# Scottish Hill Tracks – the 100+ year story

History of ScotWays · https://scotways.com/ken/scottish-hill-tracks-the-100-year-story/




In the run-up to the publication of the 6th edition of Scottish Hill Tracks, ScotWays ran a series of posts on our X (Twitter) and Facebook pages during early spring 2024. This is a summary of those posts, but you can still find them on our Twitter (X) and Facebook.

Our first guidebook came out in 1885: **The Pentland Hills: Their Paths and Passes**, compiled by Walter A. Smith, Director of ScotWays. It was very popular, running to thirteen editions by 1923. In 1885 ScotWays installed many signposts in the Pentland Hills, and the signs complemented the book's descriptions of the routes. Walter Smith, that same year, led ScotWays' signposting expedition to the Cairngorms.

Inside the back cover was a purpose-drawn map by cartographer John Bartholomew (Junior), with the described routes highlighted. The Bartholomew map-making family has had close links to ScotWays throughout our histories. The 1923 13th edition includes a note asking readers to join ScotWays, to help fund our work defending public rights of way, and to repair and replace our signposts which by then were 38 years old.

100 years ago in 1924, **Hill Paths in Scotland** was published, by Walter A Smith who was then ScotWays' Chair. It was probably the first book describing a Scotland-wide collection of routes through the hills, aimed at the public, the true predecessor to Scottish Hill Tracks. It was a

compact, pocket-sized paperback describing 187 routes from the Borders to Orkney, in a concise style designed to be used alongside Bartholomew's half-inch to the-mile maps. Smith did manage to squeeze in various literary references, for example in the description of the route from Innerleithen to Yarrowford (now route 24), he quotes John Campbell Shairp (1819-1885):
*"Will ye gang wi' me and fare / To the Bush aboon Traquair? / Owre the High Minchmoor we'll up and awa!"*

The first edition of **Scottish Hill Tracks** was published in 1947, in two pocket-sized volumes compiled by ScotWays Director Donald Grant Moir (1902-1986). Moir was born in Banchory but spent much of his life in Edinburgh, working for the Inland Revenue. He was also involved in the Scottish Youth Hostel Association and the Royal Scottish Geographical Society as well as ScotWays. The 1947 edition includes a map of suggested long-distance routes, which is marked with SYHA locations - sadly only a few of these hostels survive today. More detailed regional overview maps show all the described routes and railway connections (but, interestingly, not roads!), and readers are recommended to use either Ordnance Survey or Bartholomew maps to help find their way.



1st edition map of long-distance routes

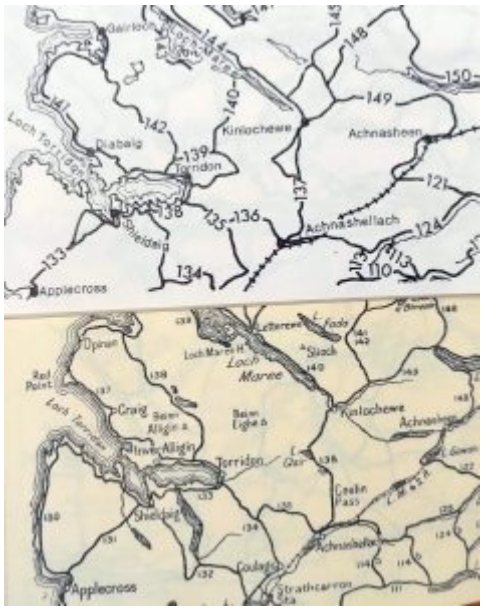
The 327 routes are divided among 24 sections. Some of the descriptions are very brief while others are more detailed, reflecting post-war developments like large-scale afforestation and roadbuilding. For example, a history of the road over the Black Mount to Glencoe is provided, explaining that the old public road, left behind after the offline construction of the A82 in 1925, provided "a fine route for walkers", though "occasionally one has to ford a burn where a bridge has fallen in". This route, of course, is now part of the West Highland Way, and it is still in Scottish Hill Tracks as route 135.



Route 135 on the Black Mount - Richard Maxey's

By 1975, the book needed an update, and the **second edition** came out, again in two volumes, this time published by Bartholomew. D.G. Moir was still a ScotWays member, and he took on the task of updating the book he originally compiled in 1947. Many of the 327 routes in the first edition had experienced changes thanks to roadbuilding, hydropower development, and plantation forestry, so Moir compiled updates from a small army of volunteers from around the country. A few routes were removed, and a few added so that the 1975 edition had 326.

One correspondent was the now-legendary Dr Hamish Brown, M.B.E. FRSGS, who in 1974 completed the first self-sufficient, self-propelled, one-trip round of the Munros. Amongst a wide-ranging outdoor CV, Brown was a ScotWays director from 1974 to 1983. One of his suggestions was to add the route from Torridon to Loch Maree via the spectacular Coire Mhic Fhearchair - this is now route number 303.




Maps from the 1st and 2nd editions

The maps in the new edition were produced by David Fallows and, this time, main roads were included as, following the ‘Beeching Axe’, railway access to many routes was no longer possible.

The Countryside Commission for Scotland helped to fund the new book, enabling the price to be just 50p per volume, and it sold very well – over 15,500 copies printed in its first year!

1995 was ScotWays' 150th anniversary. We celebrated it by installing over 150 new signs, and we also published the **3rd edition** of Scottish Hill Tracks. This time, we worked with the Scottish Mountaineering Trust (Publications) (SMT) (now the Scottish Mountaineering Press) to create a new book that looked quite different from its predecessors: a single volume of 200+ pages, in a robust plastic sleeve, but compact enough to fit in the pocket of your waterproofs. John C Bartholomew was lead editor, with Donald Bennet and Cliff Stone. Tom Weir of Weir's Way contributed the Foreword. Colour photos by our volunteers adorned the cover as well as several photographic insert pages. It took four years for our volunteers to resurvey the routes from the previous edition (and a few new routes) and for the book to be published. Some of the volunteers are still involved in ScotWays today, 29 years later!

Among the 330 routes were four new ones in the far northwest between Achfary, Gualin and Strathmore. A set of 26 map pages were included at the back of the book, Collins Bartholomew base maps with route lines added by cartographer David Langworth.




A lot was happening in the outdoor access world in the late 1990s. We worked with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH - now NatureScot) to compile the Catalogue of Rights of Way, there was a new Scottish Country Code, and new access rights were on their way. The **4th edition** of Scottish Hill Tracks was published in 1999, only four years after the third. The new edition was again edited by Donald Bennet and Cliff Stone and John C Bartholomew contributed a fold-out full-colour poster showing all of Scotland and the 355 routes, with funding from SNH. Again, they worked with the SMT, and the format was slightly larger, but still in a plastic cover, intended for a rucksack rather

than a jacket pocket! The larger format allowed for 25 additional routes to be added. To avoid confusing readers who might want to refer to the routes by number, the additions were given ‘X’ numbers, except in Arran where routes 90X, 90Y and 90Z were all squeezed in between 90 and 91! We continued to be busy installing signposts, and even added a symbol to denote where our signs appeared on routes, like our 1960 fingerpost at Wanlockhead pointing along the Enterkin Pass (now route number 62) – sadly, the sign has since vanished.




Our old signpost, Wanlockhead. Route 62

By late 2002, the 4th edition was selling well, and we started planning a reprint. But much had changed in the 3 years since it was released so we took the opportunity to update it, and we published the 4th (Revised) edition in 2004 under the leadership of Chairman Bruce Logan. The fold-out map also needed reprinted and help to do this came from outdoor retailer Tiso this was the very last commission undertaken by John Bartholomew and he undertook it with enthusiasm. Inside, the main changes were to the introductory chapter about access rights and the brand-new Scottish Outdoor Access Code. Only a few minor tweaks to the route descriptions were made, but one route that did get a brand-new description was the Herring Road, from Dunbar to Lauder over the Lammermuir Hills: this route had been resurveyed as part of a signposting project in the Lammermuirs in 2003 (now Route 32).



Track by Loch Stack into the country behind Arkle. Route 335

The **5th edition** of Scottish Hill Tracks was published in 2011. It was decided in 2007 that a new edition was needed and it took 4 years to bring the new book to print. The editors were Peter Mackay, John Mackay, Janet Clark, Judith Lewis and Peter Wood. Many volunteers resurveyed the routes, providing invaluable information and allowing the route descriptions to be brought up to date. Our partnership with the SMT (Publications) continued, with Tom Prentice putting in a force of work including surveying some routes, providing many great photos, and designing a totally refreshed appearance. The sectional overview maps were again produced by David Langworth, using Collins Bartholomew base mapping, and with all the routes numbered.

We added 3 new routes to this edition but removed 14 because of land use changes making them unappealing, or disappearance through infrequent use. As a result, the routes were renumbered, and we included a two-page table to assist with cross-referencing them. One of the new routes was added in Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, which had been overlooked in previous editions. Route 93 is one of the flattest Scottish Hill Tracks, the Greenock Cut (and Kelly Cut), with only 40 metres of ascent over 14km. Readers missed the fold-out map we'd included with previous editions, so we worked with David Langworth to produce one which we sold through our website for the great price of £1.



## Scottish Hill Tracks

£25.00

"Like a Bible for anyone interested in exploring Scotland"Mark Stephen, 'Out of Doors' on BBC Radio Scotland "a lovely book... as well as practical... wonderful for browsing and daydreaming"Chris Townsend "a substantial, beautifully produced volume full of information and evocative images that clearly illustrate the fantastic diversity of landscape in this small country"Cameron McNeish, in […]

The **6th edition** of Scottish Hill Tracks, published in the autumn of 2024 is the culmination of five years of effort by many of our volunteers, and it is a happy coincidence that it is the centenary year of the first publication of Hill Paths in Scotland. The new edition includes an additional section of six routes in Harris and Lewis, and all the other routes have been retained (with the same numbers as the 5th edition), giving a new total of 350 routes – though, of course, many routes have changed a little. Our editing team, and the Scottish Mountaineering Press, have made every effort to achieve consistency, for example, 175 variant routes have been identified and described more clearly. The result, we hope, is a very readable, authoritative, guide to the best routes through Scotland’s hills and mountains.

If you were to travel all 350 main routes you would cover some 7,644km and 194,120m of ascent. That’s equivalent to walking from Edinburgh to Islamabad and climbing Everest 22 times from sea level!  And the further 175 variants and you will travel a further 3,947km of distance and 99,950m of ascent.  Now, that’s a challenge!