

**THE COWAL WAY – REQUEST FOR SUPPORT FROM ARGYLL & BUTE
COUNCIL**

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1** Colintrave & Glendaruel Community Council are requesting that the Council recognises the importance of the Cowal Way which links Portavardie with Inveruglas on Loch Lomond to the economy of the Cowal Peninsula. See Maps in Appendix 1.
- 1.2** The Community Council is also seeking funding to ensure the future of the route.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1** That the Committee recognises the value of the Cowal Way to the people and economy of the Cowal Peninsula and the need to protect and promote this asset.
- 2.2** Welcomes the inclusion of the entire length of the Cowal Way in the proposed Core Paths Network, and supports this during the forthcoming public consultation.
- 2.3** Supports the establishment of a group or body to manage the Cowal Way drawing representation from all 5 Community Council Areas through which it passes, Council Officers, Elected Members, and Agencies including SNH, FCS and AIE.
- 2.4** Provides the Cowal Way with £10,000 from the Access Budget to allow the Colintrave and Glendaruel Community Council to begin raising the £48,000 required to make urgent repairs to the path. The Access Team will also support the Community Council in making bids to potential funders including the Scottish Rural Development Programme.
- 2.5** Support the proposal by the Access Team to install a suitable counter on the Cowal Way to establish the level of current use to justify continued investment in the route. In addition to call upon local business to collect numbers of users and assist in quantifying the value of the route to the local economy.

- 2.6 Members call on Development Services to work with partner agencies to develop a strategic approach towards local communities managing the three existing long distance routes in Argyll. There is also a need to identify the potential for new routes on land and water across the area and support their delivery.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Scottish National Heritage is currently consulting on a Paths Policy which states that the 1,400 km of long distance routes should be valued because they;
- *“allow people, particularly those of limited experience, to plan and undertake challenging adventures*
 - *provide economic tourism benefits to the communities and businesses through which they pass*
 - *offer opportunities for healthy activity holidays and short breaks*
 - *help to improve awareness of the natural heritage and history of the areas through which they pass”*
- 3.2 In the same document the following statements are made;
“SNH believes that there are opportunities to refresh and further develop the network of long distance routes in Scotland. Improving the identity, quality, accessibility and use of the network will require the following action by SNH and others:
- *Raise awareness of existing routes through mapping the network*
 - *promotion of common factors identified by research as critical to the success of long distance routes, and consensus sought on criteria for inclusion within a branded network;*
 - *the promotion and marketing of routes should be improved through collaboration between the key agencies, and opportunities for route branding and a popular network name should be investigated;*
 - *All routes should be further improved as required to improve quality and participation levels and to introduce facilities for multi-use where this is feasible;*
- New route developments should be led by local partnerships which reflect the expected economic, tourism and other benefits. SNH may contribute to feasibility study and establishment costs, but will not fund ongoing management costs; and Assess options for and implementing a kite-marking system to help drive up standards and quality of experience and to help prioritise new route developments.”*

- 3.3** Argyll & Bute has a number of established Long distance routes;
- The Cowal Way 47 miles
 - The West Island Way 29 miles
 - The Kintyre Way 87 miles
 - West Highland Way (part) 26 miles

See Maps in Appendix 1.

These routes are all linked with the Cowal Way and there is potential to encourage visitors to walk more than one path during their visit, or to return to walk the paths in future.

In addition the National Cycle Network extends to 140 miles in Argyll & Bute and encourages many cyclists to visit the area.

At present two long distance routes are in development. The proposed 29 mile long Three Lochs Way will link to the Cowal Way at Arrochar and the West Highland Way at both ends. A second proposed path will link Tyndrum and Oban. In addition there is the potential for long distance paths on Mull and elsewhere, as well as Canoe Trails along the coast and Loch Awe.

- 3.4** The Cowal Way was first established by Colintrave and Glendaruel Community Council with Lottery Funding in 2000. It links Portavardie, Tighnabruaich, Glendaruel, Clachan Strachur, Lochgoilhead, and Ardgartan close to Arrochar.

- 3.5** The Colintrave and Glendaruel Community Council have argued that there is a need for the Council and other agencies to take a more strategic approach towards the marketing, management and maintenance of the Cowal Way. Similar issues have been raised by those responsible for the existing and proposed long distance routes in Argyll & Bute. Planning Services are currently proposing to convene a meeting of all the community groups and agencies with an interest in long distance paths in Argyll to develop a strategic approach to ensure all of the routes meet the standard that is being developed by SNH.

- 3.6** There is currently no counter on the path however it is likely that over 1,000 people a year walk the entire route, with many times more people walking parts of the route close to settlements. The first guide to the route has sold over 5,000 copies. With the publication of a new guide book in 2009 usage is likely to increase. The economic impact should not be underestimated. The Southern Upland Way was believed in 2004 to generate between £40 and £50 per visitor per day for a wide range of local businesses. It is interesting to note that four fifths of walkers on that route relied upon B&B or hotel accommodation as opposed to camping and over half of users were aged 45 to 65.
- 3.7** The establishment of long distance routes can take many years as it takes time for awareness of the route to grow. Since at present there no precise figures for the use of the Cowal Way the Access Team are proposing to install a single counter on the route to establish the level of use to justify continued support for the Cowal Way. The £2,000 cost of installing the counter will be met from the Access Budget.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1** The Cowal Way requires support from Argyll & Bute Council if it is to continue to be an asset for the people and economy of the Cowal Peninsula and meet the new standard being developed by Scottish Natural Heritage. There is a need to ensure that better data on the level of use is gathered

5. IMPLICATIONS

Policy:	None
Financial:	£12,000 from the existing Access Budget
Personnel:	None
Equal Opportunity:	The Path is available for use by individuals of all abilities and the proposed works will improve accessibility for some less mobile individuals.

For further information contact: Jolyon Gritten
Access Manager
Planning Services

Telephone 01546 604 314

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Colintraive & Glendaruel Community Council – The Cowal Way
December 2008.

Southern Upland Way User Survey 2004

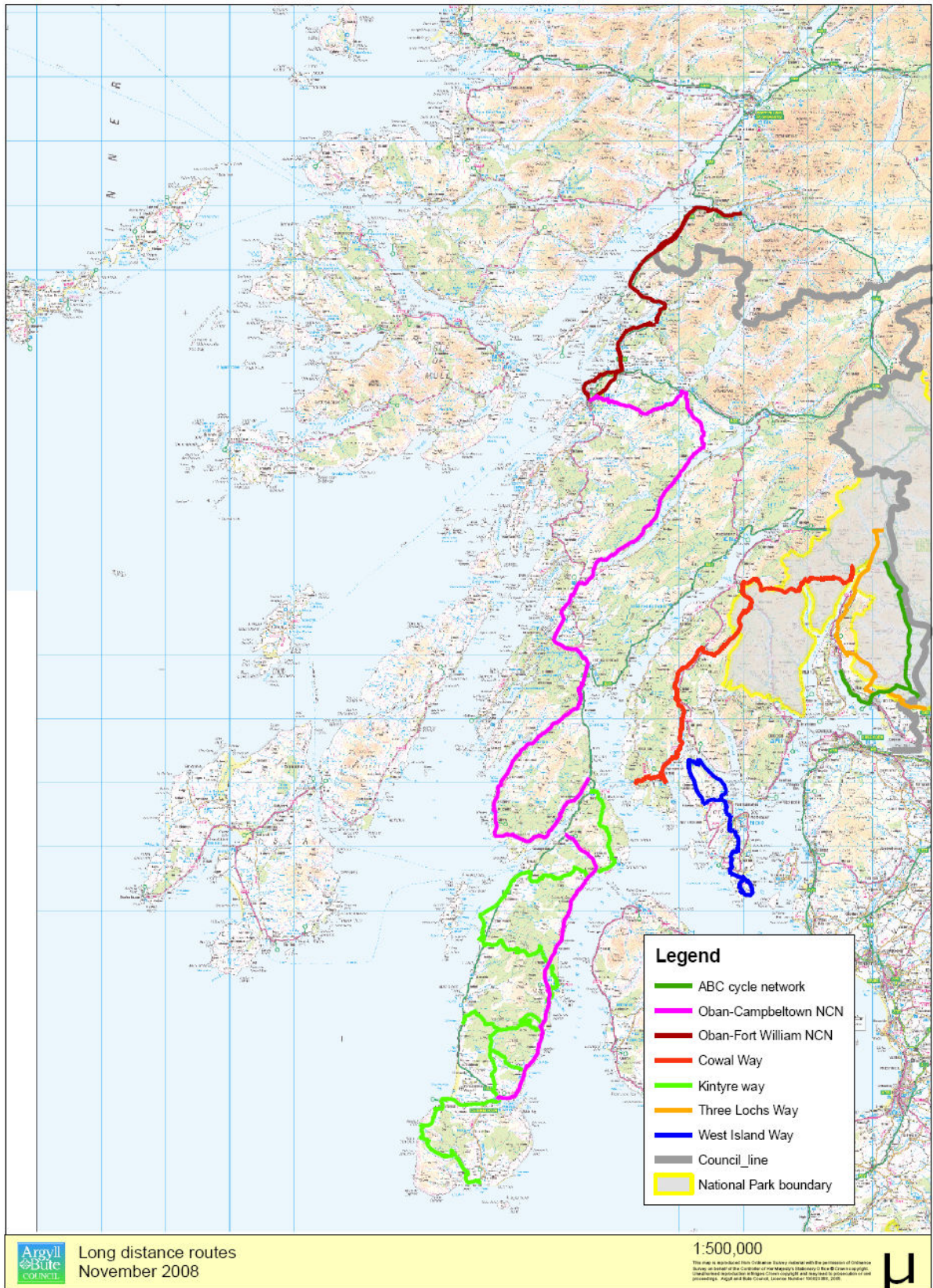
<http://www.sup.org.uk/docs/SUW%20SUMMARY%20DOC.pdf>

Scottish Natural Heritage

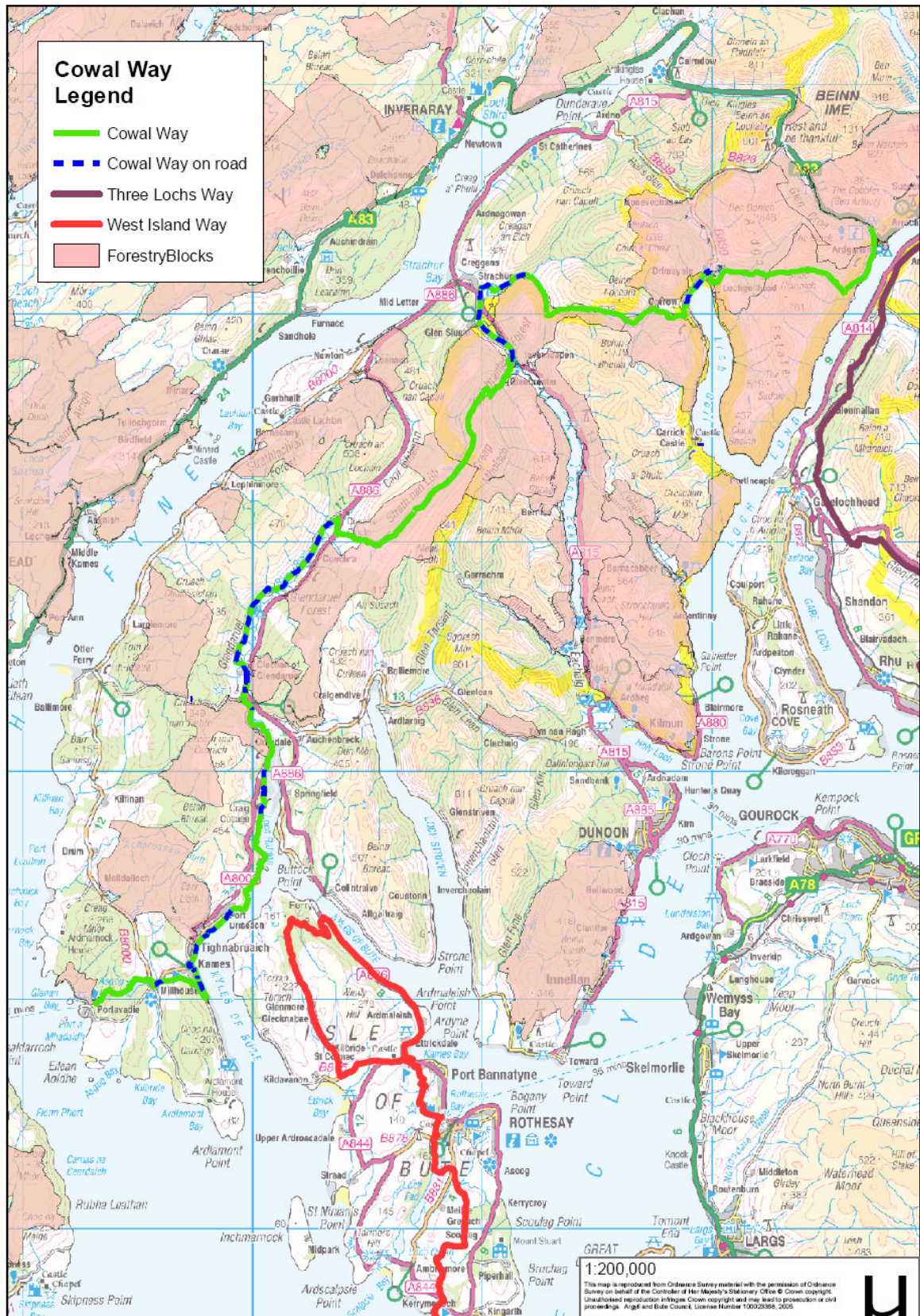
Draft Paths Policy circulated by email November 2008.

Appendix 1

Existing Long Distance Routes in Argyll & Bute



Cowal Way



Note: Extensive sections of the route use minor public roads or forestry roads where maintenance is carried out by Argyll & Bute Council and the Forestry Commission respectively.