



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. Nine years later, we can now identify over 1,000 miles of long-distance walking routes connecting places of historic pilgrimage importance and widely regarded and promoted as established pilgrim routes or under development as such. ***These are indicated on the attached map published by SPRF.***

1.2 Over the 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 as a ‘virtual’ route to an international audience. Such routes can be advertised online 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 other pilgrim routes. There is also 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 a pilgrim journey a rich and memorable experience.

1.3 We believe that SPRF accreditation in the form of public recognition of ‘Scottish Pilgrim Way’ routes will benefit 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 will only show accredited ‘Scottish Pilgrim Way’ routes, including those which are at an early stage of development but meet our basic criteria for recognition (see below), and we hope these will be the routes that most people will choose to use.

2. ‘Scottish Pilgrim Ways’ – Recognition and Minimum Criteria

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. It is accepted practice in SPRF that landowner/manager permission is essential to undertake any physical or capital work to establish a route, which, in theory at least, includes signage unless the route is already promoted and signed in some other way.

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 is producing guidelines to help establish effective local Steering Groups.

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 accreditation as one of 'Scotland's Great Trails' (but recognising that not all pilgrim routes will necessarily be long distance ones).

2.5 The criteria for the three different levels of SPRF recognition of a 'Scottish Pilgrim Way' route are summarised below. Initial SPRF recognition of a 'Scottish Pilgrim Way' route will confer Bronze standard status.

2.6 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 will be mandatory for SPW recognition. We will also look for some degree of local project funding to be secured for route management negotiated by the Steering Group for this purpose.
- 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 together with initial contact with landowners on the route from the outset. The degree of any existing waymarking will vary widely and may initially be limited.

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

- Consent sought from / agreed with all relevant landowners for any , including any physical work on route development, and a 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, accessible via the Forum website (see www.sprf.org.uk)

- A review of all route infrastructure to identify potential reduction of unnecessary restrictions on use, in line with best practice and equalities legislation. See the Outdoor Access Design Guide published by Paths for All - <https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/resources/resource/outdoor-access-design-guide>

- Operation of a ‘pilgrim passport’ scheme along the route to raise public awareness of the distinctive role of ‘Scottish Pilgrim Way’ accredited routes.

2.8 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 plansee.
- 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.

2.9 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, and initial contact with landowners.	✓	✓	✓
Confirmation of landowner consents, including any physical / capital work and waymarking plan.		✓	✓
Route interpretation and user information (digital /physical / printed)		✓	✓
Review / provision of least restrictive route infrastructure (gates, stiles etc)		✓	✓
‘Pilgrim passport’ scheme in operation via local outlets		✓	✓
Physical / capital work and 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			✓

3. Operation of ‘Scottish Pilgrim Way’ Recognition and Standards

3.1 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.

3.2 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.

3.3 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.

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

3.5 SPRF will publicise this policy statement online and by other means, along with a map and list of all recognised SPW routes showing the relevant standard of each route. The Trustees will encourage discussion by route developers or Steering Groups with SPRF member consultants in cases of dispute requiring a final decision.

3.6 The current SPRF logo will be used to identify the ‘Scottish Pilgrim Way’ brand name and promote the use of accredited routes to increase their public usage, in the format shown below:



Both the ‘Scottish Pilgrim Way’ logo and brand name will be owned by the Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum SCIO 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.

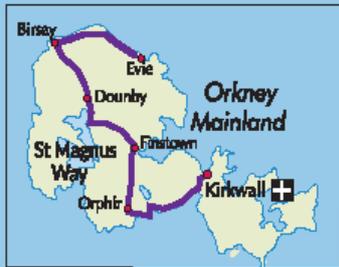
3.5 This policy statement will be kept under review by the SPRF Trustees and updated after consultation with Steering Groups and assessors as necessary. It will also be issued to all Forum members, with an online version publicly available via the SPRF website.

Updated and approved by the Board of Trustees on 12th August 2021.

Signed  (Chair, SPRF)

Attachment: Pilgrim Routes recognised by SPRF (2019)

PILGRIM ROUTES 2019



Mileages

- Existing Routes.** —————
- St Magnus Way - 55 miles
 - Fife Pilgrim Way - 64 miles
 - Whithorn Way - 149 miles
 - Forth to Farnie Way - 72 miles
 - Borders Abbeys Way - 64 miles
 - St Cuthbert's Way - 62 miles
 - St Oswald's Way - 97 miles

Routes under Development (current estimates) - - - - -

- Northern Saints Way - 95 miles
- Deeside Way - 44 miles
- Iona to Killin - 90 miles
- Three Saints Way (Killin to St Andrews) - 111 miles
- St Conan's Way - 63 miles
- Dalriada Way - 102 miles
- Kentigern Way - 150 miles



Routes under development

- ① Northern Saints Way
- ② Deeside Way
- ③ Iona to Killin
- ③a Three Saints Way
- ④ St Conan's Way (Dalmally to Iona)
- ⑤ Dalriada Way (Tarbert to Lismore)
- ⑥ Kentigern Way (Annan to Glasgow)

Scotland's Great Trails

- — — — —
- St Oswald's Way to Heavenfield
- St Cuthbert's Way
- Borders Abbeys Way
- Forth to Farnie Way
- Fife Pilgrim Way
- Whithorn Way

Map by David Langworth © SPFF