Applecross Landscape Partnership Scheme: Development Phase

Proposed New Paths and Repair to Existing Paths

Archaeological Evaluation

Catherine Dagg

For

Applecross Landscape Partnership Scheme
Applecross Landscape Partnership Scheme: Development Phase

Proposed New Paths and Repair to Existing Paths

Archaeological Evaluation
1.0 Background

The author was asked by Rowan Tree Consulting on behalf of ALPS to carry out an archaeological evaluation of the location of three new sections of path and resurfacing of one existing path.

The aim of the evaluation is to identify archaeological features or areas of archaeological sensitivity on or adjacent to the paths which may be adversely affected by the work and propose remedial action to be taken where necessary, and to identify archaeological or historical sites in the area with potential for presentation and interpretation.

The pathwork is detailed as follows:

1. **Sands Path to Heritage Centre** (625m): this path is an extension of the Sands path and initially follows a worn existing path before continuing on a new path line finishing at the Heritage centre car park
2. **Heritage Centre to Estate Road** (423m): this new path starts from the existing estate road and finishes between the Heritage centre and the old parish church
3. **Arboretum Path** (624m) This is an existing path which starts near the walled garden and passes through a mixed wooded area before joining an estate track which ends at the main entrance road for Applecross House
4. **Roadside Path** (709m) This new path links Applecross House to Applecross village. It starts at the southern approach road to Applecross at the road junction by the village store. It follows the shore road on the inland side

Work will include drainage features, clearing of vegetation and installation of waymarking posts. It is also possible that interpretation points will be installed. The potential impact on the archaeological record therefore includes

- Damage to archaeological features by excavation for drainage, waymarkers or interpretation panels
- Removal of material such as stone from archaeological features for ground levelling
- Unintentional damage to features by plant during path building
- Detrimental effect on features of altered vegetation cover, leaving sites either over-exposed or obscured
- Alteration of the setting of a feature, particularly where the relationship between a site and the surrounding landscape

2.0 Archaeological Background

Archaeological sites are given legal protection to different degrees, according to their significance. Sites considered to be of national importance are generally Scheduled. Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs) are managed by Historic Scotland and any work within or adjacent to the Scheduled area must receive permission from that body. This includes any alteration to the surrounding landscape which could have an adverse effect on
the setting of the monument. There is one SAM in the vicinity of the pathwork, around the church and burial ground.

Other recorded archaeological sites, recorded either on the Highland Historic Environment Record, or on the National Monuments record for Scotland (NMRS), are protected by Planning Policy Guidance 16 and managed by Highland Council Archaeology Unit. In brief, all archaeological sites are a finite, non-renewable resource, which should be preserved in situ where possible and adequately investigated and recorded where preservation is not possible. Any work affecting these sites will require to be carried out after consultation with HCAU. There are a number of recorded sites in the vicinity of the proposed pathwork. These sites are dealt with in the relevant sections below.

Unrecorded sites or areas of archaeological potential are not so clearly protected by law. These are most often first identified in advance of development, often where a brief for archaeological investigation has been issued by HCAU. Where this is not the case, as in the present proposed work, best practice will be to treat the newly located sites in the same way as recorded features, balanced with common sense about the potential impact of the proposed development.

3.0 Survey Results

3.1 Sands Path to Heritage Centre

3.1.1 Description

The proposed new section of pathway is, in its western section, an extension of the old footpath which follows the coast and was the main land-based means of communication between coastal townships before the present road was constructed. The path was narrow, barely wide enough for carts, and ditched on the upper side, with stone culverts, and descends gently through rough, uncultivated ground. At present it dog-legs sharply to descend to join the public road above the house at Cruag. East of this point the original line of the path can be mostly followed as far as above the cattle grid, although the ditch is blocked, resulting in waterlogged patches. East of the cattle grid, a more recent road alignment has obliterated both the path and the first surfaced road, some metalling of which is visible in the section of the cut.

3.1.2 Archaeological Sites

There are no recorded sites along this route. The following features were noted:

- Culvert at NG 70590 45723. This is the only built feature noted along the section of the old path which is to be upgraded. The culvert is almost completely blocked and obscured by vegetation; it is not visible to walkers, nor would it be more visible if cleared and unblocked
  Recommendations: none
3.1.3 Additional Observations

The path affords excellent views of the bay of Applecross, from the church to the village, and as a viewpoint is an ideal opportunity to present and discuss the historical relationship between the several historical elements. Both the main fish trap and what may be a smaller fish trap below Cruag are visible at low tide. The path itself is popular with long-distance walkers and again provides the opportunity to present and discuss transport and communications issues, stressing the difficulty of land routes.

While no recommendations are made for the preservation of original features of the path, it is recommended that the upgrading work attempt to blend the new with the old, to avoid an abrupt change in style. This will increase the understanding of the upgraded section being an integral part of the historical route and encourage less adventurous walkers to continue further along the old path.

3.2.0 Heritage Centre to Estate Road

3.2.1 Description

There is no former path or track along this section. The proposed route skirts to the north of the enclosed burial ground, across recently felled ground which is becoming overgrown with vegetation such as gorse and brambles and still contains tree stumps, forming an unattractive
ground-cover and setting to the church area. To the east of the burial ground, the route crosses a low, slightly wet field then crosses a ditch to join the estate road.

3.2.2 Archaeological Sites

The recorded archaeological sites all form a group within the area of:

- Applecross old churchyard, monastery
  SAM index no. 2802.
  The Scheduled area is an oval aligned NE-SW and extending approximately 185m from the entrance to the churchyard. This includes the site of a possible *vallum*, or enclosing wall, associated with the early monastic site and visible in aerial photographs. Recent tree planning and felling have obscured the feature, but it is respected by the boundary of the Scheduled Area.

As many of the finds from past works within the area have come from less than 300mm below ground level, any ground breaking may result in the disturbance of extremely sensitive archaeological remains. These may date to pre-Christian use of the land, to the early Christian period and to Mediaeval and later re-use of the early church site.

Any ground-breaking work within the Scheduled area, including removal of topsoil to create a bed for surfacing material and excavation of drains, will require Scheduled Monument consent. While this may be granted, it is likely to be accompanied by archaeological conditions, including, as a minimum, a watching brief on all ground-breaking work. There is, therefore, the potential for archaeological features or artefacts being uncovered during work and requiring recording and analysis or even preventing the pathwork from continuing.
It is recommended that the route of this path be amended to stay outwith the Scheduled area. This will only require a slightly wider arc to the north and east of the burial ground. However, Historic Scotland should still be informed of the proposed work, to allow their comments on the potential direct or indirect impact of the work. An archaeological watching brief may still be required as a precaution.

There has not been any indication of archaeological features within the field to the SE of the burial ground. It is possible that this area was settled or used by communities associated with the monastic settlement. However, this field has subsequently been drained and ploughed and any archaeological features not dug into the subsoil destroyed. There is a small possibility of undiscovered archaeological features in this area. Removal of topsoil will not affect any subsurface features although associated ditching might. However, this would be in too narrow a trench to allow for meaningful interpretation. Some archaeological monitoring may be advisable.

### 3.2.3 Additional Observations

It is possible that the routing of this path from the Heritage Centre will reduce the visitor numbers to the church and burial ground. Appropriate signage or waymarkers should indicate the access to the burial ground.

The rest of this section of path is of little archaeological or historical interest. Its primary interest is in allowing viewing of the church area and site of the former monastery. The *vallum* itself is no longer a visible feature, but could be indicated on any associated leaflet. Interpretation and reconstruction of the monastic settlement is well-covered by the Heritage Centre.

### 3.3.0 Arboretum Path

#### 3.3.1 Description

This existing path commences north of the walled garden at a slightly unspecified point, dropping down from an estate road to the back of the walled garden and associated sheds. It follows an attractive stone-lined watercourse then passes through a deer fence gate to meander through mixed woodland, some specimen trees and some areas of felled or fallen timber. Passing through two more gates, it then turns east of its original route to join an estate track which takes it down to the estate access road just east of its junction with the public road and the shore.

#### 3.3.2 Archaeological Sites

There are no recorded archaeological sites directly along the path, but a number of sites and Listed Buildings are adjacent:
1. **Walled garden** at NG 71991 45625  
   HER ref. MHG47006  
   Listed Building. The Listing refers to the walled garden itself and all its curtilages, including the buildings now used as the café, the potting sheds and, possibly, the watercourse and footbridges. None of these will be directly affected by any work on the existing footpath, nor will there be any adverse visual impact on the buildings or their setting. As the buildings and garden are already open to the public it is not felt there is any further potential for interpretation.

2. **Ice House** at NG 7208 4563  
   HER ref. MHG32176  
   This structure is located about 10m east of the path, access is provided by two gateways although neither is signposted. It is a well-preserved example of a small icehouse providing ice to the kitchens of Applecross House, the ice originally being collected from a pond upstream. Visitors are able to look inside the entrance. A second ice house is recorded upstream on the 1870 1st edition OS map but has not been located recently and the ground is very overgrown.

3. **Sawmill (site of)** at NG 7193 4522  
   HER Ref. MHG33863  
   This structure has been demolished and therefore is neither affected by the present work nor included as having potential for historical interpretation.

4. **Sluice (disused)** at NG 7193 4522  
   HER Ref. MHG39880  
   This structure post-dates 1870 and is presumably contemporary with the construction of the adjacent sawmill, which has now been demolished. The dam is now overgrown but is visible from the path, approximately 60m upstream. A brief investigation in 2003 revealed that under the turf now covering the dam face is neat coursing of stonework. It may be possible to remove this turf to reveal an attractive and more visible face.

3. Stone facing of sawmill dam exposed by removal of turf
Of the four sites listed above, two offer opportunities for visiting and interpretation which are, as yet only partially realised. While the ice house is mentioned in tourist literature and made accessible by the provision of gates, the lack of signage means that most visitors will pass by. The addition of small signs to the gates would remedy this. The dam and sluice are not suitable for drawing walkers off the existing path, but could be enhanced as a view from the path.

The following minor archaeological or historical features are associated with the path (running N-S):

5. **Path** from NG 7209 45630 to NG 71889 45029. This is the Arboretum Path. It is recorded on the 1870 1st edition OS map and is likely to have been constructed during the 1860s as a recreational path through the policies. Originally it continued SW to rejoin the estate road a short distance north of the present route. Constructed features include:
   - **Stone culverts.** At least three were noted, of which one is broken (Photo no. 4) These are barely visible features and probably redundant.
   - **Bridges** at NG 72010 45625 and NG 72141 45571. These are attractive features. The first crosses the stream adjacent to the ice house, which is stone-lined for a short distance in both directions (Photo no. 5). The second is at the easternmost point of the path, where the small stream emerges from a small gully. The stream bed is cobbled as it passes under the bridge and its banks are revetted for a short distance on both sides (Photo no. 6).

6. **Target** at NG 72005 45761 This slightly humorous cast-iron figure is possibly a relic of the heyday of the sporting estate (Photo no. 7) On the 1st edition OS map ‘Target’ is recorded at this location and it may be the same figure.

7. **Stone-lined watercourse** at NG 72000 45739. The stream running north to the Applecross river is canalised as it passes east of the walled garden and associated buildings. This is an attractive feature and is recorded on the 1st edition OS map, so dates to before 1870.

8. **Bridge, causeway** at NG 71916 45248. This impressive drystone construction carries the trackway over the small stream flowing west from the sawmill dam. The track, at that date leading just to the field to the north, is recorded on the 1st edition OS map so presumably the bridge pre-dates this. (Photo 8, 9)

9. **Rubble dyke** at NG 71911 45233. Rubble dyke of low, square section, crossed by the estate track. It may pre-date the track as the terminals are not neat but appear broken through, and the style would appear to be late 18th or early 19th century (Photo 10). However, it does not appear to be marked on the estate map of c1810, at which date this area is already planted with trees. Its date of construction is therefore probably contemporary with the laying out of improved fields at the time of the clearances.

10. **Stone steps** at NG 71766 45082 A flight of five shallow steps, constructed of local limestone and with a shallow ditch on the north side. The steps are now partially
overgrown, slightly more so than when previously visited. (Photo 11, 12). There is no trace of a pathway or platform at the top, although the function of the steps is most likely to have been recreational. The concept of a viewpoint at the top of the steps is somewhat limited by the lack of a view, as mature trees act as a visual barrier between this point and the bay.

None of these minor sites are likely to be damaged by proposed footpath improvement.

3.3.3 Additional Observations

It is not known whether the northern part of this walk was constructed in the mid-19th century as an arboretum walk but it has the elements of one: the meandering route makes it appear longer than it actually is and it is, for the most part, screened from built elements of the landscape. This impression is, however, marred by gaps in the tree cover, particularly where trees have been felled or have fallen but not cleared away. The view down onto the car park for the walled garden introduces an intrusive modern element which could be screened by new planting. It is recommended that new specimen trees be planted alongside the path.

3.4.0 Roadside Path

3.4.1 Description

The route of this new section of path runs parallel to the existing public road and inland by approximately 4m. It passes through wet ground, this being caused partially by a number of springs rising at the break of slope and partially by poor drainage of the ditch alongside the road. The NW section was until recently thickly wooded; this has now been thinned and the blocked drainage, fallen timber and increased ground vegetation make this piece of ground fairly inaccessible. Some attempt has been made to improve drainage at the NW end and this, although possible serving its primary purpose, has introduced obtrusive modern elements in the form of aggregate and plastic piping, as well as interfering with the flow of water from the ‘Holy Well’ (see below)

3.4.2 Archaeological Sites

The following recorded archaeological sites lie along this route:

11. ‘Holy Well’, ‘Spout Well’ at NG 7170 4499, HER ref. no. MHG7677 .also..
   Stroupan a' Bhile, HER ref. No. MHG42247 given NGR. NG7184 4586
   *This site is located near the entrance of Applecross House Drive, within a replanted wood. This drinking place, locally known as "Stroupan a' Bhile" or translated to 'The small spout of the lips'. Near the gate at the entrance to Applecross House is Stroupan a bhile - a spring or well, which was considered important enough to have steps built and a drinking ladle attached by a chain when the road was constructed sometime around 200
years ago. Despite the effort that went into marking the spot, nothing is remembered about why the well was important.’

The water emerges from the ground just above the break of slope and, until recently, flowed through a stone-lined culvert, under the road and emerged at a stone-built façade accessed by steps on both sides. A metal drinking cup is attached to the façade by a short length of metal chain.

Comparison with photographs taken a few years ago show that the façade and steps are now much more overgrown with grass (Photos 14, 15). However, the structure is stable and accessible from the road or shoreline. ‘Weeding’ could be carried out as a community project.

Of greater concern is the state of the actual spring and watercourse. The spring formerly emerged through a stone channel (Photo 13), but now seeps from slightly higher up the bank and for the most part bypasses the channel. The water then finds its way randomly to the culvert under the road, where it is joined by ditchwater emerging from the recently inserted plastic pipe. Not only is this unattractive, but also it is immediately obvious that the spring water is contaminated by road run-off. The water flowing out of the stone façade therefore cannot be considered drinkable, let alone ‘holy’. Either a notice should be put up to this effect, or the drain should be diverted to a different road culvert. Without these measures, the site loses its historical and cultural context and cannot be presented to the public.

4. Ditchwater and road run-off from plastic pipe contaminating spring water of ‘holy well’
12. **Lagan na Comraich – St Maelrubha’s Cell** at NG 7167 4495

This site is located adjacent to the road and appears to be footings of one small square building, or possibly rectangular but truncated by the road. It is recorded as follows:

The present remains, situated at NG 7167 4495, comprise the apparent footings of a small building, one side of which abuts on the road boundary wall, measuring about 4 m square with walling 1 m thick. There is a tree stump at each corner; the interior is featureless.

Associated historical notes include:

*The name ‘Apple Cross’... applies to four trees... formerly called Comeraich (Name Book 1875). Watson (W J Watson 1904) says "the four trees in the form of an oblong with a (supposed) crabapple in the centre was absurdly propounded as the origin of the name Applecross. This is the supposed site of Maelrubha's cell and is called 'Lagan na Comraich', 'the little hollow of the sanctuary'.

... it can be argued that this area was regarded as the centre of the ‘sanctuary’. The Ordnance Survey officers who visited Applecross in 1875, and collected information from local people, listed the names to be placed on the maps and put notes against them. Against the name ‘Applecross’ they wrote: ‘Applies to 4 Forest Trees, Situated on the margins of a Wood about ¾ mile NE of the village of Applecross. These stories, despite their factual errors, agree that the spot marked by the trees was regarded as the centre of Applecross and the sanctuary. Close to these trees, is the well or spring, Stroupan a bhile, which can be translated as ‘well of the sacred tree’. nearby is the site of an old building, with a tree stump at each corner. This site is known as Lagan na Comraich - ‘Hollow of the Sanctuary'. Further research reveals that ‘bile’ also had a more specific meaning in Celtic countries, particularly Ireland. According to ‘The Religion of the Ancient Celts' published in 1911,"The Irish bile was a sacred tree, of great age, growing over a holy well or fort".

The building footings, which appear to comprise a single course of large, irregularly-shaped boulders, are now overgrown and indistinct. Before recent thinning of the trees, including felling of those trees actually growing on or within the structure, it was slightly more discernible (Photo 17) but is now overgrown with rank grasses (Photos 18, 19).

Associated with the building and noted during a previous survey were stone-lined watercourses and a ‘well’ abutting onto a boulder (Photo 20) These could no longer be located and are presumed to have been destroyed during tree thinning.

This site has obviously been of some historical significance although it now appears to be forgotten and neglected. It is, however, a recorded archaeological site and should be protected from further damage. The proposed path should be kept at least 2m back from the visible edge of the building and no ditching should cut through it. It would be advisable to clear vegetation of the stonework before work commences; this would have the double benefit of guarding against accidental damage and exposing the structure for investigation and, possibly, interpretation.
Additional unrecorded archaeological sites:

**13. Buildings** (site of) at NG 71359 44663. On the 1810 estate map, a row of three buildings and one enclosure are recorded on both sides of the stream. There is no trace on the ground of any structures and it is assumed that these were completely destroyed during construction of the road.

**3.4.3 Additional Observations**

At present pedestrians walk along the road, which is not ideal in the busy summer season when vehicular traffic is heavier. It does have the advantage over the proposed path in affording a better view over the shoreline and bay, including the fish trap. The footpath, being located on the landward side of the road, would cut off much of this view and for this reason is likely to have limited usage.

An alternative route for the footpath, which would enhance the walkers’ experience, would be to take the existing cart track which rises from the SW end of the tree plantation to the fields at the top of the bank, where there is a row of beech trees probably dating to the mid-18th century (Photo 21) and excellent views. The path could follow the field edge round to rejoin the public road near the smiddy.

**4.0 Summary of Proposed Actions**

The following actions will be required before any path building or improvement takes place:

- Application for Scheduled Monument Consent for any ground-breaking work within the Scheduled area of the church/burial ground
- Consultation with Historic Scotland on the implications of any development in the vicinity of the Scheduled Area.
- Re-design of Roadside Path to ensure protection of recorded archaeological sites, Spout Well and St Maelrubha’s Cell

The following actions are considered to be advisable

- Watching brief on ground-breaking work in the vicinity of the church/burial ground
- Re-routing of drain water away from culvert carrying spring water to Spout Well
The following actions are recommended:

- Improved signage for access to church/burial ground and ice house
- Removal of vegetation from Spout Well façade and stone footings of ‘St Maelrubha’s Cell’
- Replanting of woodland sections adjacent to Arboretum path, particularly to create visual barrier to intrusive modern elements
- Removal of turf from sawmill dam face for visual enhancement
- Consideration of alternative route for Roadside Path.

5. Location of historical and archaeological sites
Photographic Record (Digital)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photo no.</th>
<th>Feature no</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Viewpoint</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sands Path</td>
<td>Existing section of path west of proposed work</td>
<td>From E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sands Path</td>
<td>Existing section of path west of proposed work</td>
<td>From W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sands Path</td>
<td>Stone culvert within section to be upgraded</td>
<td>From S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Arboretum path</td>
<td>Broken stone culvert</td>
<td>From NE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Arboretum path</td>
<td>Bridge over stone-lined stream</td>
<td>From W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Arboretum path</td>
<td>Bridge, revetted banks and cobbled stream bed</td>
<td>From W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Arboretum path</td>
<td>6. Target</td>
<td>From S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Arboretum path</td>
<td>8. Bridge, causeway</td>
<td>From N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Arboretum path</td>
<td>Estate trackway</td>
<td>From NE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Arboretum path</td>
<td>9. Rubble dyke</td>
<td>From W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Arboretum path</td>
<td>10. Stone steps, photographed Sept’09</td>
<td>From NE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Arboretum path</td>
<td>10. Stone steps, photographed Dec ’03</td>
<td>From NW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Roadside Path</td>
<td>11. Spout Well, outflow of spring photographed Dec ’03</td>
<td>From NW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Roadside Path</td>
<td>11. Spout Well, steps and facade photographed Dec ’03</td>
<td>From NW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Roadside Path</td>
<td>11. Spout Well, steps and facade photographed Sept ’09</td>
<td>From NW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Roadside Path</td>
<td>11. Spout Well, contamination from roadside ditch</td>
<td>From N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Roadside Path</td>
<td>12. St Maelrubha’s Cell, photographed Dec ‘03</td>
<td>From N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Roadside Path</td>
<td>12. St Maelrubha’s Cell, photographed Sept ‘09</td>
<td>From N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Roadside Path</td>
<td>12. St Maelrubha’s Cell, photographed Sept ‘09</td>
<td>From N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Roadside Path</td>
<td>12. St Maelrubha’s Cell, water channel and well photographed Dec ’03</td>
<td>From N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Roadside path</td>
<td>Beech trees at top of bank above road</td>
<td>From SE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>