

Access rights and local communities – keep reporting those signs

## Description



Sign on north side of A86 as you approach Inverroy from Spean Bridge

After my post on NatureScot and the Scottish Countryside Rangers Association's statement on the role of countryside rangers in Scotland ([see here](#)), a couple of readers questioned whether access rights were being afforded any more respect on the ground as opposed to what is being said in the policy

world. They were right to do so.

I have just come back from a week's walking in Lochaber. In that time, I came across relatively few obvious attempts to constrain access rights, fewer than one might come across in a day in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. But I did come across this sign while running along the road between Spean Bridge and Inverroy. While in my experience access across crofts is often difficult due to barbed wire fencing, I had never seen a sign telling the public to keep off crofting land.

The sign is of course unlawful. Crofts are not exempt from access rights and no different from other farmland or large sporting estates for that matter.

The sign, however, doesn't appear directed at the general public. The gate and sign are only momentarily visible to those travelling by car, and then only if you are coming from the west. There are no easy stopping off points on the A86 in the immediate vicinity and much more interesting places to stop a little further on. The likelihood of any general tourist or visitor wanting to walk through this field appears very remote.

The sign, therefore, appeared to me to be directed towards locals walking or cycling between the villages, whether to catch the bus at Spean Bridge or go to the pub. Potentially, for anyone living in upper Inverroy, walking across the crofter's field might offer a short-cut home. That view was reinforced by an advert on the noticeboard outside the Spar in Spean Bridge inviting local people to join a group interested in creating a path linking the village with Roy Bridge.

This illustrates a major problem with the enforcement of access rights. Local people are most likely to know about and be affected by attempts to restrict access rights but most don't want to fall out with neighbours or other local residents, particularly in small communities where the ramifications can be significant. So, rather than reporting access problems, they remain silent and tolerate the inconvenience and restrictions on their ability to enjoy the countryside around where they live.

This constraint on the ability of local people to speak out helps explain the large number of unlawful access signs that are still being erected around settlements in our National Parks. It makes it even more important that visitors, who face no such constraints, report unlawful access signs whenever they see them. I will do so with this sign and am confident that the Highland Council Access Team will, in time, get it removed.

Meantime, the lack of a path between these villages illustrates just how far Scotland has to go when it comes to the provision of basic access infrastructure. Walking, running or cycling along the A86 is not a pleasant experience and I doubt any horse rider would dare risk it. Core path plans were partly intended to address the deficit in path links between local communities but have failed to deliver. The agreement between the SNP and the Greens to spend 10% of the roads budget on active travel means there now could be money available to create paths between places like Spean Bridge and Roy Bridge. That leaves the problem of how to get landowners, big or small, to co-operate without holding public authorities to ransom.

## **Category**

1. Access rights
2. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

## Tags

1. access rights

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