

Useful information from the Expedition Network

Welcome!

Green forms and requests for assessment should be submitted to the Scottish Network Co-ordinator, who can also assist with enquiries regarding landowners, routes, and campsites:

DofE Scotland
Rosebery House
9 Haymarket Terrace
Edinburgh
EH12 5EZ

T: 0131 343 0920

E: scotland.assessors@dofe.org

Area advisor

The local area advisor is based in the area and can assist with enquiries regarding routes and campsites.

Alasdair Offin

T: 01355231504

E: offinak@yahoo.co.uk

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Lowther Hills Expedition Area

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Introduction

In this document you will find information to help you prepare for your Expedition. We will endeavour to keep the information up-to-date but please let us know if you come across new contact details or some interesting discovery that others might benefit from.

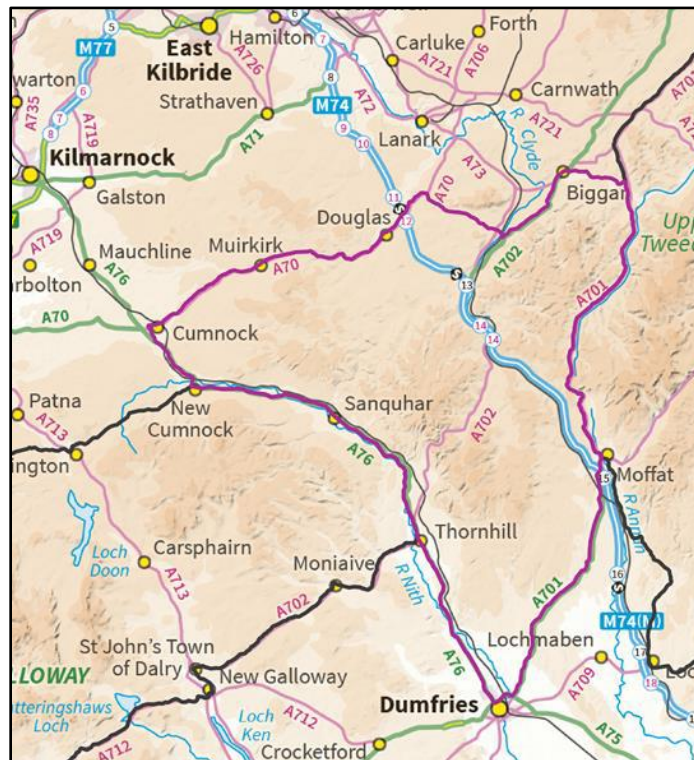
Though not mountainous the Lowther Hills are prone to low cloud, mist, fog and with little ground features on the moor like hills, it can make navigation difficult and as such you must be confident and competent in applying 'poor visibility navigation skills'.

High winds on the tops of the hills are experienced regularly and you should be aware of the potential of wind-chill when you are making any plans. It has been known for the transmitter masts on Green Lowther to be severely damaged by wind, and there is recent experience of severe damage caused to a meteorological wind/weather station on top of Stony Hill, caused by a wind storm, which, though remote, is not at all high.

Area boundaries

The Lowther Hills Expedition Area is the land contained within the boundaries of - from Dumfries on the A76 north-west of Cumnock, then east on the A70 via Douglas to Rigside, then south-east on the B7055 via Wiston village to Lamington, then north on the A702 to the town of Biggar, then east on the B7016 to Broughton, returning south to Dumfries via Moffat and Beattock on the A701.

The DofE website includes a downloadable [GPX of the area boundaries](#).



Choosing Your Route

Access Issues

High metal fences block the track at Gubhill in the Forest of Ae (NX 972 922). These block both the turnoff from the road (NX 970 921) and the tracks from the wider forest coming in past the farm (NX 972 922 and NX 973 921). This cuts off a route previously used by teams and will be particularly problematic for teams trying to get out to the road using this track.

Windfarms: Developments are taking place all over Scotland, including the Lowther Hills area. As a result access to some areas may be restricted during the construction phase. A map of wind farms in Scotland is available on the [Scottish Natural Heritage website](#) and this may be used as a guide to their location. If you are in any doubt about the likelihood of wind farm construction taking place on a planned route contact either:

Scottish Power Renewables – 0141 568 2875

or

Scottish & Southern Energy (SSE) Noel Cummins Corporate Affairs, SSE | Inveralmond House, 200 Dunkeld Road, Perth, PH1 3AQ T: +44 (0)1738 516901 E: noel.cummins@sse.com

The Scottish Rally usually occurs in the Forest of Ae at some point during the year, and may affect routes in the forest on that weekend.

Damaged Bridges

The bridge crossing Wanlock Water (NS 850 150) has now been repaired and is safe to use.

Vehicle access

There is a locked gate at the end of the minor road between Crawick and Fingland (NS 753 176). Styles have been erected to allow groups to cross. There is limited turning space so access by mini-bus to this point is not recommended. However, a new field entrance 100 meters up the road provides such a facility.

Bonus Paths

The Forestry and Land Scotland's [Forest of Ae](#) has maps with routes that may not be on OS maps and show carparks and other facilities on its website.

Way-marked and long-distance paths

The DofE Expedition Guide says “long distance footpaths should not be used, particularly by Silver and Gold teams, except in small sections to link up other paths.” (page 10, also see page 39). The quality of way-marked and long-distance paths in Scotland varies considerably – some are concepts that don't exist on the ground (for example the Skye and Cape Wrath trails) while others are clearly signposted heavily used routes (for example, the West Highland Way).

In some areas there are no alternatives to some way-marked paths. Teams may use these, but should not plan an expedition with more than half a day continuously on the same route. Heavily used way-marked paths provide little navigational challenge, undermine the sense of isolation, and potentially have negative environmental impacts, and therefore should be avoided by DofE teams as much as possible. **In this area walking, cycling and riding Silver and Gold teams should avoid the use of The Southern Upland Way.**

Scottish Hill Tracks

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Scotways, the Scottish rights of way and access society, publishes [Scottish Hill Tracks](#), a book listing rights of way across Scotland's uplands. This is an excellent resource for ideas for routes as some paths are not shown connecting on a map where historic routes exist. Scotways are also interested to hear about any issues with paths and routes.

Core paths

Under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 every local authority and National Park authority (access authority) in Scotland was required to draw up a plan for a system of core paths that gives the public reasonable access throughout their area. Some of these paths do not yet appear on OS maps and may help DofE teams link up routes. All core paths can be seen on the [Scottish Natural Heritage website](#), with links to details from each council.

Camping

Serviced sites

[The South West Scotland Scout Association:](#)

Boreland Campsite (NY 065 958) Ian Mitchell – tel. 01387 267609, mob. 07428 005882, icgmitchell@btinternet.com

Shorefields (NX 578 514) Nigel Scott – tel. 01557 814 665, mob. 07719 381 599, nigelscott@gallowayscouts.org.uk

Please note that Craigshields (NX 983 929) is no longer in operation.

[Penpont Holiday Park](#) (formerly Floors Caravan and Camping Park) (NX 850 949) Scaurside, Penpont, Thornhill DG3 4BH, Tel: 01848 30470

[Castle View Caravan Park](#) (NS 787 095) Sanquhar DG4 6AX, Tel: 01659 50291

[Craigielands Country Park](#) (NT 077 019) Beattock, Moffat DG10 9RB Tel: 01683 300591

[Wanlock Outdoor Centre](#) (NS 877 130) Wanlockhead, Biggar ML12 6UT Isobel Gibb – tel. 01659 74629 info@wanlockheadcommunitytrust.org

[Wanlockhead Inn](#) (NS 872 130) Gardendyke, Wanlockhead ML12 6UZ – there is no accommodation in the inn itself. The inn does have a wigwam which can be hired as accommodation for leaders and camping in the grounds surrounding the inn is permitted by agreement with the owners. Tel. 01659 74535 wanlockheadinn@hotmail.co.uk

[Rivox Farm & Bunkhouse](#) (NT 031 053) Kinnelhead, Moffat – camping may also be possible at by arrangement with the owner. Duncan Lloyd – rivox.farm@gmail.com Mr Lloyd is happy to assist groups by providing information about wildlife, sites of historical interest etc. in the area.

Wild camping

Scottish access rights (see the [Outdoor Access Code section](#) for further information) extend to wild camping for small groups (at DofE we consider this to be individual expedition teams). Although not strictly necessary, the DofE recommends that, as a courtesy and to maintain existing good relations, expedition teams inform relevant land owners of their intentions. It is reasonable for owners to react by saying why a particular site might be unsuitable and to suggest alternatives.

If multiple teams from the same DofE centre intend to camp at the same location, this falls outside the definition of 'wild camping' permitted under access rights. **Therefore, centres planning to camp with multiple teams in the same location should always seek permission from the landowner.**

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Teams should consult the advice on camping in the Expedition Guide (page 101). There is also lots of useful information and resources about wild camping available via [Mountaineering Scotland](#) and [The Outdoor Access Code](#).

The following locations have been arranged with the Estates as appropriate campsites:

- Mennock NS 849 105
- Spango NS 823179
- Durisdeer NS 895 039
- Glentaggart NS 899 029
- Morton Castle NX 889 993
- Auchengruith NS 827 097
- Glenimp NS 897 030
- Wanlock Water NS 854 142

Note: this is not an exhaustive list as Estates are approachable and can be flexible.

The area around Wingate House (NT 015 272) is a site of archaeological interest and should not be used for camping.

While camping in the vicinity of reservoirs is not encouraged it may be possible for responsible groups. Any group planning to camp in the vicinity of a reservoir should contact Katie or Mike from West of Scotland Water (see contact details under [Landuse](#)).

Bothies

Bothies are basic shelters in the hills. Many are open to the public for use and managed by the [Mountain Bothies Association](#) (MBA). If teams plan to use a bothy for lunch or shelter they should be aware of the [MBA's bothy code](#).

DofE teams are generally advised not to camp within close proximity to a bothy without permission from the owner because of problems that come with the pressure of numbers. This often leads to issues with pollution from human waste, so risk assessment would suggest these sites are not appropriate as a campsite. You can find more information about use of bothies, via the DofE ['Use of Bothies information sheet'](#).

Travel and transport to the area

Road works

Road closures and works in the area can have a serious impact on the ability of team's and leaders to get to and from expeditions, and for supervisors and assessors getting around due to the lack of quick alternative routes. Information about current or planned noticed road works in Scotland is available at [the Scottish Road Works Register](#).

Expedition aim ideas

Scottish Wild land areas

The Scottish Government has [defined 42 Wild Land Areas around Scotland](#). The discussions around defining these areas and the implications of this may be of interest for teams considering aims around land use, flora and fauna and wilderness.

Physical and Human Geography

The area is part of a range of hills known as the Southern Uplands. The Southern Upland fault line is from just south of Ballantrae (Ayrshire) on the west and to Dunbar on the east. The rock is predominantly sedimentary, grey coloured, sandstone known as greywacke, and it is punctuated with tiny pebbles of granite. The foundations of this rock were laid between 500-395 million years ago in the Ordovician and the Silurian times. There are several safe sites to fossil and/or rock hunt.

River systems are unique in this area as the principal rivers of the Clyde, Tweed and Nith all have their source in close proximity. There are signs on map and land that these river systems may have at one time had similar routes of flow but, due to land heave, have now distinct east-west and north-south flows. The physical geography of the area has been affected by both glaciation and weathering. U valleys and V valleys can be observed, together with dry and raised riverbeds.

The poets and writers Robert Burns, Alan Ramsay, Sir Walter Scott, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Buchan were all influenced by the Lowthers and have written their observations in their writings.

History

The Lowther Hills are named after Lothus, King of the Picts, and the area is steeped in history which is easily accessible and available to be explored.

There is evidence that points to the existence of man during the Bronze Age and Iron Ages. The area was also inhabited by Romans at one time - one of their roads, Watling Street, can be found in Crawford. As well as being noted for its history, the area is also known for its mining. In particular, the Lowther Hills mines produced gold, silver and lead. Many of the precious stones in the Scottish crown jewels originated here.

The area has been affected by medieval 'Reiver' feuding, leaving the area littered with evidence of castles, keeps and battle grounds. You will also be able to see early Christian and druid influences in place names, events and antiquities. The Lowther Hills were also the principal hunting grounds for Royals dating before David I and was once the lands of King Robert the Bruce's family.

Lanark, the Royal Burgh town, is located a few miles north of the Lowther Hills and was at one time the seat of power for most of the area. It was the town in which William Wallace ('Brave Heart') lived and where he began his historic fight for Scottish independence, with many escapades in and around the Lowther Hills. Robert the Bruce, King of the Scots, began his struggle against English tyranny immediately following Sir William Wallace in both the Lowther Hills and the neighbouring Galloway Hills.

The Lowther Hills were the scene of Britain's last civil war: The Killing Times. The civil unrest began and finished here in the Lowther Hills. Covenanters were led by a preacher named Richard Cameron, who called for armed insurrection against King and Government. In 1680, he led an army against the Government, consisting primarily of townsfolk and farmers from Ayrshire, Dumfriesshire and Lanarkshire. The period of The Killing Fields ceased when King William of Orange and Queen Mary assumed the Sovereignty of Britain in 1690. The history of the Covenanters can easily be explored throughout the Lowther Hills.

Hazards

Ticks

Ticks are small, blood sucking creatures found across the uplands of Scotland, especially in areas with lots of deer and sheep. Some ticks carry Lyme disease, which is treatable but can be tricky to diagnose. Teams should be made aware of the risks of Lyme disease and how to reduce the risk of being bitten. All teams should carry a tick remover and check themselves daily.

Some useful resources about ticks:

- Lyme Disease Action has useful downloadable [leaflets about ticks and Lyme disease](#).
- [Stop the tick](#) has lots of infographics (some are a bit graphic, but informative)
- Lyme Disease UK has posters and leaflets as part of their [Wake up to Lyme campaign](#), as well as detailed information about the disease

Midges

The biting midge is particularly prolific in parts of Scotland and worst in late Spring through to early Autumn. The detrimental effect midges can have on an expedition is disproportionate to their tiny size and should not be underestimated, especially with teams unused to them. During this summer period teams should carry midge nets, insect repellent and clothes to provide full coverage (including gloves and long-sleeved tops). First aid kits should include antihistamines to reduce discomfort. Teams should also be aware of how to reduce their impact including:

- choice of campsite (in direct sunlight and breezy, ideally in both morning and evening)
- choice of clothing (pale, bright, and smooth rather than dark, wooly, or fleecy)
- campcraft (menu planning, positioning of tents, keeping tent doors closed)

Snakes

There are Adders (the UK's only venomous snake) in the area. They are not aggressive or commonly seen, but they will bite if stood on, sat on or picked up. Because of this teams who are wild camping should always wear shoes (which the snakes cannot bite through) and not walk around barefoot, in socks or in sandals such as flip-flops. If anyone has the unusual misfortune to be bitten, then medical assistance must be sought urgently.

Drinking water

Watercourses across Scotland can contain a variety of waterborne infections. Therefore, when wild camping it should not be assumed that streams and rivers are clean sources of drinking water, especially due to the high density of livestock and deer across large areas. Leaders should refer to the DofE Expedition Guide advice on taking water from streams (pg 122). Other good sources of information about health and hygiene outdoors (including issues around drinking water) are the NHS advice about [avoiding bugs and germs outdoors](#), and the Mountaineering Scotland advice on [health and hygiene](#).

River crossings

Rivers and streams throughout the area rise quickly after rain or during snow melt, and careful consideration should be given to any route which involves river crossings. Even small streams can quickly become completely impassable and larger rivers can become very dangerous even if the rain has not been falling in the immediate vicinity of the planned crossing.

All teams should understand what to do in case of streams rising – stream levels will fall as fast as they rise and often waiting overnight is all that is needed. In case of snow melt, peak levels are often late afternoon/evening, and the lowest levels in the morning. Teams planning river crossings must have an alternative plan in the event of continued wet weather.

Hours of daylight

All visitors, especially those from the south, need to be aware of the shortness of daylight hours in the expedition shoulder season: March has 11 hours of daylight and the October half term a little over 9 hours.

Emergencies and Incidents

Mountain rescue

In Scotland, responsibility for the provision of rescue facilities rests with the Police Force - who will call out/co-ordinate mountain rescue as appropriate. Teams must be clear that if they need to call for help they must ask for the police, and then ask for mountain rescue. Teams may not be connected to the nearest police control room to their location, so should be clear on the general area they are in, and their exact location. [Mountaineering Scotland](#) has advice about the process of calling for help, and the information that should be supplied.

Teams must be trained to supply the control room with a six-figure grid-reference for their location, including the two-letter prefix code e.g. NX 345 678 not 345 678. 'GR' is not the correct prefix for any location; it is a commonly used shorthand for 'grid refence'. There is information about six figure grid references [the Ordnance Survey website](#). Correct provision of a full six figure grid-reference is essential as the police computer system will not be able to interpret a grid reference without this two-letter prefix. The two letter prefix locates your grid reference within a 100km square; a mistake here may lead to significant delays in support from Mountain Rescue. DofE Scotland strongly recommend that all DofE route cards are prepared including two letter prefixes to avoid delays or uncertainty in emergency situations.

The teams that cover the expedition area are Galloway MRT and Moffat MRT.

Remember that in case of an incident both the team's Licenced Organisation and the [Scottish Expedition Network Coordinator](#) should be notified using the DofE Incident Report Form (available through the resources zone in eDofE).

Mobile Signal

It should be noted that in many parts of the area telephone boxes are rare and the mobile phone network reception is limited/non-existent away from centres of population and cannot be relied upon for getting assistance. Therefore, teams must know how to deal with an emergency in a location without mobile phone signal.

Teams should be encouraged to [sign up for the 999 text service](#) in advance of their expedition to give them the best chance of contacting emergency services in an emergency.

Outdoor access code

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 has been implemented through the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. This provides access rights for the purposes of recreation or education across most of the land and inland water in Scotland. This includes mountains, moorland, woods and forests, grassland, margins of arable crop fields, paths and tracks, rivers and lochs, and the coast. These access rights are balanced with responsibilities towards the environment and the interests of those who make a living from the land.

Three key principles of access:

- Take responsibility for your own actions
- Respect the interests of other people
- Care for the environment.

For further information (including a downloadable e-book) visit www.outdooraccess-scotland.com

Any access issues should be reported to the [Scottish Expedition Network Coordinator](#) who will investigate.

Landuse

The [Countryside Calendar](#) gives a month by month snapshot of typical activities and happenings in the farming and wildlife year in Scotland, any may be helpful in planning expeditions and thinking about appropriate aims.

Landowners

To identify the borders of estates see www.whoownsscotland.org.uk . There is a subscription option which gives access to see contact details.

The land to the South of the Dumfries and the South Lanarkshire Authority divide (marked on OS maps) is primarily owned by the Buccleuch Estates. To the North of the divide is primarily owned by the Hopetoun Estates and Douglas and Angus Estates, with the remainder of the area owned by The West of Scotland Water Board, Forestry and Land Scotland (formerly Forest Enterprise, formerly Forestry Commission) and Tulhill Economic Forestry.

The principal estates in the Lowther Hills area are:

Buccleuch Estates Ltd, Drumlanrig Mains, Thornhill, Dumfriesshire DG3 4AG. Contact: Rosie Ogg - Land Agent, Queensberry Estate Office, Tel: 01848 600 283, 07891 099037, rogg@buccleuch.com

Hopetoun Estates Ltd, Newton, Broxburn, West Lothian EH52 6QD. Contact: Estates Office (Lindsay), Tel: 0131 331 9940

Douglas & Angus Estates, Newmains Home Farm, Douglas ML11 0RH, Contact: Grant Conchie - Estate Manager, Tel: 01555 851536, grant.conchie@daestates.co.uk

Forest Enterprise, Ae Forest District, Ae Village, Parkgate, Dumfriesshire DG1 1QB. Contact: Katie Jarvis, Visitor Services Forester, Tel: 0131 370 5500 / 0131 370 5988

West of Scotland Water, Camps Water Catchment Area. Contact: Katie Roberts or Mark Mitchell on 01738 621121, katie.roberts@bellingram.co.uk or mark.mitchell@bellingram.co.uk

Culter Allers Estate, McCosh Brothers, Culter Aller Mains Farm, Coulter, nr Biggar, ML12 6QB. Contact: Jon McCosh - Tel: 01899 220275

Lambing

Sheep and lambing season is usually between around 10th April until around 25th May and lambing ewes must not be disturbed. If an apparently 'lost' lamb is seen - do not touch or intervene, as the mother will not be far away. At all other times it is advised that teams should pass through sheep quietly and if possible at a distance in an effort not to disturb and stress them.

Traps

Teams may observe traps on the high moorland. These should not be touched or disturbed as they have been set by the game keepers to catch predators to the ground nesting birds, typically the Hooded Crow.

Scottish game seasons

Lowther Hills Expedition Area

During the deer stalking season teams should utilise the [Heading for the Scottish Hills website](#) in addition to contacting landowners to find out where and when shooting will be taking place. Teams should stay on recognised footpaths whilst in these areas for safety reasons.

Game	Season Opens	Season Closes
Salmon/Sea Trout	Jan/Feb	October (dates vary)
Trout	15th March	6th October
Roe Deer (bucks)	1st April	20th October
Red & Sika Deer (stags)	1st July	20th October
Fallow Deer (bucks)	1st August	30th April
Grouse & Ptarmigan	12th August	10th December
Snipe	12th August	30th January
Black Grouse	20th August	10th December
Wild Fowl	1st September	30th January
Partridge	1st September	31st January
Capercaillie & Woodcock	1st October	30th January
Pheasant	1st October	31st January
Roe Deer (does)	21st October	31st March
Red, Sika, & Fallow Deer (hinds)	21st October	15th February

Weather forecasts

[The Met Office](#) provides:

- Forecasts with summaries for the region and 7 day detailed forecasts for the chosen town/village.
- Surface pressure charts

[The Mountain Weather Information Service \(MWIS\)](#) provides 72 hour forecasts for 5 Scottish regions. These forecasts are for the summits of the mountains which must be considered when interpreting them for DofE use. They provide some interpretation which can assist participant understanding. The forecast that covers the area is The Southern Uplands.

Outdoor conditions forecasts are available on [BBC Radio Scotland](#) (FM: 92.8-94.7, MW: 810) at 18:25 Monday – Friday, and on Saturday and Sunday at 07:00 and 19:00.

Useful Links

Listed below are some links you may find useful. Please note that the Lowther Hills Expedition Area does not directly endorse any of the sites listed.

Dumfries and Galloway Countryside Ranger Service: Protects and provides information on the Southern Upland Way. Head Ranger: Richard Mearns, Tel: 01387 260000.

<https://forestryandland.gov.scot/visit/forest-of-ae> Forestry and Land Scotland website

<https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/galloway/lowther-hills.shtml> A useful tourist hiking website

DofE resources

The current DofE expedition kit list can be downloaded from:

www.dofeshopping.org/expedition-kit

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A range of expedition downloads, such as the Green Form and spare expedition safety cards, can be downloaded from: www.dofe.org/leaders/resources-and-downloads/expedition-downloads/

Further information of the Expedition section can be found at: www.dofe.org/doing-your-dofe/activities-sections/expedition/