

Conserving dykes as landscape features

Why should dykes be preserved?

Dykes have been built in Scotland from turf, earth and stone for thousands of years. They have been built in many different forms because of local customs, needs and the availability of materials. This variation is important in defining the landscape history and character of different areas.

Why should I repair dykes and other drystone features that are no longer used?

A repaired dyke can be used as a stock-proof feature in the future. Dykes are key features in the vision of the Scottish countryside treasured by visitors.

What dykes should I repair?

Where a dyke is made of turf and stone or has collapsed for more than 50% of its length it may be inappropriate to repair it, though each case should be judged on its own merits. Remember that some dykes may have biodiversity interest in the form of plants and lichens or as refuges for rare mammals and amphibians.



Restoring turf & stone dykes in this condition is generally not appropriate. However it is good practice to fill in erosion and burrow holes to prevent the feature decaying further.



Timely repairs will retain upstanding dykes as stockproof walls & enclosures.

How should I do protect dykes?

Replacing capstones and repairing small holes as part of routine maintenance is an important part of good farm management. This can be part funded under both the LMO and Rural Priorities Schemes.

Recognising where older dykes survive, especially slighter ones built of turf, will allow you to route vehicles, stock and tracks away from where they can damage these features. These should be protected as part of basic good practice to comply with SGRPID's Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions.



Dykes form a distinctive feature in the Scottish countryside and with a little maintenance can still function as stockproof boundaries.

GOOD PRACTICE

- Identify where all dykes survive on your farm, including those of earth and turf as well as stone. Mark their position on your farm plan.
- Use old OS survey maps earlier maps and aerial photographs to identify the position of dykes that may be now obscured by age and vegetation.
- Maintain stock-proof dykes by regular maintenance. This can save considerable time & money in the future
- Note the condition of damaged dykes, whether it is appropriate to repair them and what work may be required to do this.
- Make a good photographic record of a dyke before and after repairs are carried out. Copies should be supplied to your local Sites and Monuments/Historic Environment Record.
- Use similar materials as those used previously.
- Do not take stone from archaeological sites, such as abandoned buildings or older wall lines to restore dykes.
- Make sure stringers, facing, coping stones and gateways are set out in the same style as the original wall.
- If in doubt on the historic or environmental value of a specific dyke or fold, contact your local archaeological service (and your local SNH Area office for the natural environmental interest in these features).

Further information - see [Drystone dyking association](#)

Use the online [Maps of the National Library of Scotland](#) to identify earlier mapping of wall lines and [BING](#) or [GOOGLE](#) aerial mapping to identify the course of dykes less visible on the ground. Historic Scotland guidance [Managing change in the historic environment Boundaries](#) has some useful information but is primarily aimed at architecturally significant features.



Sheepfolds, stells and other drystone structures make an important contribution to the landscape and may well justify repair to preserve them for the future.



Many dykes were designed to be capped by turf or wire. The variety of dyke forms are a distinctive feature that should be preserved.