

Campaigners say it is time to reopen the Radical Road

Historic Environment Scotland closed the Radical Road five years ago amid fears for safety of walkers, cyclists and motorists below the crumbling rock face.

Now campaigners have issued an urgent call for Historic Environment Scotland (HES) to “see sense” and reopen the road in Holyrood Park with HES manage and which is out of bounds for exercise and enjoyment. It is one of the most popular ways up Arthur’s Seat yet five years on, it remains blocked and ringed by fencing to keep out intruders.

Ramblers Scotland, the Cockburn Association, Edinburgh Geological Society, Mountaineering Scotland and ScotWays are urging the body to conduct a more holistic assessment of risks, weigh up what they describe as “the low risk of rockfall injury” against the harm the closure causes to the economy, landscape, tourism and people’s health and wellbeing.

Leaders of these groups met at the path to call for urgent HES action and to discuss their options. They agreed to begin running their own process to consult those affected by the closure of Radical Road and that HES will be invited.

Ramblers Scotland director Brendan Paddy said: “It is farcical that Historic Environment Scotland has failed to reopen the Radical Road, following half a decade of missed deadlines and broken promises.

“It is a national embarrassment that the body tasked with

caring for and promoting Scotland's historic environment has left this iconic 200-year-old path shut away behind ugly fences for five years, with no end in sight. HES must immediately see sense and stop managing this world-famous geological feature like a crumbling historic building. Residents and tourists should be advised of the risks then allowed to make informed decisions, like everywhere else in Scotland."

ScotWays chair Katharine Taylor said: "The Radical Road is a recorded right of way. There is a process which should be followed before closing a right of way, but this path was blocked unilaterally without using formal procedures and there has been little engagement since.

"We acknowledge that HES has an obligation to ensure public safety, but landowners and managers in Scotland also have a legal duty and responsibility not to obstruct or deny public access unnecessarily. It is very disappointing that a national agency has closed a popular right of way in our capital city, right next to our Parliament building. If it can happen here, what protection is there for other, less well-known rights of way?"

A spokesperson for Historic Environment Scotland said: "In line with our statutory obligations we acted to manage the risk identified with the input of our geotechnical engineers and temporarily restricted access to the Radical Road. From 2017-2020, there were at least 82 rock fall incidents, ranging in size, with the majority either small or small to medium rocks.

"Two incidents have involved large or very large rocks. Since the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, we have not actively monitored rock fall incidents at the Radical Road due to the path being closed to the public, however, we are aware of at least two rock falls.

“After temporarily restricting access, we undertook an initial outline options appraisal. We were subsequently requested to review elements of our rock risk management approach by a statutory authority. This took much longer than anticipated and was interrupted by COVID and the need to respond to high-level masonry challenges across our wider estate, which we have been working on at speed.

“We intend to have discussions with a range of stakeholders once we have a proposal to discuss that has been endorsed. Any management intervention taken here will likely require consents under the planning system so there will be a number of opportunities for stakeholders and the public to engage. Our desire is to enable public access if this can be done safely.”

Campaigners say that during face-to-face meetings in summer 2022, HES committed to publishing a park management plan by autumn 2022 and to keep communicating with stakeholders but since then, there has been no update.

Cockburn Association assistant director James Garry said: “The Radical Road is just one issue of many to be considered as part of a much overdue revised management plan for Holyrood Park as a whole.”

The campaigners say that the HES risk assessment fails to mention that outdoor recreation is enjoyed at people’s own risk across Scotland every single day, by thousands of people. This includes popular sites where signage is used to advise of potential risks such as cliffs, tides or forestry and farming.

In 2021 HES issued the following statement: “Following a rockfall onto the park’s Duddingston Low Road in June this year, our engineers advised that the rock slopes in this area required to be reassessed. The road was closed due to the risk of harm to members of the public. With our geotechnical engineers we reviewed the most effective options to re-

facilitate public access and we now plan to move ahead with a range of work, including fitting catch fences along the face of the rock slopes at both high and low level.

“These measures will adequately mitigate the current risk at the rock slopes in this area and enable us to provide access. Following this, rock slope management with geotechnical engineers will continue with regular inspection and assessment.

“We have already started this process, moving to secure the granting of statutory consent, given the park’s status as both a Special Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SM), and to ensure the necessary expertise and materials can be procured, including appointing a contractor to carry out the required work. We are aiming to complete this work by early next year, with the catch fence solution being in place for at least the next five to ten years, at which point we will review again.”





Cockburn Association assistant director James Garry, ScotWays chair Katharine Taylor, Ramblers Scotland director Brendan Paddy, Edinburgh Geological Society vice-president Angela Mathis and Mountaineering

Scotland president Brian Shackleton.

