraging routes to be developed responsibly over the longer term and to give them public recognition. Experience to date shows that SPW assessment is by definition a two-way iterative process between a Steering Group and the SPRF Board, which can and does lead to the improvement of a route in the interest of its users. Generally, this has been welcomed by all the Steering Groups involved.

Third edition updated and approved by the Board of Trustees on 12th June 2024

Signed:  (Chair SPRF)

Date: 12th June 2024

Attachments:

- 1. Scottish pilgrim routes map 2024***
- 2. Scottish Pilgrim Ways Assessment – Useful Resources for Pilgrim Route Accreditation***

Scottish Pilgrim Routes 2024



www.sprf.org.uk



Scottish Pilgrim Ways

accredited routes: ————

1. St Magnus Way - 55 miles
2. Northern Pilgrims Way - 120 miles (braid 1)
3. Cowal Pilgrimage - 80 miles (circuit)
4. Forth to Farnie Way - 72 miles

Other recognized routes: ————

5. St Conan's Pilgrim Way - 63 miles
6. Three Saints Way - 111 miles (Killin - St Andrews)
7. Fife Pilgrim Way - 64 miles
8. Whithorn Way - 149 miles
9. St. Kentigern Way - 150 miles
10. St Cuthbert's Way - 62 miles
11. Borders Abbeys Way - 64 miles



Attachment 2.

SCOTTISH PILGRIM ROUTES FORUM

Scottish Pilgrim Ways Assessment – Useful Resources for Pilgrim Route Accreditation

Documents:

Outdoor Access Design Guide: [Outdoor Access Design Guide - Paths for All | Paths for All](#)

Signage Guidance for Outdoor Access: [Signage Guidance for Outdoor Access - Paths for All | Paths for All](#)

Scottish Outdoor Access Code: [Scottish Outdoor Access Code | NatureScot](#)

A Brief Guide to Occupiers' Legal Liabilities in Scotland in Relation to Public Outdoor Access:

[Brief guide to occupiers legal liabilities in Scotland in relation to public outdoor access | Scottish Outdoor Access Code \(outdooraccess-scotland.scot\)](#)

These documents can all be downloaded as pdfs using the links above.

Relevant Legislation:

Occupiers Liability (Scotland) Act 1960 (discussed in Signage Guidance for Outdoor Access)

[Occupiers' Liability \(Scotland\) Act 1960 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

Land Reform Scotland) Act 2003: [Land Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2003 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

Helpful Websites:

ScotWays: <https://scotways.com> (Scottish Rights of Way & Access Society)

Ramblers Association: <https://ramblers.org.uk> (Select "Scotland" in drop-down menu at top left-hand corner of home page)

NatureScot: <https://www.nature.scot> (Select "Enjoying the Outdoors" + "Routes to Explore" + "Local Path Networks" to obtain information on and maps of Scotland's core path network)¹

Scottish Outdoor Access Code: [NatureScot \(outdooraccess-scotland.scot\)](#)

Access Officers:

Scotland's 32 local authorities and 2 national park authorities (Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park and the Cairngorms National Park) make up Scotland's 34 Access Authorities.

Scotland's access officers uphold access rights and facilitate access in each local authority and national park and should be your first port of call for any local access enquiry, question or problem.

The link below will provide up to date contact details for local access officers:

[Scottish Access Officer Contact List | Scottish Outdoor Access Code \(outdooraccess-scotland.scot\)](#)

¹ Core path plans were a requirement of Scotland's access legislation [Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003]. Each local authority and national park consulted the public to draw up their plans. Core paths are usually the most popular paths and should be signposted. They have an extra level of legal protection as local authorities have powers to keep these paths free from obstruction, even if landowners refuse to act. They aren't specially highlighted on Ordnance Survey maps although many of them do appear on the map. See the NatureScot link.