

SRANI is the South Renfrewshire Access Network Initiative, a multi agency project that aims to establish a network of paths linking routes, facilities and attractions around Castle Semple Loch. The SRANI partners wish to enhance this path network with:

- seating, information, interpretation and play equipment
- improved links to Howwood railway station, the cycle track and historic parts of Castle Semple Estate

What has been done so far?

In 2003, SRANI commissioned a Feasibility Study which found in favour of the proposal to develop the path network. Construction of the path, now called 'Semple Trail' began in 2004. The first priority was construction of a new path from Lochwinnoch railway station and the RSPB Reserve, to Lochwinnoch village and the entrance to Castle Semple Country Park. This section is now complete, incorporating provision of a viewing platform, affording superb views of Castle Semple Loch. A further stretch of path has since been upgraded, leading from the Castle Semple Visitor Centre northeast along the loch shore to Blackditch Bay, a focal point on the northern edge of the loch where the path links to national cycle route number 7 and the network of paths which meander through Parkhill Wood. A section of path has also been created from the cycle track, round Kenmure Hill to link with the Howwood Wildlife and Woodlands path network, thereby providing a largely off road link from the cycle track to the village of Howwood and the railway station there.

The first two sections of the path have been designed to a high specification including bitmac surfacing, reflecting the path's use as a commuter route to the station and the danger of significant and often sudden flooding. Further phases of the network are more in keeping with the rural environments through which they pass.

To help formulate plans for enhancement of facilities and provision of signage and interpretation, SRANI has commissioned preparation of an Interpretive Masterplan (2006) and a Conservation Statement and Management Proposals (2008). Already tree planting, picnic tables and artworks have accompanied path development and further viewpoints, heritage conservation, habitat improvements, seating and sculptures are envisaged. A leaflet is now available to promote Semple Trail and the many features and attractions accessible from it.

A Path Round the Loch

Implicit within the aim 'to establish a network of paths linking routes, facilities and attractions around Castle Semple Loch', was a path along the east side of the loch as one part of the "network of paths". That aspiration however has had to be modified.

Prior to design of additional phases of the path network, the SRANI Core Group commissioned a further ecological survey of protected mammals in the project area, with particular emphasis on the east side of the loch. Because of the results of these ecological surveys and subsequent advice from Scottish Natural Heritage, SRANI has decided not to progress path

development through a sensitive area and so development of a path from the RSPB Reserve northwards on the south east shores of the loch is no longer included within current plans.

The Semple Trail can still provide a “round-the-loch” route by making use of higher level tracks and quiet roads between Howwood and Newton of Belltrees and the Roadhead Roundabout.

Funding:

Funding for the path network to date has been received from Clyde Muirshiel Park Authority, Forward Scotland, Heritage Lottery Fund, Lochwinnoch Millennium Events Group, Renfrewshire Council, RSPB, Scottish Natural Heritage, Sustrans, Johnstone and Villages Local Area Committee and Waste Recycling Environmental Ltd.

The next steps (update March 2010):

SRANI partners now wish to develop the final phase of the project. This final stage will offer a balanced mix of elements relating to access, biodiversity, conservation and interpretation. The intended components are as follows:

- Access – provision of new and improved paths to increase access around Castle Semple Loch
- Built Heritage – conservation of identified built heritage features including the ice house, artificial cave and a section of the former estate wall. Conservation of these features will safeguard them for the future and enhance the appeal of this historic environment.
- Interpretation – SRANI partners believe that good interpretation will transform this path network into a significant destination that will stimulate repeat visits throughout the year.
- Biodiversity – biodiversity benefits will include an enhanced wetland habitat at Blackditch Bay and enhanced wildlife viewing via camera systems.

The project is now at a very exciting stage in development. The partners have agreed the elements of the project which will provide maximum benefits to local communities and visitors.

SRANI is now seeking funding to allow the further studies necessary to fully evaluate the feasibility of these proposals and provide the necessary information to allow further consultation and preparation of final plans. Applications for funding have been submitted and we now await decisions.

Let us know what you think:

SRANI is committed to consultation at every stage of project development. Local communities have been consulted in relation to draft designs for the sections of path completed to date as well as in the preparation of reports including the Feasibility Study, the Interpretive Masterplan and the Conservation Statement and Management Proposals.

We welcome suggestions for development of the project and invite residents and visitors to the area to let us know their priorities for improvements in

relation to new or existing routes - or even if you feel enough paths already exist!

Please email srani@clydemuirshiel.co.uk or write to SRANI, c/o Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, Barnbrock, Renfrewshire, PA10 2PZ

SRANI is a partnership of LMEG (Lochwinnoch Millennium Events Group), Clyde Muirshiel Park Authority, RSPB, Sustrans, Scottish Natural Heritage, Renfrewshire Council, Howwood Wildlife and Woodlands Group and Lochwinnoch and Howwood Community Councils

