

#### Maintaining old tracks and roads

##### Why do archaeologists consider old tracks to be important?

People over the centuries have created a number of routes through the Scottish countryside. These vary from tracks created by hunters and travellers over the high passes to major embankments created for the railway routes of the industrial period. Old routes are important landscape features explaining how the land was used in the past. They may also be used as routes for public access maintaining continuity with the past.

Some routes such as former Roman Roads or the 18th century Military Roads are protected as Scheduled Monuments. Besides being important landscape markers, they also contain significant information as to how roads were constructed in the past. Details, such as how the roads were metalled and drained, can easily be destroyed by inappropriate actions.

Some bridges and culverts may have separate legal protection as Listed Buildings (see *Archaeology Scotland Advice Note 4*) because of their architectural importance.



This track is barely visible in this woodland and will become obscured in summer by bracken. It could be easily reinstated as a footpath without altering its original form.



This track formed part of the system of military roads built by the government soldiers in the early 18th century. A Scheduled Monument of national importance, it now forms part of the West Highland Way.

##### How can they best be protected?

Routine maintenance to clear drains and prevent erosion is the most effective way to protect tracks. Where vegetation is encroaching onto disused tracks a, more vigorous, intervention to cut back seedlings may be necessary - though not all tracks will need clearing.

Funding for road repairs, particularly if it involves repairs to bridges, drains or culverts can be expensive. It is possible that some financial help is available from SNH or your local authority under the implementation of the new Access Legislation to improve the condition and access to existing routes and Historic Scotland may be willing to part fund work on features that are protected as Listed Buildings or tracks that form part of Scheduled Monuments. They may also be eligible for payments under the Rural Priorities Scheme. Conservation bodies such as [TCV in Scotland](#) may be able to help provide voluntary labour where there is clear public benefit for such works.

*Much of Scotland's archaeological heritage lies in rural areas. This sheet is one of a series giving advice on some of the ways these important remains can be protected during normal rural land management.*

### GOOD PRACTICE

- Use [PASTMAP](#) to identify if any tracks or features are protected as Scheduled Monuments or Listed Buildings.
- Consult with Historic Scotland over any works that might affect a track that is protected as a Scheduled Monument and your local planning authority for works involved with a Listed Building. If not protected as a Scheduled Monument or Listed Building consult your local archaeology service.
- Check to see if a path is recorded on the [Heritage Paths](#) website
- Remove trees seeding across a track that is used as an access route.
- When improving drainage across an eroding track, avoid damaging earlier road surfaces and drains. If in doubt consult with your local archaeological adviser.
- Use terram matting or similar to protect historic surfaces
- When repairing road surfaces, try to replace eroded surfaces with metalling similar to that used in the original surface.
- Avoid ploughing up old roads and tracks.
- Where modern traffic, such as 4WD vehicles and tractors, is affecting a significant old track consider creating a new road line to prevent further damage.

*Further information - see the [Heritage Paths](#) website for a substantial amount of information on all aspects of old paths in Scotland.*

*The [Paths for All](#) website has a range of general and specific advice that includes managing and repairing tracks.*



More recent tracks such as this railway embankment may be important not just as relics of our industrial past. They may, as here, be important reservoirs of biodiversity interest or form new access routes.



This dog-legging track leads to a rock outcrop and was used to quarry stone for a roadside dyke. Old routes can help interpret how the land was used in the past.