



FOREST RESEARCH

“Enhancing the Forest Sector’s contribution to equal access for disabled people to recreation goods, facilities and services in Scottish Forests”

Good practice examples of access to forests or countryside

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By

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1.0 Introduction

This report presents an assessment of a sample of places with access for disabled people. The sites were identified as being exemplary in provision of disabled access from Forum discussion groups and from questionnaire participants (access, recreation and forest managers, land agents). The sites were also selected to give a good geographic spread across Scotland. A specialist disabled access auditor, Sally –Anne Hoyne (S-A), accompanied OPENspace staff (Simon Bell and Jenny Roe) on the visits to provide a first hand perspective as a wheelchair user. S-A also has extensive experience in auditing sites for provision of a wide range of other disabilities.

The aim of the visits was to assess the strengths and weaknesses in provision for disabled visitors to forest and countryside locations. The assessment criteria applied to each site were follows:

- Provision of information off-site prior to making a visit
- Way finding and quality of experience on Approach, Entrance and Arrival to the site.
- Evidence of good practice at the site during the main activities
- Identification of problems and possible solutions.

2.0 The sites

2.1 Mable Forest

Date of visit: 9 July 2007, 10.30am

Weather conditions: Good

An all abilities trail providing access to a sensory garden and a pond area.

Provision of off-site information: map and information provided on the web, but missing essential information on gradients. The exact form of the route is also difficult to decipher. A disabled visitor in a wheelchair would need assistance at this site.

Approach: signage from road, but poor contrast (see below), could be better lead-up

Entrance: signage provided

Wind-down: good, road winds upwards with sense of anticipation, then downwards to disabled parking area.

Arrival: very poor, location of disabled parking facility is hard to see; some distance away from main car park, presenting difficulties if more than one party of cars is visiting; grass surfacing is poor (S_A had to move car twice to position wheelchair on a safe surface), way finding from car park to toilet and trail is poor, and no dispenser provided for leaflets. There's a steep slope up to the information area.

Evidence of good practice

- The quality of experience available to a disabled visitor is high. It offers a rich sensory experience with access to water and plants.
- Large type signage in places (sensory garden and pinpointing sequoia) but not consistent.
- Surfacing is generally ok (mostly hoggin paths)
- Several picnic benches with missing seat area for wheelchair
- Zig-zag paths are employed to control gradients
- Tapping posts to boardwalk

Potential improvements

Fixable ...	Nice to have ...	Hard to fix but could be helped by
<p>Disabled toilet: add shelf and bins, keep floor dry, improve drainage at entrance, replace bolt with swing catch.</p> <p>Improve signage and visibility from disabled car park.</p>	<p>Tapping rail to path edges and fill side slopes to some path edges.</p>	<p>Information on gradients to be provided on a more detailed map; map to locate position of disabled parking.</p>
<p>Signage: add Braille (acrylic overlay), improve colour contrast is poor on green posts, improve type (larger, san serif).</p> <p>Change phraseology: "less-abled" to "blue badge"</p>	<p>Sign-sound boxes for poetry</p>	<p>Decking: difficult to fix spacing to boards (too wide) but alert blind people?</p>
<p>Chicken wire to bridges: unsafe for visually impaired people</p>		
<p>Printed leaflet dispenser in disabled parking</p>	<p>Benches en route instead of picnic tables (with arms and backs)</p>	
<p>Grassy surface to disabled car park is difficult: remove stones</p>	<p>Gravel surface to disabled car park.</p>	

(visitor had to move car twice to position wheelchair)		
Relocate picnic table in disabled parking to be accessible, allow for missing seat.		
Latch to gate to pond is stiff – simply needs some oil, is a gate really needed?		

Overall rating: sensory garden and woodland pond area: 7/10
 Remainder of All Abilities Trail: 5/10 owing to steep gradients and poor way finding information.

Figure 1: blue sign evident from roadside but contrast between headline and background is poor

Figure 2: disabled parking indicated from main car park but located some distance away.



Figure 3: double star rating indicates the path is generally accessible, has some bumps and steep gradients, but rating meant nothing to disabled visitor and requires interpretation to accompany it, plus some repair.



Figure 3: Sign to sensory garden, good colour contrast, good size type, acrylic overlay in braille would improve accessibility

Figure 4: Poetry in the wood, type size is too small and should be in san-serif typeface. Sound posts for the poetry would expand accessibility.



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Figure 5: grass surfacing uneven and difficult to position wheelchair on, picnic table to rear isn't accessible by wheelchair, signage pointing to toilet up hill would be helpful.

Figure 6: the toilet simply needs a disabled signpost indicating its location.



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Figure 8: seating in sensory garden, good height, back rest would be helpful



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Figure 9: gradient controlled with zig-zag to path



Figure 10: boardwalk provides access to pond, posts act as trip rail for visually impaired, seat to rear would benefit from arm rests.

2.2 Dalbeattie Forest (Town Wood)

Date: 9 July 2007, 11.30am

Conditions: Good

An all ability trail providing access to Dalbeattie Forest and lake.

Provision of off-site information: map and information provided on the web, but as above impossible to gauge information on gradients or decipher form of route. However, a disabled visitor in a wheelchair could visit this site alone.

Approach: signage from road, but not much notice provided

Entrance: blue disabled signage provided and highly visible at entrance

Wind-down: non-existent, immediately arrive into car park from road junction

Arrival: path trail information signage provided in dispenser, directions are fairly clear.

Good Practice

- The quality of experience is good and the site feels safe: this is a rich, natural setting providing access to water, but variety en route and range of views out of site is missing, plus re-tracing of steps required along part of route.
- All Abilities Trail can be negotiated independently
- parking: space and reasonable surface
- no gradient above 1:12
- easily accessible, bus from Dalbeattie stops at entrance
- leaflet dispenser at start of route
- well used by scooters
- non-stick surface to boardwalk (but gaps between boards too wide as at Mabie), railings and seating to this area all satisfactory.

Potential improvements

Fixable ...	Nice to have ...	Hard to fix but could be helped by
Dog and horse soiling on path	Disabled toilet	Broaden the potential experience of site for disabled users by providing more information on access to other trails, link in with forest roads. Gradient key on large scale, easier to read map is needed.

Signage en route could easily be improved: ie colour contrast, type size, san serif etc	Benches en route with back and arms	
	Path edging for tapping	
	Larger scale map of route with more information	
	Wider path in places	
	Fishing dock to boardwalk	

Overall rating: 8/10 owing to quality of natural experience provided and ability to negotiate path independently.



Figure 7: clearly visible entrance and way finding information from car park



**Fig 9: wide path
accommodating 2 wheel
chairs side-by-side**



**Fig 10: insufficient contrast in
signage**



Fig 11: viewing platform to lake easily accessible, wide turn around area, high seats, arm rests.

2.3 Threave Estate (NTS and Historic Scotland)

Date: 9 July, 3 pm

Conditions: Good

A trail within the extensive estate grounds leading to hides and ferry to Threave Castle. No indication as to whether “all ability” is provided.

Provision of off-site information: non-existent, the site was known to the disabled auditor but otherwise information was unavailable.

Approach: minimal signage from main road, we would not have found it had SA not been before.

Entrance: minimal signage at entrance, simply saying “Threave Estate”

Wind-down: none, immediately from access road into car park

Arrival: disabled toilet available and signage to start of route but nothing to indicate easy access trail for disabled users.

Good Practice

- Blister surfacing for visually impaired at gates to car park, and on main trail textured concrete surfacing at junctions indicates presence of benches/gates
- Good gates, easily opened
- Good disabled toilet, highly visible, easily accessed, good colour contrast internally
- Provision in hide is good (moveable seats) but accessible not possible owing to poor path maintenance (see below)

Schedule of potential improvements

Fixable ...	Nice to have ...	Hard to fix but could be helped by
Maintain the path to the bird hide, it's not accessible owing to overgrowth of vegetation	Tapping rail to path is over obtrusive, it need not be so deep.	
Replace benches: very poor quality.	Barbed wire to fence is a potential hazard: use non-barbed wire to fore-front of rail.	

Steps to boat landing: colour contrast required on treads	Disabled boat access to Castle	
Easy-to-read signage providing information about the site. Maps of site available in dispenser on arrival and on web.	Provide hand rails en route	

Overall rating: 5/10 owing to poor provision in information provided about the site (both on web and at the site). Good for accessibility and facilities. The site could be easily negotiated by a disabled person in wheelchair, but main attractions (hides and castle) are not accessible, however landing platform at end of route is a nice place to sit and watch the world go by.



Fig 12: bubble paving identifying gate



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Fig 13: gate with pull latch easily opened



Fig 14: textured concrete indicating position of seating for visually impaired



Fig 15: path to hide inaccessible owing to poor maintenance in path.



Fig 16: toilet access highly visible and in prominent location



Fig 17: good colour contrast to disabled toilet and good provision of shelves & handles.

2.4 David Marshall Lodge, Aberfoyle

Date of visit: 15 July 2007, 10.30am

Weather: torrential rain

Trail to Waterfall, marked “easy” route but not “all ability”. Visitor centre and viewing area.

Provision of off-site information: downloadable map and guide available from the web, but type size is tiny and difficult to read. Information on gradients is helpful, and the blue disabled sign pinpoints provision of facilities for the disabled but doesn’t state what. This site does not promote itself as Easy Access but was recommended by the Fieldfare Trust.

Approach: prominent sign positioned on main road well in advance of entrance but no blue sign.

Entrance: prominent signage indicating entrance, and a smaller blue sign directing disabled visitors to special parking area.

Wind-down: a climb up a hill leads to the visitor centre. Road humps are uncomfortable for disabled drivers but probably necessary to slow speeds. Provision in the car park for non-disabled visitors is good, with attractive views across the lake and picnic tables. Unfortunately owing to steep gradients this area is largely in-accessible to visitors in wheelchairs.

Arrival: blue sign obscured by other cars (including FC vehicle)

Good Practice

- Overall, visitor centre experience is a good one although some improvements could be made (see below): easily negotiable by a wheelchair user (but since the centre was temporarily closed this may be experienced differently on a busy day). Outdoor seating area to café provides magnificent views and easily accessed via low gradient ramps.
- Signage in large type and non-serif style but signage indicating location of disabled toilet is missing.
- Hand-rail to yellow rail leading to waterfall is helpful for the visually impaired and ambulant visitor.
- Café well set out, wide aisles, moveable chairs (but might be more difficult to negotiate on a busy day).

A second disabled toilet is provided out doors accessed via a long and twisting ramp, but was out of order on the day.

Potential improvements to Trails

Owing to steep gradients the trails are not accessible to a wheelchair user, even with a helper to push. However, the trail could be accessed by the visually and hearing impaired. The following indicates potential improvements in improving disabled provision to the yellow graded route, a ½ mile walk to a nearby waterfall.

Fixable ...	Nice to have ...	Hard to fix but could be helped by
Dips in path surfacing could be easily filled	More benches en route: higher, with arm rests.	Whilst it's not possible for a wheelchair visitor to get to the waterfall, a viewing platform further up-route would be highly beneficial.
Cross slopes to path difficult both for visually impaired and ambulant disabled visitors – again could be levelled with fill		
Provision for a continuous hand rail		
Replace rocky surface with smoother gravel		
Signage in Braille		
Clarify what the footprints mean in outdoor signage.		
Improve contrast between black ramp walling and brown stained handrail.		

Visitor Centre: potential improvements

Fixable ...	Nice to have ...	Hard to fix but could be helped by
Signage to disabled toilet	More inter-active material in educational area eg. tactile/sound posts.	Trail development difficult but clearer, more prominent information on gradients would be helpful, together with provision of scooters to enable access.
Demarc platform edge to steep slope in outdoor café area	Acrylic tactile overlay to entrance orientation map or model	
Minor improvements to disabled toilet: re-locate handle to toilet to side where most space, add single sheet toilet dispenser and towel dispenser, improve contrast between equipment and colour of walls.		
Add kick plate to main door entrance (its heavy).		

Overall rating: it was not possible to rate the trail since it was in- accessible. The views available from the site would be the main attraction for a wheelchair visitor, and these alone would make a visit worthwhile.



Fig 18 & 19, provision for disabled parking clearly indicated at entrance, but signage obscured at arrival point owing to low level siting.



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Fig 20: more access information on trails needed.



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Fig 21: good access from café to viewing area



Fig 22: good provision of hand rail to trail but this needs to be continuous along route

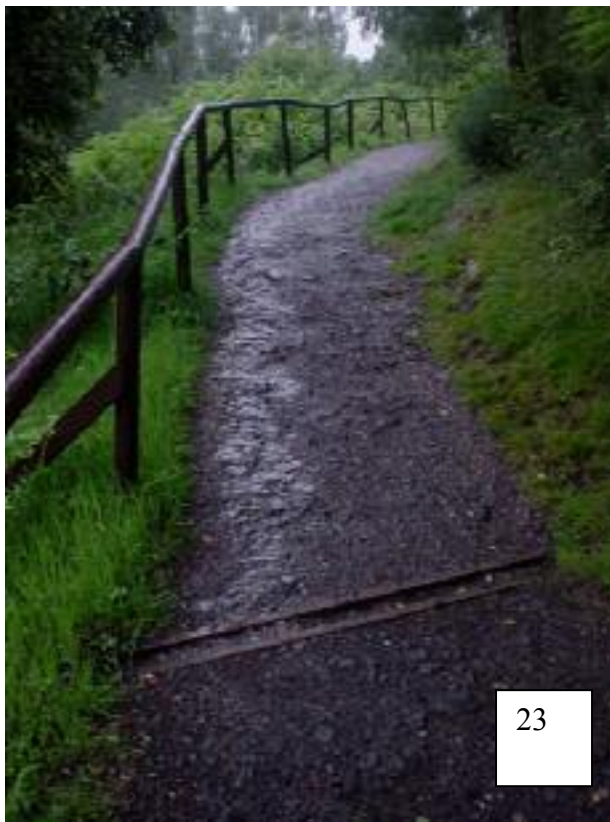


Fig 23: water rill projects from surfacing creating trip hazard.



Fig 24: greater colour contrast required between brown handrail and black painted posts.

2.5 Abriachan Woods

Date of visit: 12 July 2007, 16.00pm

Weather: Overcast but dry and warm

A community forest in a remote location providing a range of trails and family friendly activities.

Provision of off-site information: website is reasonable accessible but information about what to do is limited

Approach: Along a narrow single track road but spectacular countryside. Signposting is not very good

Entrance: not clear – the sign is set back and rather dull in colour

Wind-down: there is a wind down from the road which itself is rather calming after the A82

Arrival: Good sense of arrival and sight of the facilities.

Good Practice

- Family friendly site with very good accessibility for all
- All the paths are wide, good gradient and well surfaced.
- The toilets are composting but fully accessible with only a few minor aspects that should be fixed.
- The ramps up to the toilets, necessary due to the need to raise them above the compost tanks, are well constructed and quite a feature.
- Paths are well edged and boardwalks also very good.
- The hide and dipping platform are also very accessible.
- Information and other signs include tactile elements as well as sound posts, though these were out of action at the time of the visit.
- The picnic tables and a barbecue are also well designed.

Potential improvements??

Fixable ...	Nice to have ...	Hard to fix but could be helped by
Repair the sound boxes	Less confusing information	
Improve the entrance sign		
Mark the entrance from the road and add advance warning signs		

Overall impression: S-A awarded 10/10.



**Fig 25:
accessible
picnic table**



Fig 26: good provision of path edging which also defines it for visually impaired people to both edges of path



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Fig 27 & 28: tactile and signage with good colour contrast and interest



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Fig 29: Composting toilets with attractively designed ramps

2.6 Anagach, Grantown-on-Spey

Date of visit: 13 July 2007, 10.00am

Weather: sunny and fine

A range of trails forming part of Seafield Estate and through extensive woodlands. The trail audited below is through Kylintra woods commencing close to the town centre, leading past a park, pond and sewage works into the woods and down to the River Spey.

Provision of off-site information: A leaflet is available and has input for people with visual impairment.

Approach directly off public street and footpath

Entrance: not signed and partly blocked by a concrete bollard

Wind-down: none

Arrival: no specific sense

Good Practice

- Good surfacing, straight, level and smooth to main stretch of path which merited the trail a score of 8/10 for the main stretch of path.

Potential improvements

Fixable ...	Nice to have ...	Hard to fix but could be helped by
Improvement to existing ramps, particularly entrance ramp	Create new links in the park and in the woods	Problems less easy to fix are ramps to the underpass (too steep) and access to the river). Information on accessibility therefore required.
Provision of benches	Fix the bridge to the park	
Provision of entrance sign	Add signage	
Provision of tapping rail		



Fig 30: level, straight and smooth surfaced path



Fig 31: ramps required for bridge access.

2.7 Lionthorne Woods

Date of visit: 19 July 2007 11.00am

Weather: dull following rain

An area of woodland managed by Callender Estates that has undergone extensive work recently to build a set of easy access paths. This area was not assessed but SA but Simon Bell made observations.

Provision of off-site information:

Approach In housing area with no approach as such

Entrance: non-descript gateway with some dumping

Wind-down: None

Arrival: No sense of arrival

Good Practice

- Excellent quality path construction to BT Countryside for All standards, with low gradients and smooth but firm surfacing.
- Good woodland management making the woods more accessible, welcoming and friendly.

Potential improvements

Fixable ...	Nice to have ...	Hard to fix but could be helped by
Provision of path edge/tapping rail in places	Map indicating gradients and surfacing	Steep gradients to some sections of the path where information is needed.
Provision of benches		
Signs and waymarkers		



Fig 32:
Path construction to BT
Countryside for All
standards: low
gradients, smooth but
firm surfacing, and
straight.