The Changing Face of ScotWays Signs

Signposting · https://scotways.com/ken/the-changing-face-of-scotways-signs/



A pre-1950 sign. White text on a black background.

There’s much more regulation surrounding signposting today than there was when ScotWays first started installing signs back in 1885. At that time, the most recent signposting guidance was dated 1835! Our signs are more correctly known as direction signs as they direct you where to go and it would be 1920 before any real guidance came out as to how they should be designed.

While there are no photographs or drawings of our very first signs from 1885, our records show that they were rectangular cast iron plates with red letters on a dark background, affixed to posts that were often of the wooden telegraph pole type.

Moving into the 20th century, our signs continued to be rectangular cast iron plates with either convex or concave corners. From the 1920s, the official recommendation was for black lettering on a white finger, but this wasn’t a design that ScotWays adopted. Instead, we frequently used white lettering on a black background.



1922 style local authority footpath sign.

Our signs remained in this style until the late 1940s, where some were still fastened to wooden posts, but it was becoming more normal for them to be attached to a metal T or I beam. During this era, occasionally there were wooden signs but the majority were metal.

1944 marked a key change for rights of way signs across the UK. A review of signposting led by Henry Maybury felt that there should be a clear distinction between direction signs for routes for cars and those for pedestrians or horses. New traffic signs regulations recommended that path signs for pedestrians and horses should be white lettering on a green background and use the words “Public Footpath” or “Public Bridleway”.

ScotWays felt that the term “public footpath/bridleway” was not appropriate to Scotland where the legislation regarding rights of way was very different to south of the Border. The Ministry of Transport, whilst sympathetic, did not agree and ScotWays had to adopt the new footpath sign design standard. From then on, all ScotWays signs were fingerposts of white letters on a green background.

While we accepted the new standard colour scheme, we were unhappy at no longer being able to include our name on our signs. As a solution, it was decided to affix small cast aluminium plates (called ‘finials’) that read “Erected by the Scottish Rights of Way Society” to the top of signposts (at the cost of 9 shillings each).



A 1950 design complete with finial.

Initially, the regulations specified that signs could only have two lines of text and no distances. Later distances in miles were required and during the 1950s three or more lines of text were permitted.

Over the next few decades, ever-increasing motor traffic with its faster speeds and the arrival of motorways showed the inadequacy of the existing sign regulations. The 1960s saw the introduction of the of the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD), which defined new signage rules based on recommendations made by the Worboys Committee in its review of British road signage. Changes were radical, with major alterations not just to warning signs, but also to direction signs (including the humble footpath signs). One thing that did remain consistent with the previous regulations was the colour scheme, white text on a green background.



A 1964 design sign. This is design remains in use to this day.

The TSRGD would become the go-to design standard for all road signs, and it remains the design standard for all roads signs and ScotWays signs today (as rights of way come within the definition of a road in the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984). Despite this, however, footpath/right of way signs disappeared from the TSRGD and were absent for a period of 19 years. ScotWays continued to use the old design, but others used different styles and materials for their signs.

When footpath/right of way signs returned to the regulations in 1994, the regulations reflected what had happened in their period of absence by being much more liberal in the different styles,

use of materials and wording that were now allowed for these signs. They introduced icons of pedestrians and horses to make it easier to understand what the sign meant.

ScotWays signs still follow the designs of the TSRGD and we have even embraced the use of bilingual, Gaelic and English signs in the north and west Highlands, but one thing remaining unchanged is that the majority of our signs use the white and green colour scheme first created over 60 years ago.


Ceuman Poblach Public Path
An Tom Donn
Tomdoun
16 km / 10 miles
Loch Cuaich
19 km / 11 miles
Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society
TAKE CARE
You are entering remote, sparsely-populated, potentially dangerous mountain country. Please ensure that you are adequately experienced and equipped to complete your journey without assistance.
Installed by
ScotWays
JOIN US
www.scotways.com

A modern bilingual sign.

Photograph by Geoff Simpson.