



## SUMMARY

The project will carry out vital path conservation and upgrade around the nationally important climbing area of Polldubh. The area is also significant for its landscape character, habitat mosaics and proximity to Lower Falls car park.

The crags are not only popular with independent climbers visiting the area but are a highly regarded and regularly used resource for: local schools, colleges, universities, activity centres, national outdoor centres, scouts, freelancers and adventure tourism businesses.

## Polldubh crags



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## PROJECT DETAILS

This project will improve access to the historic and popular rock climbing area of Polldubh Crags and in so doing make a positive impact on the landscape character in this part of the Glen. The U shaped profile of the glaciated valley is a dominant geological feature of this area with the surrounding mountains providing contrast and scale. Rocky outcrops are present and of particular interest at Polldubh on the north side of the Glen. The crags are made up of Schists and their proximity to the road make them a popular destination.

These crags are nationally important with a range of famous climbing routes across the grade spectrum. They played an important part in the early days of rock climbing and in particular during the 1950's climbers such as Jimmy Ness pushed the limits of what had

been achieved to that date. Pioneers such as Dave Cuthbertson continued to establish cutting edge routes during the 80's and 90's. Dave MacLeod, the UK's current leading professional climber lives locally and continues to demonstrate the importance of these crags as a testing ground for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Polldubh Path project aims to restore and improve access to the crags primarily for rock climbing purposes, but also as an important recreational area. The proximity to the Lower Falls and associated car parking, make this a high priority spot for a range of visitors. The area offers short yet strenuous walks through crags and mixed woodland which would otherwise be inaccessible. The landscape character here is particularly impressive, with diverse habitats supporting a wealth of flora and fauna. The area has considerable value both in terms of its biodiversity and from the perspective of nature-based and wildlife tourism.

Dalradian metamorphosed sedimentary rocks (Schists) is the bedrock for much of the character area with granite extending from not far above the floor of Glen Nevis to the summit of Aonach Mòr. Mosaic habitats comprise woodland, heath, mire, calcifugous grasslands and montane communities. Since the removal of grazing animals from the area the crags themselves have become densely overgrown.

The short access paths to these climbs have also degenerated and require professional re-pitching and/or surfacing. The work done so far, which has been on a much smaller scale to what is now planned, has not only opened up some of the crags to climbers once more but has also had a serendipitous positive effect on the mosaic of habitats for key species such as Chequered Skipper.

The scrub surrounding the Polldubh crags is the early stages of what will become mature 'western acidic oak wood'. The term 'scrub' has negative connotations whereas it is an essential development stage of woodland as it develops from open ground to mature forest. This woodland is a qualifying feature of the Special Area of Conservation. There are also patches of 'mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes', and although this is not a qualifying habitat within the SAC, it does support the oak wood by being part of the habitat network. <sup>i</sup>

The paths are on steep ground and exposed to considerable erosive forces from water channelling. The project will target specific sections of path requiring a range of interventions from de-roughing and pre-emptive conservation through to major rebuild and upgrade.

## **OBJECTIVES**

*The project will:*

- Enhance/upgrade access to Polldubh.
- Improve landscape character in this unique part of the Glen.
- Improve the infrastructure of a nationally important climbing venue, tourist destination and educational resource.
- Improve visitor experience, offering more opportunities to appreciate natural heritage.
- Involve local community and volunteers in conservation

- Protect key habitat
- Deliver training and increase skills in path construction and maintenance

*The project also delivers across a range of core scheme objectives:*

<b>Scheme Objectives</b>		
Protect and enhance landscape character for future social and environmental benefit	1	v
Encourage responsible access and mitigate visitor impacts	2	vv
Strengthen ecosystem resilience and plan for future adaptation	3	
Connect people with the landscape through meaningful and memorable experiences	4	vv
Increase learning and appreciation of cultural heritage	5	
Support community participation in conservation and visitor management	6	vv
Increase knowledge, skills and employability in conservation and eco-tourism	7	vv
Increase public awareness of the importance of biodiversity, ecosystem services and environmental pressures	8	
Adopt a partnership approach to visitor/land management, which is future focused, adaptive and landscape-scale	9	v
Develop the local economy in a sustainable way	10	vv
Contribute to health and wellbeing by encouraging and improving access to the outdoors	11	vv
Provide an example of best-practice in sustainable nature-based tourism	12	vv

## **CONSTRAINTS**

The area where path works will be focused is within Ben Nevis SSSI/SAC. Elements of the Native Pinewood/Caledonian Forest feature are present here and the work is specifically designed to protect the condition of this feature by mitigating erosion and managing access in a sustainable way. Consents will be required for works.

The area where management is to be focused is owned by one of the NLP partners, Rio Tinto Alcan, who will derive no direct benefit from the project.

## **DELIVERABLE OUTPUTS**

- Upgrade and enhancement of nationally important paths (focused intervention across 1km path network)
- Involvement of local community (160 Vol. days counted in Training Programme)
- Delivering training in path building and maintenance (40 days)

## **TIMETABLE**

The project will run over three consecutive years, making the most of the Conservation Volunteer workforce, managed through the Nevis Training Programme.

Phase 1: June 2015 – Sep 2015

Phase 2: June 2016 – Sep 2016

Phase 3: June 2017 – Sep 2017

## **DELIVERY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The project will be managed by the Nevis Landscape Partnership Paths Project Manager. Significant added value will be brought to the project through the engagement of the local climbing community, specifically through The Polldubh Club. Additionally, the Conservation Volunteer workforce will provide skilled labour (at no cost) as part of the Nevis Training Programme, under the supervision of the Training Programme Co-ordinator and the NLP Path Project Manager.

The NLP path project manager will develop detailed survey sheets, method statements and bills of quantities once in post to ensure maximum value for money and community involvement.

## **WIDER CONTEXT**

The project will run alongside the Future Forests project which will provide the wider landscape and habitat improvement to complement the project. The Future Forests project will further include the local community in this unique part of the Glen and provide interpretation for visitors.

## **OUTCOMES**

- Access to historically significant crags conserved for future generations Landscape character protected and enhanced
- Habitat protected
- Quality of visitor experience enhanced
- Important resource for local educational organisations enhanced Ensuring sustainability of an important economic asset

## **HERITAGE CONSERVATION**

The project will improve landscape character in this unique part of the Glen. It will also reduce erosion from water channelling and from foot traffic. Conserving the quality of existing paths helps protect surrounding habitat by reducing both 'path spread' and the creation of 'desire lines'.

## **BENEFICIARIES AND COMMUNICATION**

The project will have direct benefit for the local and national audience of rock climbers. The Conservation Volunteer workforce (as part of the Nevis Training Programme) will also directly benefit from having a project of national significance to work on. The project will be communicated to: the Polldubh Club; to the wider climbing community through MCoFS and climbing forums; to local College and adventure tourism students; Friends of Nevis and through the NLP communication channels including the Fort William Mountain Festival.

Beneficiaries will include:

- Polldubh Club,
- National climbing community,
- local schools,
- colleges, especially West Highland College adventure studies department
- universities,
- activity centres,
- national outdoor centres, scouts,
- freelancers and adventure tourism businesses
- local economy indirectly through improved access to nationally important area and visitor destination

## **BUDGET**

The Project will be managed/delivered by the core NLP staff team and supported by the Nevis Training Programme workforce. This reflects the low budget of the project as the associated staff costs are within the programme E: Scheme costs and significant labour costs with the Nevis Training Programme.

Cost = £30,000

VAT = £6,000

## **PERMISSIONS AND COMPLIANCE**

- Prior to the commencement of any path works, detailed proposals containing risk assessments, a method statement and site management plan (demonstrating compliance with Site Designations, Access Legislation, Health and Safety Regulations) will be sent to and be approved by the landowner (RTA), planning authority and other agencies (SNH, THC, SEPA) as required.
- All parties contracted to carry out path works will be required to provide satisfactory, documentary evidence of appropriate competence, certification, insurance and standard operating procedures which adhere to HSE guidance and regulatory requirements.
- All parties contracted to carry out or manage path works will hold full public liability insurance.
- All parties contracted to carry out or manage path works will hold full responsibility for Health and Safety management within the area designated as a site of work during operations.
- Liability for workers, volunteers and work affecting visitors will not fall to the landowner. During operations, liability for works within the site area will reside with either an appointed Project Manager or the party contracted to manage the works.

The Landowner (Rio Tinto Alcan) have provided 'consent in principle', pending satisfactory evidence of compliance with the above requirements.

## **LEGACY AND MAINTENANCE**

The importance of the area to the local climbing community will be at the heart of the legacy of this project. Future maintenance will be agreed with The Polldubh Club and Friends of Nevis

## **RISKS**

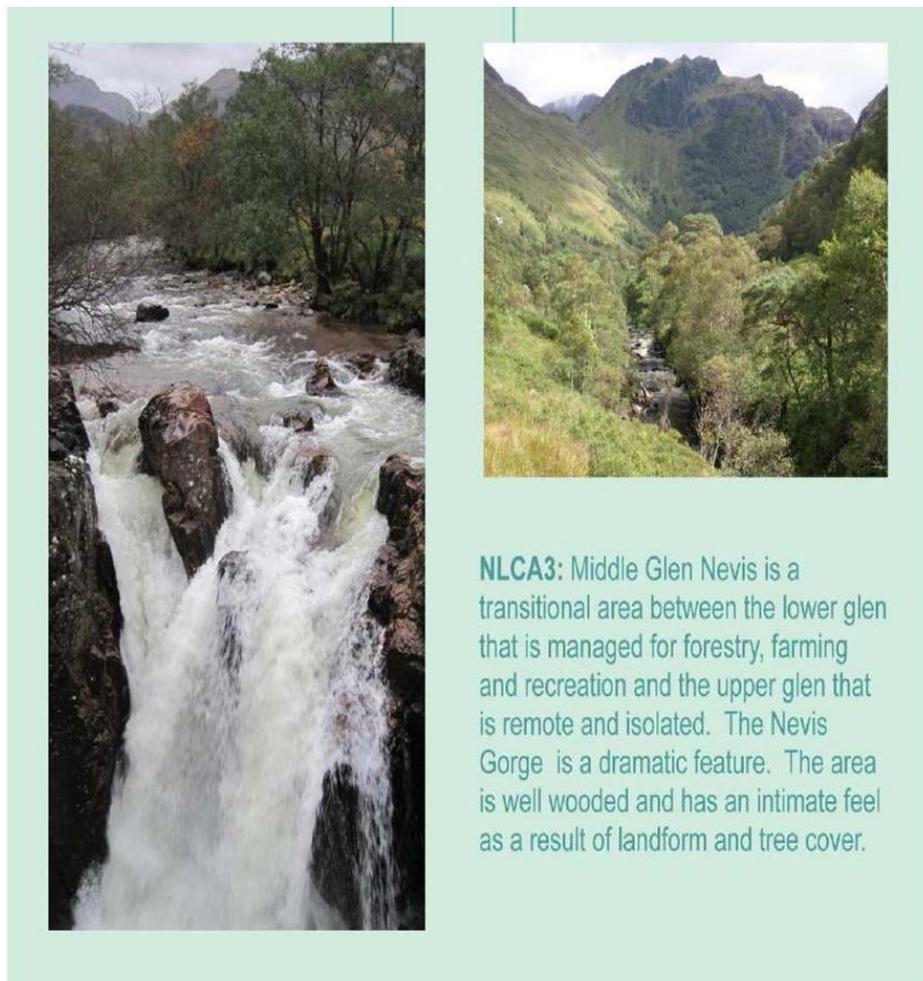
- As the key agencies and landowner are involved in the Landscape Partnership there is a low risk of non-consent for works.
- The Project Manager will upon completion of the survey and statement of works produce a full risk assessment
- As the area is of such national and local importance to the climbing community there is low risk of lack engagement/support.

- The area where project activity is to be focused is owned by one of the NLP partners, Rio Tinto Alcan, who will derive no direct benefit from the project – all of the benefit accrues directly to the public.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Middle Glen Nevis character area begins at the bridge over the lower falls and Polldubh Crag where the valley turns from a north south orientation to an east west orientation. At this point the flat valley floor also begins to narrow and disappear where the steep sides of the glaciated valley have been eroded and collapsed as the ice retreated at the Nevis Gorge. The character area extends to the end of the Nevis Gorge and includes the valley sides up to an elevation of approximately 500m although this does vary depending on landform.

The included photographs from the 1950's, 80's, and 2009 show how the many of the crags, including important named routes, are now virtually inaccessible. The Nevis Partnership has worked with local climbers and volunteers to more effectively manage the woodland by clearing mainly hazel and birch scrub (see film 'Polldubh' <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0u0JIXFi6Q> )



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