

Evanton Community Wood

Policy & Practice: Access and Use

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Ownership: Boundaries & Rights of Access

The community company are legal owners of all of Evanton Wood on the south side of the Allt Graad/River Glass, with the exception of a 10-metre buffer strip from the riverbank and the corner/nose of the wood at the main entrance (i.e. Novar retains the wood to the east of the line from the farm gate at Coulags and the western edge of Hermitage St.). Novar also retain ownership of the roadway from the said gate to the entrance of the main intersection.

<https://www.evantonwood.com/index.asp?pageid=399883>

At purchase we received the transmission of right of access via Chapel Road and through Blackrock Caravan Park entrance. In addition, we received the right of access via Camden St and via Novar Estate's track from the caravan park to near the area below the gate at Coulags.

Access

We aim to maintain and improve access to and within the wood, through ongoing maintenance, improvements as required and appropriate signage. (Soon after purchase we created an accessible pathway to the pond area. The disabled ramblers on their special buggies have twice made round tours of the paths).

There is access as follows:

- Chapel entrance. Core Path pointer. Suitable for pedestrians, bikes, buggies and wheelchairs (although there is a bit of a slope)

- Emergency vehicle additional access via Chapel patio farm gate (unlocked)
- Camden St (East) extension. Core path pointer. Suitable for all the above but look out for vehicles – this being the main vehicle access- for authorised vehicles only - 10mph speed limit. The gate is kept closed but not locked.
- Blackrock Caravan Park entrance then keep to the left-hand track. Pedestrians and vehicles esp. heavy vehicles as required (legal right of access but we try to keep the owners informed and limit heavy traffic during peak season).
- Assynt St extension. Currently there is a kissing gate that predates community ownership, making it unsuitable for bikes, buggies and large dogs. Tree roots also make access uneven.
- Knockrash entrance. The access was markedly improved in 2020 by the creation of a wooden walkway over the flooding area, an easily accessible gate and new sign.
- 2 wide and sturdy split-log bridges ford the stream and a muddy area next to the western field wall.
- There is a plank crossing at the lower ford; 5 parallel wooden poles allow people to cross at the upper ford but neither are fully accessible. It is normally possible for motorised wheelchairs to cross the fords.
- Drumore Farm track at the far western end of the wood. There is a pointer sign at the top of the farm access track which leads one through the farm gate (which needs to be lifted) onto the wood-side track (which has been significantly cleared of overhanging branches in 2020).
- Glenglass road. Just below the Mill Cottage (potential parking for a couple of cars) is a good track down to the bridges. These are not accessible by wheelchair.
- Access via the 'old' pipe bridge across Blackrock Gorge. Steps up the bank and a stone path have been created in 2021.
- There is a wooden farm gate on south side of wood at Four Oaks, which would have been an access point in the past. It has, with owner's permission, been used for disabled access for a special event; Kiltearn Primary have also used it in 2020.

Health & Safety; Defibrillator

We aim to ensure the safety of woodland users and to take preventative and remedial action as appropriate.

We aim to risk assess all our own activities and share risk assessment forms as appropriate. We are ready to share risk assessments with other woodland user groups.

We hold a 1st Aid box in the cabin.

We have put various volunteers through 1st Aid in the Outdoors courses, including 6 volunteers in August 2022.

We purchased defibrillator HeartSine, Samaritan PAD 350P

in Feb. 2023 and installed it at the Chapel entrance path soon thereafter (the box is kept slightly warmed using electricity supply provided by the neighbours at 2, The Chapel). There was an unwelcome incident in mid-2023 when the defibrillator was removed from the box and went missing, only to be found nearby in the long undergrowth a few weeks later. The Board took the

decision to reinstall it as before, without any additional security (taking note of professional advice regarding the importance of rapid access). We have duly registered it with The Circuit and it shows on <https://www.defibfinder.uk/>

Parking

We aim to minimise vehicle access to the wood through information and signage.

See [website](#)

Please park in the village car-park. The road access is only for authorised users including Disabled people.

Please keep traffic to the minimum required for delivering equipment and supplies; ensure that participants know to park in the village.

Authorised vehicles include: registered disabled, other with mobility issues (on request), those who have booked in advance [Booking Form](#), those assisting our own events, also those with a Scavenge Licence (below).

Booking

The community wood is open for use by all, including political and religious groups, provided that they are meeting for social purposes and are not involved in campaigning in the wood. User groups should restrict their activities to the specific area booked and to limit any display for viewing by their members only. Disclaimer: the acceptance of the booking does not indicate any support by Evanton Community Wood for the group or its purposes

[Booking Form](#)

Signage

We aim to enhance access and encourage people's responsible enjoyment of the wood through appropriate signage.

Current signage includes:

- Village centre road sign pointing to the woods. But we encourage all visitors to use the village car park
- Core path pointer signs at:
 - Camden St (East) junction with Chapel St (on private wall)
 - End of Camden St (East), along with No Unauthorised Vehicle access sign (on Council sign pole)
 - Chapel entrance (on lamp post)
 - Glen Glass road, below Mill House (on Council pole)
- Other informal pointer signs:
 - Near cabin. Pointer to The Gorge
 - Near cabin. Pointer to The Chapel

- Within the play area: pointer to Secret Trail
- Left Core Path: pointer to Secret Trail
- At pond turn off: small pointers to Mag's Wood shelter, ponds, gorge
- Before pond turn off: pointer to Explore (adventure area)
- At gorge path: pointer to the bridges
- Welcome and Interpretation signs:
 - Chapel entrance: carved welcome sign with small noticeboard
 - Camden St (extension) gate: carved welcome sign
 - Main path intersection near cabin: Wood framed interpretation panel, plus notices
 - Plaque at path junction to the Balconie Well
 - Knockrash entrance: small carved welcome sign
 - Pond (at decking): interpretation panel
 - Gorge bridge (lower): interpretation panel
 - Mag's Wood: carved welcome sign
- Traffic signs
 - 10mph at Camden St. entrance and exit to wood
 - No parking sign at gate
 - No access to unauthorised vehicles at Camden St entrance and on gate
 - No motorcycle signs on gate and on far side of gorge bridge.
- CCTV notice at cabin
- Notices at the bins behind the cabin
- Toilet pointer sign and signs on door
- Orienteering Posts and plaques (some with additional animal figures) for a basic course (Cnoc Ruadh, 2.3kms = 15 posts) and an extended course (Darach, 2.8kms = 15 posts). The 2 maps are downloadable from our website.

<https://www.evantonwood.com/index.asp?pageid=399883>

Path network

We aim to maintain the paths to allow easy access by all, over paths which are relatively dry and free of mud.

This requires

- removal of fallen and dangerous branches and trees
- removal of close, overhanging branches
- the annual removal of leaves on the core paths

- clearing ditches as required
- the cutting back of whins and bracken etc. as required.
- attention to the bridges

Facilities

We aim to maintain the facilities in a good state of repair for our own use and use by others as appropriate.

This requires regular inspections by appointed persons and action as required:

Play Area

Created in 2014/15. ROSPA initial inspection March 2018. “This is a delightful play space, which offers good play value, enhanced by the natural woodland setting and close integration with the woodland.

It has been assessed against the current British Standards, but its self-built nature means it will not comply. Where non-compliances are assessed as low risk no particular remedial action may be justified, but take the findings into consideration for future work”.

Items include: Swing, seesaw, balance logs, upright frame tunnel, stone spiral, wooden reel, 3 mini tunnels, climbing uprights, cargo net, climbing rocks, picnic table, other seats

All items were assessed as within Green Low Risk. Some minor remedial work was undertaken post inspection. The area is checked on a frequent basis (at least weekly). A nest swing was added in 2022. The ground below the swing was lowered in 2023.

Other Play Equipment

A viking-style boat has been created (by us and others) from fallen trees and logs at the river bend.

We leave out short wooden poles and brush for the making of temporary shelters, principally behind the play area. We maintain several frames for this purpose. We check such temporary shelters on a frequent basis and dismantle them as required.

We are aware of a couple of tyre swings that have been hung from trees by neighbours behind their gardens and we monitor these and any other independent installations but have not undertaken any responsibility for them. (We are of the view that tyre swings do not present the same potential hazard as rope-and-seat swings).

Toilet

The NATSOL, full-access composting toilet was installed in 2015. SEPA warrant received in 2019, Building warrant completion certificate in 2020.

There are 2 chambers. The first has yet to be filled. We occasionally rake the mound to the front of the chamber.

The toilet was opened on demand for the initial 5 years; it was kept open during Covid restrictions to allow family use of the wood/play area. This has not caused any significant extra work or damage apart from restocking of toilet paper and cleaning. However, in 2023 some unsociable activity at weekends led to a decision to close it during weekend evenings.

The sawdust has been replenished from our own supplies and in recent years, free of charge, from Novar sawmill.

The liquid soap dispensers need occasional restocking (but have proved very economical).

We installed a second composting toilet in the Mag's Wood area in 2021. (This is only open for events and activities and on request).

The Cabin

The wood-covered portacabin with log superstructure and veranda decking was built in 2014 (with planning permission). A wood-burning stove was installed (with financial support from the playgroup).

There have been improvements made for wheelchair access. A wooden shutter was created in 2020 to protect the patio door glass (which was deliberately broken in 2018 and 2020). The Building Warrant completion certificate was received in early 2020.

The principal use of the interior has been by the play-group, the dementia group and small school groups. (It was put out of use during the negotiation for a building warrant and during Covid restrictions).

The veranda area with picnic benches has always been well used by groups and families. There is a leak from the roof which affects the veranda in a couple of places during heavy rains (initial investigation does not show any problem on the veranda roof itself; the problem may be on the peaked roof).

The Picnic benches

In addition to the 3 refurbished Forestry Commission rectangular benches, we have (since 2018) 2 circular benches which are easier to access. These suffered vandalism in 2020 and have since been rooted to the ground. A further 2 circular table benches were bought in 2023 (with funds from HTSI dementia project); one is at Mag's Wood; the other at the cabin.

BBQ

The cooking area with roof was created in 2015 and the BBQ built in 2019. It is available for all to use and does not require significant maintenance.

There is also a wheel-rim tripod for fires and a more recent, very effective (and potentially v.hot) washing-machine hub on legs. Both are padlocked to chain set in concrete. The fire is used quite frequently by groups (organised and other). The tripod for hanging pots and kettles is kept in the outdoor cupboard, along with cooking equipment.

Wood shed

This was created in 2019 to ensure an ample supply of dry firewood. There are padlocks on each compartment; the frames were strengthened after incidents of vandalism.

There is an upright wooden storage space at the rear of the cabin, which is kept locked. This holds sundry cleaning and cooking items. The gas bottles have been chained and padlocked (2024).

The Tool Sheds

The secure shipping container was installed in 2016 and is effectively vandal proof. It contains all our main tools and generators etc.

The upright metal cupboard attached to the rear of the cabin was installed in 2015 and reinforced soon after, following an act of vandalism/attempted theft. It is used for woodworking tools and sundry items.

The metal chest attached to the cabin was installed at the same time. It is used for storage of chainsaws etc.

Keys

Master keys are currently held by the secretary and given out as required (currently DW, BL, AC).

The Pond

The pond was created in 2015 (in conjunction with Froglife) and the decking platform installed at the same time. The dry-stone seat with wooden bench was built soon after.

The pond level is regulated by a small, stone sluice at the egress. Large sticks need to be cleared after the ice melts as they can clutter up the egress. (Many large stones have been thrown in but these are surplus to requirements and do not present a problem).

A large picnic table (made from a nearby fallen sitka spruce sits opposite the pond).

Other wooden benches etc

There are 2 carved benches at the cabin area, 1 at the viewpoint above the river and 1 at the stream crossing.

There are basic benches made of stripped logs on supports: 18 or so at Mag's Wood, 2 at high point of core path, 4 in the secret trail, 4 in the Dell, amongst others.

There are fire-pits with wooden surrounds at the Dell, the Cabin area, play area and river bend.

There is a carved post showing pond life at the turning to the lower pond.

A celtic-knot memorial post (to a dog) sits in the trees at Mag's Wood.

The Octagonal Shelter at Mag's Wood

This log structure with turf roof was completed in mid-2019 and has planning permission and a building warrant completion certificate. It is open for anyone to use; those with actual bookings take preference. There is a vehicle wheel rim fire tripod. There are 3 sturdy, outdoor chairs (a fourth was burnt in 2022) and several benches. (The pole lathe was removed from here back to the cabin site in 2020 after minor vandalism, as was the remaining shave-horse after one had been burnt). A wooden sign asks people to respect the property and to source their own firewood. Mosaic art pieces by Annik and Iain adorn the interior of the shelter.

A new, stone track was laid in 2020 and a flattened, grass area added in 2023 as a dancing area.

The Gorge Bridges and related fencing are Novar property and not the responsibility of the community wood. (If, however, we are notified of any issue we pass this on to Novar to deal with). The upper bridge was removed by Novar Estate in early 2024 after having been damaged by a fallen tree. The estate is considering options for replacement (April 2024).

Cycle tracks. We deliberately did not create lots of new tracks as we had been informed by local cycling groups that the terrain was already good for mountain-biking without further intervention. We are aware of various tracks that have been made down the ridges and also of some jumps (with hazard notices) that have been created independently on the top ridge. (These are not the responsibility of the wood). We have cleared a simple track around the play area and one that leads from the top core path (to the west of the bridge turning) down to the bridges).

Litter, Vandalism and Neighbours

We aim to keep the wood free of litter and clutter through our own actions and by encouraging others to do the same.

Generally, litter has not been a major issue. This is down to good behaviour and also to some people acting as informal litter wardens. In 2020 a concerted effort was made to ask people to remove their dog poo bags, by notices and signs. Matters seem to have improved since then – however it is an ongoing issue.

We have a general bin and a recycling bin next to the wood store along with notices asking people to take their own rubbish away with them. People have been good at respecting this request (during Covid the bins had to be emptied only rarely). There is also a composting bin.

Youth parties have sometimes resulted in broken and discarded bottles and cans; occasionally more serious damage has been caused deliberately. Action to discourage this includes: mounting a camera on a tree, also a wildlife camera and 3 motion sensitive lights; and prompt involvement of the police. The cabin itself is hopefully now largely vandal proof following the creation of window shutters (2020).

Other than broken bottles around the cabin area and at the river bend, we have rarely come across hazardous items left in the wood. (In Feb 2021 a blade of a Stanley knife in a piece of wood was found in the wood and a photograph circulated on social media).

Sundry hardware items have been left in the wood by neighbours and others, some pre-dating community ownership. Items removed include vehicle tyres and garden fence wire. A vehicle roof-rack remains; a long white drainage pipe has been donated to the wood. Some neighbours have historically treated the wood fringe as an extension of their own garden and we retain the right to use these spaces. We are also aware of some neighbours putting up their own swings etc. and we will take action if we consider such items to present a potential hazard.

One neighbour has colonised a small corner of the wood when building a conservatory. An arrangement has been reached for a 5-year lease (renewed in 2024).

Neighbours sometimes approach us to remove trees near their property. Whereas we are not obliged to do so we will treat each case on its merits, taking account of how it fits with our woodland management plan.

Dogs

Evanton Community Wood is a preferred walking place for dogs and their owners. We aim to encourage responsible behaviour but are not in a position to police this.

People are entitled to walk their dog without a lead but need to keep it under control at all times (Dogs Act 1871 and the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991). Anti-social behaviour by dogs is sometimes reported and we have on occasion spoken with dog owners asking them to keep their dog on a lead.

Dog owners are required by law to pick up and dispose of dog faeces. In 2019, because of the plethora of dog poo bags being left in the wood, the board adopted the 'Stick and Flick' approach, which had been adopted by Forestry Commission England. ('Bag and bin your dog's waste. Or 'stick and flick' it when you're deeper in the woods'. <https://www.forestryengland.uk/dog-code>). However, we much prefer owners to remove all trace.

Scavenge Licences

We aim to encourage responsible collection of firewood using hand tools only.

We give out scavenge licences for 3-month periods (£40 discounted to £30 to locals). Initially this was restricted to Sept to March but some flexibility has recently been introduced. Licensees are permitted to bring a vehicle (which should show the permit on the windscreen). We are aware that some people help themselves to wood without a licence; where this is flagrant and ongoing we take action by asking them to pay for a licence.

Volunteer Work Sessions etc

We aim to encourage people of all ages and abilities to take part in practical management of the woodland environment.

Since even before the purchase of the wood we have put on regular sessions to undertake a wide range of necessary tasks: thinning and brashing, brash piling, removal of unwanted/invasive plants; path improvement and maintenance; building projects; sign installation etc. In recent years there has been a weekly Friday half-day session. The Saturday sessions are currently in abeyance.

Some volunteers have created small teams to undertake particular projects as agreed with the board.

Volunteers are also welcome to join the Eco (Biodiversity) and Woodland Management groups; also to assist with events (eg summer concert series, Winter lights trail)

The woodland management group currently includes 2 board members and 2 volunteers with chainsaw licences. (We had paid for one half costs of the 5-day training). In March 2024 good practical advice was received on site from an experienced forester, a specialist in health and safety (through the CWA mentorship scheme). Chainsaw sessions are normally specifically organised as separate from the Friday hand-tool sessions.

The Building of Dens etc.

We are happy for people to make temporary shelters in the wood, using natural materials and to wild camp at the river bend.

Wild camping should adhere to the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#), including being for a maximum of 3 nights at a time and leave no trace. Campers should access the wood by foot.

We have a designated area for temporary shelters at the rear of the play area, with poles and brash piles available. Other areas may be used, provided they are not blocking pathways or sight lines, and advice will be given by the board on request. Shelters should not use nails, cable ties or any permanent fixing; natural twine/cord is permissible (as is used in small quantities in our own shelter building activities). Trees should not be cut for this purpose, except under supervision within the school sessions. The board will review temporary shelters and remove them after an appropriate length of time, or when they become structurally unsound.

Ac 24.2.21; 4.4.24