The First ScotWays Signposts

Signposting · https://scotways.com/ken/the-first-scotways-signposts/



Present-day signs on the Hawthornden Right of Way. Note these are not the 1885 originals!

29 May 1885 was an important day in the history of ScotWays as it was the day that the Directors approved the spend on our first ever signposts. They were four cast-iron signs for the Hawthornden path through Roslin Glen, Midlothian. Little did the Directors know the impact of their decision or that they had inadvertently created our future logo.

In October 1884 the Directors set up a committee to investigate routes across the Pentlands and the right of way through Hawthornden. The committee reported back in December 1884 and recommended signposts go up in four places along the Hawthornden right of way. Permission was given at the January 1885 Board meeting to negotiate with the owners for the installation of the

signs. By 4 March 1885 all the signage had been approved by the owners, one of whom, the Earl of Roslin, had even installed a drinking fountain and the Directors approved the purchasing of the signs on 29 May 1885.

Sadly, the original signs have long since disappeared, but the route through Roslin Glen remains the first right of way to be signed by ScotWays and maybe the first right of way to be signposted in Scotland, if not the U.K.

Pentland Guideposts

The 1884 Committee also reported back on their findings about the routes across the Pentlands. The first route they mention is Currie to Glencorse crossing the east slope of Bells Hill. They note that the shepherd has already painted “drove road” on the gate at the junction of the road to Colinton. They recommended at least 4 direction “tickets” or signposts.

Whether Currie to Glencorse was the first Pentland route to be signposted is not known, but on 5 June 1885, the Board authorised the installation of about 30 guideposts on the Pentland Hill paths. Unlike the Hawthornden Path, approval for the installation of these signposts was not sought from the landowners, rather their installation was merely “instructed to the respective proprietors”.

A Mr Faircairn of Balerno who had been employed to erect the Pentland Hills signs wrote to ScotWays in October 1885 saying that the work was complete. Interestingly, ScotWays’ next move was to let the public know and it was left to Walter Smith, the Acting Secretary, to do this “by means of a paragraph in the newspapers.”

The papers for the December 1885 Board Meeting include a transcription of “that” paragraph.

> “Roads over the Pentlands Hills:- With the object of facilitating the use of the Drove Roads across the Pentland Hills by the general public, the Scottish Rights of Way and Recreation Society have recently erected Direction Boards and Guide Posts on several of the more picturesque and beautiful of these old public paths. Amongst other routes so marked out are the favourite walks from Colinton and Currie to Glencorse, from Balerno to Penicuik by the Kip, from Kirknewton to Carlops by the Bore Stane, and from Mid-Calder to West Linton by the Cauldstane Slap. The well-known right of way from Polton to Roslin through Hawthornden, which was kept open by an action in the court of session many years ago, has been carefully marked out by Guide Posts. A Guide Book to the Pentland Hill Roads has just been published by the Society.”

> *Walter Smith*

The same meeting records a year's guidepost expenditure as £31 (£4,244 at 2022 equivalent) and, more worryingly, that two of the cast iron Pentland signs have been destroyed. Investigations were ongoing, but it was resolved to replace them. Instead of cast iron the new boards would be made of wood bound with iron.

Sign Design

What did those first signs look like? Sadly there are no photographs or drawings to show us. However, the third part of Scotland to be targeted for signposting by ScotWays was the Cairngorm and Mounth Passes. Walter Smith led a deputation to do this and his journal reveals a lot about the design of those early signs and the ScotWays Signposting tour of the Cairngorms. Today, our signs are white letters on a green background, which is not the only design of sign that ScotWays has had.