

P16 Suilven Path



Project Overview:

Suilven is one of the most dramatic and iconic hills of Assynt. Recreational access to the summit of Suilven was having an adverse effect on vegetation and soils along the established access routes. Small sections of the path deteriorated over the last few years and this process would only have continued if the path were not consolidated and protected.

This project aimed to upgrade the main approach path to Suilven and repair the erosion caused by recreational access on Suilven itself. The project created a more durable and sustainable path protecting the landscape from erosion and ensuring visitor's experiences aren't adversely affected by an eroded and deteriorating path.

The path has been repaired to an appropriate condition in keeping with the wild, rugged landscape of Assynt and creates a more sustainable path line, helping to ensure walkers enjoy their experiences on Suilven and that the area continues to be considered a desirable and highly regarded destination for hill walking. The project also demonstrates how major path restoration work in a wild landscape can be undertaken sensitively and appropriately and not create an overly engineered path out of keeping with the environment.

Project lead organisation and other organisations involved: John Muir Trust, Assynt Foundation

Project Location: Glencanisp Estate (grid reference: NC 16763 19636 to the Bealach Mor saddle area on the ridge of Suilven) Annex 1

Project dates: December 2016 – February 2019

Project Outputs

Measure	Target	Delivered	Notes
1.6 kms main approach path repaired	1.6km	1.6km	Completed
400m main ascent path repaired & consolidated	400m	400m	Completed
1 information point upgraded	1 info point	1	Located in the Honesty Shop of the Estate Buildings at Glen Canisp Lodge.
Volunteer days	120 days	16	

Scheme Outputs

How has the project contributed to the CALLP Scheme Outcomes:

Y	1. The key features of the Coigach and Assynt Landscape will better understood and restored with a fit for purpose system in place to ensure the benefits are sustained. <i>The repair of the iconic path was received well both locally and nationally.</i>
	2. Where appropriate the connectivity and diversity of selected habitats will be mapped.
Y	3. Increased awareness and understanding amongst all individuals and groups of what makes Coigach and Assynt special and the threats to the unique heritage. <i>The media coverage of the repair has reinforced the well-established local appreciation of the mountain that dominates Assynt.</i>
Y	4. Important elements of the built, cultural and natural heritage will be recorded, improved, made publicly accessible and celebrated by the local community. <i>Path accessibility and safety greatly improved.</i>
	5. People will have gained new skills in researching, restoring and understanding their heritage.
Y	6. Collected data, information and interpretation will be more accessible in the public domain including posting on appropriate websites. <i>Blog post and commissioned photography as well as interpretation panels has been well received with many internet media posts.</i>
	7. Local groups and individuals understand, enjoy, value and take action in the Coigach and Assynt area in ways they did not at the outset.
Y	8. Increased access infrastructure at key strategic locations enabling people to enjoy the natural and cultural heritage of the area. <i>Path accessibility and safety greatly improved.</i>
Y	9. Increased opportunities for informal recreation that promotes health and well-being benefits. <i>Path accessibility and safety greatly improved and promoted on walkers' and climber's websites promoting health and wellbeing benefits.</i>

Reflecting on the last 5 years, what's the one thing that you're most proud of that has come from your project being part of CALLP?

"The most magical" path repaired

Sir Chris Bonington said "The most magical walk I have ever known was on Suilven." describing his 1952 ascent of the mountain.

In 2017 Footpath Officer for the John Muir Trust, Chris Goodman, noted: "With the film Edie about to be released in cinemas across Britain, we expect to welcome a lot of visitors onto Suilven this summer, so the work is taking place at a fortuitous time.

"Last year's repairs and the work we're starting now will help minimise trampling damage to the vegetation and peat that runs alongside the path."

What difference has this project made to the built, cultural and natural heritage of Coigach and Assynt?

The path work has made an incredible difference to this iconic path. Specifically, the upper section has arrested erosion and enhanced safety for climbers. The lower section has made the once onerous experience of sloggng across the peat bog a pleasant experience, that encourages walkers to confine themselves to a fixed route avoiding braiding of the path and destruction of the surrounding environment.

The hiring of a professional photographer to document the work has provide inspirational images that have promoted not only the path and the Coigach & Assynt Living Landscape but also the wider area.

What difference has this project made to People?

The CALLP Tourism survey indicates that of the 78,336 visitors to Coigach and Assynt in 2017, 49% visited with the intention of walking 3km of more. Although figures for the assents per year of Suilven are unknown it is estimated that with the release of the film Edie in 2017 and the influx of visitors in the summer of 2021 after the easing of the COVID-19 pandemic that the impact of this project has been quite influential. The feedback from the wider climbing community and the coverage of the national media support the assertion that the path has had a big impact for the local community and visitors from further afield.

“When we began the work the route was so boggy and waterlogged that I always had to walk out to the work site in wellies. By the later stages, a pair of trainers was sufficient. And a path that had begun to widen into an unsightly scar on the landscape, destroying surrounding vegetation, had been transformed into a robust, attractive path that feels good underfoot, looks natural and blends in with the surrounding landscape.” Chris Goodman, footpath officer for the John Muir Trust

“The reason for this report is to alert those contemplating Suilven that the new path from the Lochinver side is really quite superb... It is a joy to walk on, blends in without being too conspicuous and will do much in preserving the landscape around Suilven’s approach” Walk Highlands report 17/18

Useful Links

[Suilven Path - Coigach & Assynt Living Landscape \(coigach-assynt.org\)](https://www.coigach-assynt.org) many guest blogs
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_cqUf1mF5Y presentation on the work on Suilven and Quinag

National Media

<https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/highlands/1790421/suilven-mountain-200k-footpath-repairs-completed/>
<https://www.eocaconservation.org/project-detail.cfm?projectid=768>
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-44022956>
<https://www.tgomagazine.co.uk/news/suilven-path-restoration-work-completed/>
<https://www.coigach-assynt.org/project/suilvenpath/>

https://www.ukhillwalking.com/news/2018/09/path_work_completed_on_suilven-71722

Future Plans and Legacy

The path repair was coordinated by John Muir Trust who supervised the tender of work and the two years of path work. To mark the end of John Muir Trust's involvement in the path work and to signify handing over the responsibility for maintenance of the path to the landowner, Assynt Foundation, a framed picture of the work was exchanged on 21 June 2019. Since this time Assynt Foundation have been overseeing annual maintenance and are committed to maintaining the path until the end of the maintenance period.

Lessons Learned

What are the three positive lessons gained from the scheme:

1. Employing a professional photographer to record the work in blog and photographs allowed the public to understand the scope of the work.
2. Project focused on iconic locations create a lot of interest.
3. Phase ongoing work with concurrent low level path projects to allow contractor to make the best use of weather.

What are the three negative lessons gained from the scheme:

1. Bad and wet weather impacted path work and helicopter lifts.
2. Unanticipated requirements e.g. planning permission for borrow pits caused delays.
3. Change in personnel of partners can cause confusion.

Funding Partners



Taing dhan

**A' Mhaoin-
Dualchais**

Made possible with

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Photographic Evidence



A morass has been replaced with a good firm surface © Chris Puddephatt



The steep final ascent has been stabilised, and steps have been built © Chris Puddephatt



Volunteers contributing to the path work © Chris Puddephatt



John Muir Trust handover ceremony to Assynt Foundation © Ross Brannigan

Annex 1: Route of the Assent Path of Suliven from Glen Canisp

