
River Dee Access and Fishing Study



Commissioned by Dee Salmon Fishing Improvement Association,
Aberdeenshire Council, & Scottish Natural Heritage

Study Undertaken by Alison Espie Countryside Services

January 2003



Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL



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Summary

This Study was commissioned by the Dee Salmon Fishing Improvement Association, Aberdeenshire Council and Scottish Natural Heritage, to examine perceived conflicts amongst user groups on the River Dee. It was carried out by direct contact with various user groups during the summer of 2002.

The general conclusions of the study were that relations between the various users of the river are on the whole very cordial. There are a number of hotspots where there is more pressure of use and therefore potential conflict, and a higher degree of management is required. At present, the good relations are a reflection of individual attitudes and efforts on all parts to accommodate each other's interest. There is little co-ordination amongst riparian owners in their response to user pressure. There is also a need for better co-ordination between proprietors and other bodies. If there is to be greater use of the river in future, which many consider likely, it is time to consider a co-ordinated response to the problems which may arise, and plan accordingly.

The main management options include education, greater liaison between interest groups, local marketing of fishing and promotion of its benefits, footpath creation and management and improved ranger services. While much might be achieved in the short term on a voluntary basis, the appointment of dedicated staff to address river issues is seen as more likely to bring about measurable results.

River Dee Access Study

I. Background

I.1

In 2001, the Dee Salmon Fishing Improvement Association convened a Public Access Sub-Committee, to work with Aberdeenshire Council and others, to address the issue of public access on the river and ways in which this might be managed. In September 2001, a questionnaire was sent out to all fishing proprietors, seeking information on any public access problems which they may have experienced. In all, 60 questionnaires were sent out; 35 proprietors responded, of whom 26 reported some kind of problems, ranging from the occasional incident of thoughtlessness to systematic vandalism. In the light of this response, and with the support of Aberdeenshire Council and Scottish Natural Heritage, it was decided to commission a Study to examine the issues further, and report on ways of responding to them.

I.2

The Steering Group representing the organisations who have commissioned Alison Espie to undertake this study on their behalf are as follows:-

John Foster - Park Estate (Chair)
Peter Ord - Balmoral Estate
Robert Fettes - Dee District Salmon Fishery Board
Linda Mathieson - Aberdeenshire Council
Chris York - Scottish Natural Heritage

2. Introduction

2.1

The River Dee is famous, not only for the quality of its salmon fishing, but also for the tranquillity and beauty of the surrounding countryside in which the fishing takes place. Salmon fishing is a solitary activity; those who take part in it frequently state that the experience of solitude amid attractive surroundings is almost as important to them as the opportunity to catch a magnificent fish. The recent decline in the salmon catch on the Dee, in common with all other rivers in Scotland, has led to increasing importance being attributed to the quality of the overall experience as a means of drawing fishermen to the river. The general increase in leisure time, especially in the oil-producing city of Aberdeen, coupled with the rise in popularity of outdoor sports, and the proposed Land Reform Legislation, has led to the perception that there is, or will soon be, increasing public use of the river; and that this might compromise the peace and natural beauty which the fishermen seek. In the light of the significant income which salmon fishing brings to the economy of rural Deeside, it is important that the fishermen enjoy the overall experience of visiting the river, and therefore continue to come, even in times when the chances of catching a salmon are reduced.

2.2

Fishermen are not the only visitors to the Dee who come for the quiet, attractive surroundings and the chance to observe nature in action. Walkers, canoeists, bird watchers and others are also attracted for similar reasons. It is the responsibility of Scottish Natural Heritage and Aberdeenshire Council to promote the quiet enjoyment of the countryside while taking care not to compromise the interests of wildlife and the landscape. This study was set up to examine the relationship between the different recreational uses and users of the river, to ascertain the level of conflict, if any, between the various interest groups, and to offer suggestions on an appropriate response.

2.3

The aim of the Study was to identify all the problems experienced by the main user groups on the river; to ascertain how frequently these problems occur and to gauge how serious they are; and the effects they have on wildlife, the landscape, and the enjoyment of others. Options for management could then be explored, and suggestions for further investigation put forward. Some of the problems reported were general to the whole of the River, and probably to many other salmon rivers in Scotland; others were more specific to a particular area or set of circumstances.

2.4

An attempt was made to compare the experiences of other Rivers, and to learn from initiatives taken elsewhere, so that pointers may be found. It was also felt useful to tease apart those problems that are directly related to the River, and those which are a problem of Society in general, in which the River serves only as a backdrop.

2.5

As the initiative for the Study derived from the fishing proprietors' questionnaire, and as fishing on the River Dee is confined to the main stem of the River, so the Study concentrated on the main stem, and the tributaries were not systematically dealt with. It emerged in the course of the study that there may be problems to address in these areas, notably fly camping, fires and litter on the River Lui, and to a lesser extent the Cluny, white water canoeing on the Lui, Callater and Quoich, and including the Garbh Allt Shiel, which lies within the Ballochbuie SSSI and core Capercaillie area. Upland tributaries are important areas for spawning salmon, significant habitats for otters, and key refuges for the declining wolverine. Damage to wild areas and disturbance of wildlife could be a serious issue in these sites. These are issues for concern, and the indications are that the problems may increase in future years, so further investigation into the management of access to the tributaries may be required.

3. Methodology

3.1

The main means used to gather information was by canvassing the opinions of all the main types of recreational user on the River Dee, alongside those who live near the river and those whose business interests are in some way linked to it. A list was therefore compiled of all local bodies known to represent the above interest groups, as well as national offices of the main organisations, and individual businesses with strong connections with the river. A cross-section of bodies with interest in all aspects of wildlife and nature conservation along the river was also identified. A letter was sent out to all of these organisations, as well as all the proprietors and those ghillies who belong to the Dee Ghillies Group. In all, 146 people were informed in writing that this study was being undertaken, and were invited to come forward with information they felt might be relevant. Further names were added as a result of recommendations by some of the consultees, and some letters were copied and circulated amongst members of the various organisations, so the final total was around 180 individuals. A full list of consultees is attached in Appendix I. From the 180 names, 110 were identified whose experiences were deemed to be central to the study, and successful contact was made with 95 individuals. The majority of these were telephoned directly, and asked a standard list of questions. (Appendix II and III). Others chose to supplement their response with written or photographic evidence. It was emphasised to the respondents that the study was a fact-finding exercise, and where personal opinions, were offered, these should be supported by evidence.

3.2

In addition to the information specific to the Dee, it was recognised that some of the problems identified may also be experienced on other rivers, and that lessons could be learnt from management practices adopted elsewhere. To this end, a number of national bodies, such as the Scottish Canoeing Association, Scottish Landowners' Federation and the Association of District Salmon Fisheries Boards, were contacted, with a view to gathering examples of good practice from elsewhere in the country.

3.3

Once the information had been gathered, and the main problem areas identified, these sites were visited, and where appropriate photographed, so that a more accurate description of the problems could be reported.

3.4

Where examples of good practice were identified, either on the Dee, or on other Rivers, these were explored, to give some guidance on options which may be pursued further.

4. Expectations and Aspirations

4.1

In order to understand the problems experienced by each user group on the river, it is important to understand what their needs and aspirations are, and thus how these may be compromised by the activities of others. A summary of what each interest group is looking for from their experience of the river is outlined below:

4.2 Fishermen

4.2.1

Salmon fishing has a reputation as an expensive sport, and in many cases this is justified on the Dee. Fishermen have often invested a considerable sum in their equipment and may have to pay sums of up to £1,000 for a week's fishing on the Dee, with no guarantee of catching a fish, and currently knowing that if they do, they will then return it to the river. It is not surprising, therefore, that they are looking for a high quality experience when they come. This extends to the quality of the fishing huts, access to the river bank, the enjoyment of outstandingly beautiful countryside, peace, tranquillity and the opportunity to observe wildlife in its natural surroundings. Fishermen also enjoy the challenge of casting a fly line, the rhythm of doing this steadily and consistently as they work their way down the pool, the anticipation as they approach the best salmon lies, and the supreme moment of excitement when a fish responds to their fly. The concentration involved can be intense, and interruptions such as catching their fly line on bankside vegetation behind them, or having to stop to allow other river users to come past, breaks both the rhythm and the concentration of their fishing. The fishermen are in pursuit of a wild animal in its natural environment, so they dress in inconspicuous clothing and try to move quietly about the river, to minimise the chances of scaring it. Brightly clad visitors to the river not only represent an aesthetic intrusion, but are also considered more likely to ruin the chances of catching a fish.

4.2.2

It is usual for a fisherman or party of fishermen to spend a week on a particular beat of the river, fishing the same pools in rotation each day of that week. Many people return to the same beat every year and develop a personal affection for and interest in this particular stretch of river and the locality.

4.2.3

The River Dee in particular has had in the past a reputation for exclusiveness, and still retains a certain cachet that other rivers do not carry. Whilst strictly speaking, this only applies to the fishing, many fishermen have come to believe that this entitles them to exclusive access to the whole of the river within their beat.

4.3 Proprietors

4.3.1

Proprietors vary in their expectations of the river. Some retain the fishing rights entirely to themselves, for their own enjoyment and that of their family and friends. The banks may become an extension of their own garden, whether or not they live nearby, and they develop a very personal attachment to their stretch of water and seek privacy in their enjoyment of it. Others may need to take a more commercial view, offering the fishings to paying clients, and feeling under pressure to manage the area intensively with a view to providing them with the very best experience in a competitive world. They may feel obliged to provide first class fishing huts, good quality roads, regularly cut banks, security against poachers or theft and finally even to alter pools to increase the chances of their tenants catching fish. They will also be very sensitive to any aggravations the fishermen may suffer, especially at times when the fish are not being caught. Their aim is usually to satisfy their regular tenants so that they continue to return year after year. Some proprietors believe they should provide a highly managed environment for fishermen to facilitate access to the river and easy casting conditions.

4.3.2

On the whole, proprietors annually spend considerable sums in managing the river for the benefit of the fishing. They employ staff, provide tracks, fishing huts and bankside management. The income involved is significant, and may represent the main income-earner for an estate, employing staff directly, and contributing to the viability of other enterprises, such as holiday cottages, and cafes, by increased trade, especially outside the (short) traditional holiday season.

4.4 Canoeists

4.4.1

The river is used by paddlers in a variety of contexts - it is a useful introduction to moving water for less experienced paddlers, in a club, as part of an education group, or as a commercial activity. It also is used to develop skills either for further recreational paddling or for competition. The Dee is suitable for many different types of craft: open Canadian canoes, whitewater kayaks, playboats, marathon boats and slalom boats.

4.4.2

Canoes are the open 2 person expedition craft and kayaks in a river context are the closed short 1 person white water craft. Large parts of the Dee are canoed and short sections of the river tend in the main to be kayaked. There are therefore honeypots for one craft - the kayak, while canoe use is more widespread. For safety reasons, many kayaks are bright colours; buoyancy aids and helmets are also made in bright colours.

4.4.3

The two main types of paddlers using the Dee are canoeists seeking a journey along the river, observing wildlife and beautiful scenery, and kayakers, who whilst enjoying the proximity to nature are also looking for the excitement of white water and challenging conditions. They all need good car parking next to easy access points to launch or retrieve their craft.

4.4.4

Most journeying canoeists seek a sense of wildness and space, the peace and tranquillity of the river and the chance to view natural landscapes and wildlife with minimal disturbance. Their view of a good river is one where evidence of human management is minimal. Coming across occasional fishermen on the way down may add to the interest of the trip, but where the river is highly fished, this may reduce the sense of remoteness which they seek.

4.4.5

Canoeists learning their sport need safe areas in which to practise manoeuvres and develop their proficiency. Unused fishing pools may prove ideal for this.

4.4.6

Whitewater kayakers seek more challenging waters both for excitement and to enable them to develop their skills. Man made structures - such as weirs - where they already exist may sometimes even offer extra opportunities for skill development, but by and large new developments which interfere with the largely natural atmosphere of the river are not generally welcome by paddlers. White-water kayakers may target those stretches of the river where rapids are found, putting their craft into the water just above them, and taking them out below. Again, good access and parking space is sought.

4.4.7

As with salmon fishing, canoeists may have invested significant amounts in their sport; the cost of their equipment will be in excess of £1,000, and they contribute to the local hotels and services of Deeside, often outside the main holiday season. There is no doubt that the commercial sector which varies from low income guiding and coaching through to corporate entertainment and incentive days on which the margin is higher is starting to bring money into the area on the back of activity provision – this is a growing trend which is likely to be of greater significance in the future. Canoeing at present does not involve direct investment in the management of the river, but neither does it seek it from others, except where access and egress points require management.

4.5 Walkers

4.5.1

This is a diverse group covering a significant percentage of the population of all ages, and it is not easy to generalise their requirements. Some common themes may be inferred, however. Usage is normally higher around centres of population. Local groups or individuals will normally look for circular routes, while those from further away seek good access near to a convenient car parking site. Established tracks and pathways are generally preferred, along with stiles or gates where fences must be crossed. Unwelcoming surroundings deter walkers, and can cause resentment, whether they are signposts, fences, livestock or locked gates. A significant proportion also feel embarrassed to walk close to fishing huts, regardless of whether these are in use.

4.5.2

Many walkers come to the riverside hoping for an unspoiled landscape and the chance to observe wildlife, admire flowers and enjoy the peaceful surroundings. Often they will dress soberly and move quietly to make the most of their chances of spotting wild creatures.

4.5.3

Another significant group comes with dogs. Many have similar aspirations to walkers without dogs, but some also derive pleasure from seeing their pets enjoy themselves in the water. Some take a regular walk along the same route to allow the animal to relieve itself.



4.5.4

Formal groups are still looking for a pleasant day out in attractive countryside, but may also seek a higher provision of facilities: convenient car parking is important, and facilities such as toilets, picnic sites or cafes are more significant to this group. Because of their numbers, their expectations of viewing wildlife are often lower; cultural or historic sites may be more important to them if they have a knowledgeable leader. Ease of access and a welcoming environment is particularly important to this group.

4.5.5

Walkers can contribute to the local economy, as has been evidenced by many previous studies, but it is difficult to determine the contribution they make to the river and its immediate surroundings.

4.6 Cyclists

4.6.1

On the River Dee, there is little use of the immediate riverbank by cyclists. Most of the cycle routes are centred on the old railway line; people would like to use the area more, but there are few opportunities to do so. Cyclists are looking for routes which connect up with roads or other tracks, so they can make a circular journey, ideally avoiding main roads.

4.7 Horse Riders

4.7.1

As with cyclists, little use is made of the Dee by horse riders. The opportunity for more access would be welcome.

4.8 Casual Users

4.8.1

In addition to the distinct groups outlined above, the river is increasingly the destination of visitors who do not fall easily into any of the above categories. These are people looking for casual outdoor recreation, be it a short walk or cycle ride, a boat trip, or a swim. It could even be a drive out into the countryside, with a stop at a local beauty spot as the objective. This is often accompanied by food, either a picnic or a barbecue, or drink, and tends to be very dependent on good weather. The river in these cases may only be a backdrop to their activities; the same people might be found on a different day doing exactly the same thing on the beach or in a forest. While some small level of cost may be acceptable to them (such as a car parking fee), they have no meaningful financial involvement with the location. Their requirements seem to be good car parking, an attractive setting and easy access to the river on foot, at a minimal distance from their cars. The proprietors are providing exactly these conditions when catering for their fishing clients, so it is no coincidence that pressures may be felt by fishermen from this spectrum of the visiting public.

4.9 Interactions between User Groups

4.9.1

It may be that many of the problems described in this report are derived from some casual users, or visitors whose interest in the river itself may be less strong than the others described above, and who may value the natural heritage and the special qualities of the river less strongly.

4.9.2

It will be seen from the above that the various interest groups have many aspirations in common; a peaceful, unspoilt environment, a sense of remoteness, the chance to observe wildlife and the uninterrupted enjoyment of one's pastime in particular. In the case of the fishermen, they have an expectation of exclusivity, and their sport is very sensitive to disruption, while their financial involvement is high. The combination of these three factors explains why the fishing interests are the first to feel pressure from enhanced levels of public usage of the river.

5. Problems Reported

5.1 By Proprietors

5.1.1

The original questionnaire which was sent out to all proprietors sought to identify problems experienced by the fishing interests due to use of the river by the public. Sometimes the respondent was the owner, sometimes the questionnaire had been passed on to a factor or ghillie. Unfortunately, there was nowhere on the form to identify the respondent. Of the 60 beats contacted 35 responses were received, of whom 9 had no problems at all to report; two others (both close to Aberdeen) reported no problems, despite regular usage of the river and banks by various interest groups.

5.1.2

All respondents were subsequently telephoned with supplementary questions to determine the level of usage and seriousness of perceived problems. When interviewed, only 9 beats reported problems of any great significance. Most of these were associated with "hotspots", and are summarised in the following section. A high proportion commented on the good behaviour of the majority of visitors to the river; it is a small minority who spoil things for everyone, and make landowners suspicious of the public as a whole. The general problems experienced throughout the river were as follows:

5.1.3

Walkers on the whole are not perceived to be a problem, especially if they are sombrely dressed, keep their dogs on a lead and leave no litter. Where paths go close to the water, there is a fear of catching people with the fly. There are occasional incidents of walkers throwing sticks into the river for their dogs to retrieve. Some intrusion of privacy is felt when they pass close to fishermen eating their lunch. There is also some concern that increased access allows thieves to take cover amongst the public, and that occasionally equipment is stolen.

5.1.4

The canoeists as a group have worked hard to achieve a good relationship with the fishermen. They can, however, cause great surprise to the fishermen by paddling up silently behind them; a fisherman waist-deep in fast-flowing ice-cold water, is at risk of falling in, if caught unawares. There is also a risk of the fisherman hooking the canoeist with a fly if he does not know he is there. Many canoeists make a point of alerting the fishermen to their approach before they get too close. When groups of brightly-coloured craft come past, there is a suspicion these may unsettle the fish. Some fishermen think this could work to their advantage. All are agreed, however, that when a canoeist repeatedly uses a stretch of water, or lingers to practice manoeuvres downstream in the pool they are about to fish, this is likely to ruin their hopes of success.

5.1.5

Cyclists, like canoeists, can come up on other recreational users unawares, and on those few parts of the river where there is regular use of bankside paths by cyclists, fishermen are concerned about causing an accident by catching a cyclist with a fly. This is not a major problem on this river.

5.1.6

Casual visitors are perceived to cause the greatest problems. Where visitors have come to settle themselves on a bank for some time, they are more likely to cause disturbance, leave litter, light fires or even camp overnight. Younger members of the party may get up to mischief, such as moving rocks from the riverbank, vandalism, throwing objects into the river or being abusive to other river users. Toileting can also be a problem.

5.2 By Canoeists

5.2.1

Canoeists reported most fishermen and ghillies were perfectly friendly but there was hostility from some individuals they encountered on the way down the river. There is a perception amongst some fishermen and ghillies that they should not be there, despite the long-established right of navigation on the Dee. One canoeist accused estates of mis-selling to the fishermen, by inferring they would have exclusive use of the river, when it is not in their power to do so. Some guides try to alert estate offices when they intend to bring groups of paddlers down the river. A few estates regularly tell them not to come. Their response is simply to stop telephoning that estate.

5.2.2

There is a code of conduct advising canoeists what to do when they meet a fisherman. This is well understood by regular paddlers on the Dee, but not many fishermen seem to be aware of it. This makes part of the code (eg hand signals) unusable. The canoeists would find it useful if the fishermen were told of the code, and if ghillies were familiar with it.

5.2.3

The canoeists find it interesting to come across the occasional fishermen on their travels, and feel they have much in common in their appreciation of the river. Occasionally, if there are a lot of fishermen on the river, the canoeists find this irritating, as it disrupts the enjoyment of their journey.

5.2.4

Several canoeists voiced concern over erosion at the access points which they regularly use, and expressed a willingness to help with remediation work. One well-placed individual foresees much more use of the river by informal canoeists in the future; the canoe manufacturers are believed to be targeting family groups for their sales in the next decade. The application for lottery funding to develop Templars Park as an outdoor activity centre if successful may lead to increased usage from this quarter. These two factors could result in more misunderstanding between ill-informed casual paddlers and other groups.

5.2.5

Several canoeists expressed a dislike for the way the river has been modified to accommodate fishing. They see any management of the river and its environs, such as Bankside mowing, fishing groins and huts, as detracting from the naturalness of the river. Locked gates and notices give them a general feeling of not being welcome. The use of cleeks to prevent poaching are also viewed as potentially dangerous to paddlers. Engineering works such as those at Banchory are seen as artificial, and generally undesirable, although they provide good sport for canoeists. The fish counter presents an obstacle to paddlers, which they hope will eventually be addressed.



Many canoeists find artificially managed banks unattractive compared with more natural stretches of river.

5.2.6

Despite the above, all the canoeing representatives contacted spoke of cordial relations with the fishermen and a good atmosphere on the Dee as a whole.

5.3 By Walkers

5.3.1

Walkers complained of an unwelcoming atmosphere in some areas. Barbed wire, locked gates and unwelcoming signs all make the law-abiding public feel uncomfortable, while they only seem to inflame the more rebellious. Where the through route is unclear, this makes some walkers feel nervous, and more likely to stray from the track. Walkers also were unhappy about the apparent exclusivity of fishing. There was one complaint about the discarding of nylon line by fishermen being unsightly and a danger to wildlife, and one individual expressed concern about the pressure the fishermen are putting on a declining species by continuing to fish for salmon.



Walkers find unwelcoming signs a deterrent

5.4 By Cyclists

5.4.1

The cyclists' representative had little to say, apart from the lack of connectivity of many routes which might otherwise have been popular with cyclists. In one or two places, obstructions had been placed across roads or gates locked. There may be a potential problem with the proposed restoration of the old Deeside railway line, where cyclists may come into conflict with walkers on the proposed new path.

5.5 By Community Groups

5.5.1

Community groups' concerns tend to be specific to their locality, but there are some general points. Most groups feel their immediate riverbank should be a resource for the whole community and not just for the use of a few fishermen.

There is concern about water quality issues in the lower part of the river where outflows from sewage treatment works are more common. Many communities are working towards circular paths taking stretches of river bank, and there is a fear that a minority might abuse such a facility. Some concern was also expressed about inappropriate management of vegetation.

6. Hotspots

6.1

The parts of the river which are under greatest pressure from public use are those where access is particularly easy, such as bridges, stretches near to centres of population and points of specialist interest, such as rapids. The main sites and their individual problems are described briefly below, listed geographically starting from the top of the river.

6.2 Ballater

6.2.1

Ballater lies in a loop of the river, and therefore has a long frontage on to it, although access by the bridge is not good on either side. This lack of a focal point may be part of the reason why there appears to be little pressure on the river bank from public use. Much of the bank lies alongside the golf course, which is open for people to walk through, although dogs are discouraged. Dogs not on a lead have posed problems, because it is not always possible to keep them under close control. Fishing pressure is also lower here than further down the river. There is a minor focal point on the white bridge above the village, which is part of the seven bridges walk. People do tend to come off the formal path in this area and stray along fishing or forestry tracks. Cyclists tend to go further than walkers. Ballater is a village that relies heavily on its tourism, and there is a recognition that outdoor recreation of all forms contributes to the local economy, so there is great tolerance between people who are enjoying the river. There is a desire to enhance provision for tourists and locals alike, notably by providing a circular route downstream along the railway line, across the Cambus O'May bridge and back to the village along the south bank of the river.

6.3 Cambus O'May

6.3.1

Cambus O May is an important tourist attraction in Upper Deeside. It is referred to in a number of guidebooks and is signposted from the main road. In 1985, a seven-year agreement was reached between Inchmarnoch Estate and Aberdeenshire Council, which included provision of some ranger cover for the site. This agreement has now fallen into abeyance, and there is little formal supervision of the site today. There are ongoing discussions between Aberdeenshire Council, SNH and the Estate to address this situation. The Glen Tanar Charitable Trust Ranger does visit it from time to time, as do rangers from SNH and Aberdeenshire Council, but this is not yet co-ordinated to provide an adequate management regime.

6.3.2

The most up to date figures for visitor levels at Cambus O'May indicated around 600 cars per year at the car park in 1996. The problems experienced are typical of all honeypot sites along the river: litter, fire damage, erosion, occasional fly camping and fouling of the woodland, swimming and jumping off the bridge, and disturbance of fishermen and wildlife, The ghillie reports continued problems of littering, vandalism, disturbance and poor behaviour by the public, and at present it is still unclear who should take responsibility for the site.

6.3.3

The Council's predecessor, Kincardine and Deeside District Council, was for the most part responsible for the promotion of the area, by constructing a car park and signposting to bring people in. A proposal was put forward in the late 90's by the Glen Tanar and Inchmarnoch estate ranger to develop facilities for picnicking, and as an interpretive point. There were financial and time constraints on such a proposal, and as yet, nothing has happened.

6.4 Dinnet Bridge

6.4.1

The village of Dinnet has a low population, and is situated around half a mile from the bridge itself. The bridge nevertheless attracts some walkers and a number of car-borne visitors, including youths who come to swim and jump off the bridge in the warm summer months. It is also a good entry and exit point for canoes. The peak season for fishing at Dinnet is in the spring, before the water has warmed sufficiently for it to be attractive to bathers. When the weather is warm enough for this, conditions are not good for fishing in the pool below the bridge, and the ghillies encourage the fishing guests to see the youths' antics as part of the entertainment.

6.4.2

The bridge is quite a public place, it is a meeting point for fishermen and many ordinary people stop to look over the parapet. This may explain why there is little incidence of vandalism, littering or other inappropriate behaviour. It is also interesting to note that after the peak of the season in May and June, when there are fewer fishermen and no ghillies to deter bad behaviour, the vegetation is allowed to grow up, and the bracken can become quite thick on the south side. This may help to explain why this very attractive spot is still relatively little used.

6.4.3

Whilst significant numbers of canoes are launched at Dinnet Bridge, these travel out of the beat very quickly and are not considered a problem by the ghillies. For their part, the canoeists particularly commented on the friendliness of the ghillies at this point.

6.5 Aboyne

6.5.1

Aboyne is a much larger settlement than Dinnet, with a significant stretch of the river which is accessible from the town. This presents problems for the ghillie, as there is no part of his beat which is free from the possibility of disturbance. Most of the activity is centred on the Bridge Pool, which is easily accessible from the road and is close to the Boat Inn. School children regularly used to visit the bridge area at lunchtimes, leaving considerable quantities of litter behind them. Since the nearby Mace shop closed, this problem has been less severe, but the river is regularly used by all spectrums of society, some with more care than others. Canoeists also use the Bridge Pool as a launch site for their boats, which is not a problem, although their habit of congregating at the Irrigation Pool prior to taking the rapids can cause a good deal of disturbance to fish and fishermen. Problems regularly encountered on this beat include litter, fires, vandalism (throwing seats and gauges into the river), broken fences and stone throwing, and there have also been instances of freshwater pearl mussels being destroyed. The ghillie has felt the need to respond by locking all gates, patrolling the river on his days off and carrying out regular litter clean-ups on Monday mornings. He has recently tried putting up signs on the Potarch model (see below). Most of the problems he encounters are typical of the river in more urban areas, and also typical of many other rural beauty spots, whether or not they are near water.

6.6 Potarch

6.6.1

Potarch is the greatest honeypot on the River Dee, and can have as many as 500 visitors to the bridge and its environs on a sunny day. The historic bridge is one of the most picturesque on the river, with a popular hotel nearby, and plenty of space for recreation and picnicking on Potarch Green, which is leased by Aberdeenshire Council. Part of the banks of the river at Potarch have been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest, due to the distinct flora which they support, maintained for the most part by the traditional regime of bankside vegetation cutting which has been practised by ghillies over countless years. The pool below Potarch bridge is important both as a fishing pool and as a holding pool for salmon, as in places it is as much as 27 feet deep. This area of deep, quiet water immediately under the bridge provides an attractive pool in which to swim, and people frequently jump off the bridge into the water. Picnics and barbecues are common, and this is also a popular place for canoeists to launch their craft.

The proprietors and fishermen suffer a range of problems as a result of these activities. The levels of use on warm days at weekends and in the holidays preclude any hope of fishing in the Bridge Pool, and fishermen are deterred

from using the hut, one of the major venues on this beat, because of intrusion.

6.6.3

There is ample parking close to the river on the north bank, and it is from here that most of the canoes are launched. The way down to the river is steep, however, and there are clear signs of erosion from people scrambling down the bank. The gentler south bank would be a more suitable site from which to launch craft, but at present there are no facilities for doing this. Some of the commercial operators have started to use the layby about a quarter of a mile further downstream, where the approach is less steep, but there is still regular use of Potarch for canoe access.

6.6.4

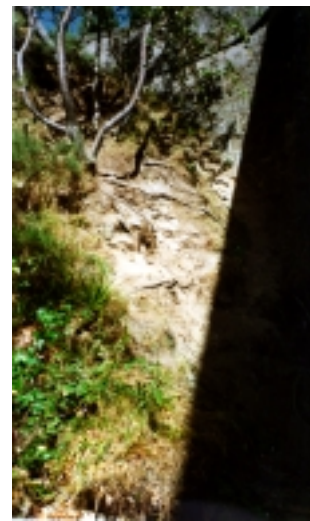
Vandalism is frequent, most notably handrails, fishing rod racks and seats, some of which are used as fuel for fires, others are thrown into the river. Trees are also regularly damaged. There are also security worries for fishermen in particular.

6.6.5

The illegal practice of lighting fires is commonplace, and presents a risk of wildfire (in a previous year, 35 unauthorised fires were extinguished on the north bank alone).

6.6.6

Bare ground arising from barbecues and fires, from erosion by people scrambling down from the road above, and from heavy use of the approaches to the river causes problems of management compounded by the SSSI designation on the north-west side of the bridge. Where the exposed area lies below the winter high water level, there is a serious risk of further erosion by spate events. Traditional methods of restoring vegetation, by reseedling or turfing are inappropriate where a site has a high floristic value.



(Photographs courtesy of Andrew Bradford)

6.6.7

The presence of human faeces, discarded nappies and other unsavoury litter represents a health risk to the public and to estate staff who have to deal with it. It also detracts from the high amenity value of the site. There are toilets and litter bins on the green, but the former are poorly signposted and are often closed.

6.6.8

Kincardine Estate, on the north bank, has erected a sign (Appendix IV), welcoming people to the area, and requesting good behaviour. This appears to have had some effect, but personal supervision of visitors has been found to be the most effective.

6.7 Invercannie

6.7.1

The Cairnton and Invercannie rapids on the Cairnton and Middle Blackhall beats are the most significant stretches of white water to be used by canoeists on the main stem of the Dee. These are the only grade 3 rapids on the main stem of the Dee, and a useful training facility for canoe groups. For this reason, white water kayakers may use the rapids several times in succession, rather than travel through them and continue down the river as other canoeists might do. This clearly leads to more disturbance of the fishing above and below the rapids.

6.7.2

An agreement has been established between the fishing interests, Grampian Canoe Association and Scottish Water, whereby in return for the right of access to the river the canoeists agreed to use the rapids only on Sundays and Wednesday afternoons. A route was therefore made available for canoeists from the water treatment works, and subscribers were given a key to the gate. Formal groups on the whole behave well, but there have been incidents of individuals abusing the arrangement, including one commercial operator. Canoeists without keys can also bypass the locked gate by crossing the burn below it. A site visit during the preparation of this report revealed the gate had been taken off its hinges, rendering it useless. Lack of respect by some members of the canoeing fraternity for an agreement into which they have freely entered does little to endear them to other river users.



The gate at Invercannie through which canoeists access the river.

6.8 Banchory

6.8.1

This study has highlighted that this is a key access issue on the River. The situation on the North bank of the Kinneskie beat at Banchory has received much publicity in recent years. In the 1990's, the riverbank was open to access to all, but there were serious problems of erosion of footpaths, coupled with unsocial and abusive behaviour, littering, vandalism and fire damage by a minority of individuals. To counter the erosion damage, and to try to reduce the vandalism and abuse of fishermen, the riparian owner erected a 2m high fence, leaving a small stretch of the riverbank open to the public. This provoked a furore among the residents of Banchory, many of whom had used the riverbank for years, but whose access was now curtailed. The problem was exacerbated when the owner, or his agent then carried out significant engineering works to the bed of the river, which reinforced the antagonism of the local people towards him.

6.8.2

The height of the fence has now been reduced, but the ferocity of the attack on the owner and the incidents of vandalism and abuse which have happened since it was erected have only served to make him determined to keep the fence up. The two sides are now firmly entrenched, to the loss of the local community, and to the detriment of the image of fishing in general. This is an unfortunate example of how bad behaviour by a minority of the public can provoke a riparian owner to such an extent that a breakdown in co-operation between landowners and the community results, to the loss of all concerned.

6.8.3

The problems at Kinneskie should not be considered in isolation from the problems of the town of Banchory itself. There is an acknowledged problem of underage drinking and associated bad behaviour by children as young as 12, and various attempts have been made to address this by local community groups (Appendix VI). The river provides a secluded area for youngsters to participate in underage drinking, and may be seen by them as a refuge in which to do this.

6.9 Crathes

6.9.1

Crathes (Durriss) bridge was formerly used by canoeists for access and egress with their boats. This has been made much more difficult recently by the locking of the gate on the south bank.

6.10 Park

6.10.1

Park estate reports that there are usually no problems which cannot be resolved by engaging in dialogue with visitors, but that there is a growing problem at Park Bridge. The access roads to both sides of the bridge give a good route into the river for people who wish to come to the countryside, especially at weekends. The problem is only serious on sunny weekends but then there is a problem that requires some form of acceptable remedy. There is little or no parking available in that area of the river and there is a parallel attraction in the use of the Glebe field just down stream from Park Bridge on the north bank. Visitors to the Glebe inevitably find their way to the river bank and adjacent to the Glebe there is no problem with them paddling and enjoying the proximity of the river. It is not however the most popular spot for river access as the bank is not shingle and therefore not so easy to gain access into the river. Therefore visitors walk up the bank and make use of the Bridge pool above the bridge. Unfortunately this is an excellent fishing pool and this is where conflicts of interests arise. Most people are considerate towards fishermen, but there are exceptions, and there have been incidents of sticks being thrown in for dogs as soon as the fisherman's vehicle is seen arriving and the same with stones being thrown in, which disturbs the fish.

6.10.2

On the bridge itself there have been problems with raft races, during which the bridge is lined with supporters, some of whom bring missiles, particularly eggs, which they throw at the rafters, along with the egg boxes, and other litter.

6.10.3

A further problem at Park Bridge is graffiti some of it obscene, which the Estate tries to remove as soon as possible, and ropes tied underneath the bridge for swinging on. The owner is concerned that an accident might happen, for which he could be considered responsible.

6.10.4

This is an instance where the problems of managing river access could be addressed in the context of the general community access to the Glebe field.

6.11 Templers' Park.

6.11.1

Templers' Park at Maryculter belongs to the Scouting Association, and venture scouts converge on the Park from all parts of Scotland during the holidays. For the most part, they are well-behaved, and do not come down to the river during the day, possibly because formal activities are laid on for them. In the

evenings, when they have finished the days' events, groups of boys will appear on the river looking for something to do. Stones may be removed from the banks to create fires, or to throw into the river, and branches may be broken, but on the whole the boys are reasonably well-behaved. There is, however, a lottery bid in preparation to raise money to develop Templers' Park as an outdoor activity resource. If this is successful, it could lead to much higher levels of usage of the river by informal groups in summer evenings.

6.12 Maryculter Bridge

6.12.1

Both walkers and canoeists are experiencing difficulty in gaining access to the river by the locked gate at Maryculter Bridge. The ramblers aspire to a route linking Culter to Maryculter bridge, but ditching works along this route make this difficult at present. Legal action has been taken to persuade the landowner to make good the crossing of this burn.

7. Experiences of Other Rivers

7.1

When considering the problems of usage of the River Dee, it was considered appropriate to compare experiences on this river with those of others in a similar situation. Letters were sent to the Association of District Salmon Fisheries Boards, for circulation to other River Boards to canvass their opinions. Representatives of national organisations, such as the Scottish Canoe Association, were asked for information on other initiatives. The following examples have been identified.

7.2 The Junction Pool on the Tweed

7.2.1

This was cited by a number of people associated with the River Tweed as an example of a famous salmon fishing pool situated in the heart of an urban area, in which there are no perceived conflicts between the various users of the river. The riparian owner, who was very helpful when approached, was horrified to hear of the problems experienced at Banchory, as in nearly 30 years of fishing the Junction Pool he has never had any problems at all. It is difficult to speculate why this is, but the following suggestions may play a part.

7.2.2

Kelso is a town with a strong fishing tradition; there are several specialist fishing hotels in the town, and the importance of fishing to the local economy is well recognised. The Tweed Foundation's success in attracting Heritage Lottery Funding has raised the profile of the river in the locality, and there is a sense of pride in the river which is noticeable throughout the area. At Kelso, local interest is further kindled by the availability of day tickets for local people, from mid June to the end of July.

7.2.3

The river is in a very central area of the town, and much overlooked by the public. If someone hooks a fish, a crowd quickly gathers. Equally, there is little chance for local youths to misbehave without being spotted. The central role that the river plays in community and economic life, the support given to local businesses and charities and the participation by the locals in day fishing were cited as probable reasons why relationships are so good.

7.3 Spey canoeists

7.3.1

An interesting initiative has been going on the River Spey, to enhance understanding between fishermen and canoeists. The Scottish Canoe

Association has a voluntary “coordinator” for each river, to advise canoeists on conditions, the suitability of the river for different skills levels, access points, etc. Their coordinator for the River Spey, Dave Craig, is also very interested in promoting good relations with the fishermen, and in conjunction with the chairman of the Spey Board, Colin Whittle, has arranged for paddlers and fishermen to try out each others’ sport. In September 2000, he arranged for 13 boats to be made available, with an experienced paddler in charge, to take members of the fishing fraternity canoeing on the Spey. These included proprietors, ghillies and Fishery Board staff. This was followed by a day’s introduction to fishing for the canoeists. This was an extremely successful event, and they intend to repeat it in the autumn of 2002.

7.3.2

In addition to the above, the problem of canoeists congregating at rapids was addressed by the agreement to make the Knockando rapids available to kayakers, on condition they concentrate their activities there and leave other areas undisturbed. White markers have been placed above and below the rapids, to indicate where the kayakers should get in and out. The canoe groups have also reached agreement with the proprietors on which (4) days they will use the river, and have undertaken to telephone the estate office or ghillie if they cannot keep to this. A canoeist’s map has been produced, identifying sensitive areas of the river where fishing could be disrupted by canoeing, and informing people of the agreement on usage. Following up from this, one riparian owner has donated land for a changing room for canoeists, with financial support from Sport Scotland, and a revolutionary composting toilet has also been installed.

7.3.3

Both the canoeists representative and the Spey Board chairman are very pleased with the success of this dialogue. There are still a minority of individuals on both sides who insist on being confrontational, but the feeling is that the arrangement has worked very well.

7.4 Inverurie Anglers

7.4.1

Inverurie Angling Association fishes the River Don at Inverurie, with public footpaths running along the left bank throughout the length of the beat, picnic sites and benches on the left bank, and a public footpath for much of the way on the right bank. Their contact reported cordial relations with both walkers and canoeists, and had no reports of incidents of conflict between the various interest groups. He stated that there is a mutual respect for the rights of others. He felt that the fact that the water was being fished by an Angling Association with an open membership made a lot of difference. Anyone who wished to fish could join the Association, so there was no feeling that the locals were

being excluded from the river. The Association clearly had the sporting aspects of fishing at the centre of their interests, which was recognised by the public. Public accessibility and the sporting ethos he felt were important to good relations between fishermen and the general public.

7.5 Aberdeen Anglers

7.5.1

The level of regular usage by walkers, cyclists, swimmers and picnickers is understandably far higher in Aberdeen than further up the Dee. The Aberdeen Anglers' Association has learnt to live with this, however, and fishermen still contrive to enjoy their sport nevertheless. The river at this point is much wider than higher up, so there is more room to accommodate all, but the expectations of the fishermen are also very different. The Anglers Association has a very good relationship with the local police, who have been called out on a number of occasions, when youths have been abusive, or when there is a suspicion of poaching. On the whole, members seem to leave it to the police to deal with troublesome elements, rather than trying to tackle them themselves. The expectations of the fishermen seem to be the key difference between this part of the Dee and the rural beats.

7.6 The Environment Agency

7.6.1

South of the Border, the Environment Agency is the navigation authority for most rivers where there is a right of navigation. Where such rights exist, they are usually formalised by statute, but often the right is of navigation only; no access or egress is included. Historically, an infrastructure has grown up by regular use of certain points on the rivers where boats have traditionally been launched, and these form today's access points. When the Countryside and Rights of Way Act was being introduced to Parliament, the British Canoe Union was keen that rights of navigation should also be included. DEFRA felt that this would slow down the passage of the Act, and instead commissioned Brighton University to conduct a study on the current status of access on English and Welsh rivers. This report is currently with DEFRA, who are expected to make an announcement shortly on the action they propose to take in the light of its findings.

7.6.2

In the meantime, the Environment Agency nationally has set up the Angling and Canoeing Liaison Group, which seeks to find agreement between the two interest groups on access issues.

7.6.3

On English rivers where there is a right to navigate, the Environment Agency is usually the navigation authority charged with maintaining the right of navigation. Anyone who wants to put a craft on the river must buy a license, which should be displayed on his boat. For canoes, in East Anglia, the fee is £12.70 per year. This money is used to maintain the river for navigation purposes, though in East Anglia it is insufficient for the maintenance needs which they have (notably lock gates). The license is for the canoe, not for the person, so someone who has more than one craft must buy several licenses. There are discounts for youth groups and others who need to buy licenses in bulk. The license is for use in that region of England only, so a separate license may have to be bought for use elsewhere. However, an arrangement has been reached with the British Canoe Union (BCU), whereby membership entitles an individual to a license disk for use throughout the navigable waters in England and Wales, and the Environment Agency charges the BCU a levy, based on the number of members it has. This provides an incentive for people to join the BCU, and therefore be kept informed of codes of conduct and acceptable behaviour.

8. Management Options

8.1

Two schools of thought about future access trends emerged from the questionnaires. One group felt that the proposed access legislation would make very little difference, apart perhaps from an initial flurry of people exercising their new-found right to roam, before returning to their old habits of land use. The others foresaw increasing use by the public in general, and feared that the more undesirable elements might spoil things for everyone.

8.1.1

There was a high level of agreement on the need for management to forestall problems, rather than trying to deal with them after they had arrived. Alongside this, however, was a concern, expressed by walkers, canoeists and fishing interests alike, that too much management, or the formal provision of facilities could destroy the very naturalness which most visitors come to the river to experience.

The following options are available:

8.2 Footpath Creation and Route Management

8.2.1

Many fishing interests consider it inevitable that public usage of the riverbanks will increase. Proprietors and ghillies took the view that they should create new footpaths in order to encourage most people to follow designated routes, hence directing them away from sensitive sites. This ties in with the aspirations of the Ramblers group, the Community Councils, and the Aberdeenshire Council Countryside Access Strategy, which seeks to link up existing routes, and create “settlement networks” around centres of population. While the efforts of individual estates are to be applauded, there may be scope to create a more valuable resource by connecting riverside footpaths with existing routes, or joining with other estates to create a coherent response. The DSFIA might wish to act as broker between estates and community groups, to help negotiate the best route for all concerned.

8.2.2

These routes could be further strengthened by vegetation management (tree planting to direct people away from an area and grass cutting to encourage them in), and sign posts. Interpretive signs, such as the one on the Feugh, at strategic points might contribute to the understanding of the river and raise its profile in the community. Positive signposting on the Potarch model should be investigated as a way of promoting good behaviour. Unwelcoming signs may be outlawed under the new legislation, and tend to inspire an adverse response from some individuals.

8.3 Toilet Opening Hours

8.3.1

The toileting problems at Potarch and Cambus O'May should be addressed by persuading Aberdeenshire Council to increase the opening hours of the toilets at Potarch in order to reflect the level of usage of the site. A discreet sign or signs somewhere on the bridge may help to direct people to use them. Signs at the car park at Cambus O'May, indicating the nearest toilets may also help.

8.3.2

If the provision of further facilities is required, investigation of the composting toilet on the Spey at Knockando would be useful.

8.4 Changing facilities for Canoeists

8.4.1

If the predictions of the canoeists are right, there will come a time when the current informal arrangements for changing and access to the river are insufficient to meet the demands of recreational canoeists, especially those not affiliated to any club. The provision of some form of changing room, car parking and toilet facilities may be required, to counter the pressure felt at the various existing canoeing hotspots. Such a facility might prove to have commercial value to an enterprising riparian owner, although it would concentrate canoe use on the area immediately downstream from wherever it was situated, and therefore, may well be unpopular with proprietors immediately downstream.

8.5 Ranger Services

8.5.1

There are a number of ranger services working in the area, although at present, there is not a co-ordinated service along the length of the River. The ranger services should be reviewed and a clear understanding reached about what services are to be provided.

8.6 Publication of the Canoeing Code

8.6.1

All proprietors and ghillies should receive a copy of the code of conduct for canoeists, and should be encouraged to bring this to the attention of the fishermen. Copies could be distributed to all fishing huts, and the video could also be made more freely available.

8.7 Cleeks

8.7.1

The issue of cleeks needs to be addressed, possibly at a national level between the fisheries associations and canoeing bodies.

8.8 Leaflets

8.8.1

The provision of information material about the river Dee and its heritage would raise awareness of the river in general and its role in the community in particular. Many towns and villages on Deeside produce their own publicity, and efforts could be made to ensure that all publicity which goes out contains some information about the river. The main points of the Access Code could be included, to promote good behaviour by all visitors. In particular, the fact that the leaving of litter, lighting of fires and breaking of fences are illegal activities whose perpetrators forfeit the right of access could be usefully highlighted.

8.9 Day Tickets

8.9.1

The community should be encouraged to take an interest and pride in their River, and one way in which this could be done is by the marketing of day tickets to local people. Many estates do sell day fishing, but this is often not advertised locally. A possibility which could be investigated is to offer day lets to known community groups (including youth groups) at discounted rates. Certain standards of behaviour would be required, and a nominated individual or officer of the association would be responsible for ensuring that these were adhered to. This would have the combined effect of increasing the interest of the public in the river, and debunking the myth that salmon fishing is the preserve of the wealthy and privileged.

8.10 Marketing of Fishings

8.10.1

Those estates who have made a point of emphasising the exclusivity of their fishings should be asked to review their marketing, to ensure they do not give their clients a false view of what they are purchasing. The DDSFB could offer guidance on what is appropriate, perhaps in the form of a briefing note. It may also be appropriate to confirm that all ghillies understand the limits of what the estate can offer the clients, and the statutory rights of other river users.

8.11 Promotion of the Benefits of Salmon Fishing

8.11.1

Salmon fishing has a poor image in the eyes of a sector of the public. The DDSFB or the DSFIA should consider the value of promoting the benefits of fishing to the environment and the local economy, and combine this with encouraging proprietors to make sure their management practices are exemplary.

8.11.2

The hugely beneficial work of the Fishery Board Scientist and the Habitat Manager on the Dee passes totally unpublicised, and the ground-breaking work of the hatchery in helping with the propagation of freshwater pearl mussels is also unknown. In addition to this, many people on Deeside are not aware of the huge contribution fishing makes to the local economy.

8.12 The Problems at Potarch

8.12.1

The Dee Board should seek support from Aberdeenshire Council and SNH ranger service for the management of this valuable asset to the local community and tourism, and a clear understanding should be reached as to what these two organizations are able to provide to support the riparian owners.

8.13 The Problems at Banchory

8.13.1

This problem is a major issue which needs to be tackled as a priority. It is an area where all key parties should come together to strive for a solution at the earliest opportunity. The persistence of this problem is detrimental to the interests of all river users.

8.14 Canoe Access

8.14.1

The provision of recognised access and egress points for canoeists will become increasingly important as the sport continues to expand. Canoeists have indicated a willingness to work with landowners to restore or build access points, and it should be possible to do this without jeopardising the natural appearance of the river.

8.15 Safety of Paddlers

8.15.1

The existing good relations between anglers and canoeists on the Dee could easily be jeopardised by small numbers of informal canoeists, ignorant of the ways of the river. Every effort should be made to work with the formal canoe groups to forestall such a situation.

8.15.2

The next few years could see an increase in the number of casual, and possibly inexperienced paddlers on the river. It is in the interests of canoeists and all other river users that some kind of voluntary safety principle is established, possibly on the Loch Lomond model, where there is a set of registration and navigation Bylaws. Under these, paddlers are required to obtain a permit, so that it is known how many people are using the loch, and they may be given some basic information about safety precautions and equipment. They could also be issued with information on recognised access points and other facilities, plus the code of practice and any other information likely to prove useful. The cost of producing this might well be offset by advertising from local hotels, pubs or canoeing suppliers. The Board could take the lead in approaching the canoeing groups, in conjunction with Aberdeenshire Council and SNH to discuss safety measures and explore the possibilities of such an arrangement.

8.16 Access Code

8.16.1

The draft Scottish Outdoor Access Code sets minimum standards of behaviour for people visiting the countryside. It also clearly points out that those who breach this code forfeit their right of access. This principal should be promoted vigorously by all concerned with the wise use of the riparian resource.

8.17 Education

8.17.1

The river is a valuable resource, and much prized by interest groups across the community. It has huge potential as an educational resource, helping to reconnect people with nature and the outdoors, and as a medium for healthy exercise. Activities such as fishing bridge the generation and gender gaps in a way that many others do not. The Board should consider ways in which the public can be encouraged to take a positive interest in the river, and the activities that depend on it.

8.18 Signs

8.18.1

The provision of clear and informative signs would help direct people to those parts of the river best equipped to cope with visitors. If all were produced in a recognised livery, they could provide an opportunity to establish an identity for the river. Perhaps if combined with an image of one of the characteristic species of wildlife, they might also engender further interest and pride in the river.

8.19 Interpretation Boards

8.19.1

These can be particularly useful in educating people about the river, and raising its profile amongst the local people as a whole (these rarely read tourist literature about their own river, and in many cases seem to know less about it than visitors). The boards at the car park by the Feugh are a good example, and the possibility of erecting similar boards (with grant aid?) elsewhere, for example at Potarch, Cambus O'May, Park and Aboyne, should be investigated.

8.20 Youth/community partnership

8.20.1

Bad behaviour by the youth of Banchory stretches far beyond the river bank. A recent article in the press (Appendix V) highlights the problem of teenage drinking and the lack of supervision of young people in the town. Increasingly, community initiatives are being proposed to find constructive activities for young people in the town. The river should be seen as a resource which could have a significant role to play in any such project; encouraging youngsters to take up fishing (under supervision) or become involved in habitat management work could help them to take a positive interest in the river, rather than vent their frustrations of the fishermen, as seems to be the case at present. If a paid River Officer were employed, and ranger services co-ordinated, they could take an active part in working with community groups, not just in Banchory, but also perhaps in Aboyne and other areas if required.

8.21 Management of Access on Tributaries

8.21.1

This Study has concentrated entirely on the situation on the main stem of the river. It was clear from some of the responses received, however, that access issues are developing on some of the tributaries, notably the Lui and others in the upper catchment. It may be necessary to address these in the medium term.

8.22 Protection of sensitive wildlife areas

8.22.1

The fishing interests should be proud of the part they play in managing sensitive wildlife sites. Their achievements in this respect could usefully be publicised, and where sites are particularly sensitive, the introduction of local byelaws to protect them may be required, in accordance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act. When introducing such byelaws, the means of enforcement should be taken into account

9. Mechanisms

9.1

There are a range of mechanisms that could be used to bring about the options described above. In order to make progress, the present steering group should continue with its work, and should expand to embrace other interest groups. Fisheries representatives on the steering group would act as a conduit for issues which are brought forward by fishing interests.

9.2 Job description/training and support of ghillies

9.2.1

At present, each ghillie reacts to the situation according to his instincts, with varying success. It is clear from the interviews that some individuals find this challenge easier to deal with than others. Proprietors seeking to take on ghillies should be encouraged to consider the wider responsibilities that ghillies may have to take on in the future, and recruit accordingly. Support and training should be given to those who need it if they are to be asked increasingly to undertake a wardening role.

9.3 Liaison with Canoeists

9.3.1

The constructive relationship with canoeing interests is useful, and should be built upon, especially in the light of the forecasted growth of the sport. The chairman of the Spey District Salmon Fisheries Board has indicated his willingness to speak about the reciprocal arrangements between his Board and the canoeists to members of the Dee Board. The Dee representative of the Scottish Canoeists Association is willing to help arrange a similar event on the Dee. This idea should be followed up. The agreement over the use of the Invercannie and Cairnton rapids may need to be reconsidered, to allow the canoeists greater use than at present. This could be combined with the use of marker posts as at Knockando Rapids on the Spey, indicating to canoeists the boundaries within which they should keep to avoid significant disturbance of the fish.

9.4 Canoeist Representation on the Fishery Board

9.4.1

The Salmon Strategy Task Force Report recognised the possibility of canoeing impacting on fishing, and suggested the inclusion of canoe representatives on the District Salmon Fisheries Boards. If the Board were to take on a regulatory role for navigation, a canoeing representative would be necessary. Even without such a role, greater co-operation with the canoeing bodies, especially

in the field of conservation and environmental protection, is likely to be advantageous

9.5 Access Officer

9.5.1

There is no substitute for a human presence on the river. SNH and estate rangers are unanimous on the value of professional rangers. Many ghillies undertake a certain amount of ranger-type work, but they are naturally seen as the representatives of the riparian owner, while rangers are less obviously so. A dedicated access officer could provide invaluable coverage of the hotspots on the river, and support when needed in other areas. There are so many access issues to be addressed on the river, and so many opportunities to follow up, that, whilst a volunteer from the DDSFB or DSFIA could do a great deal, the presence of a full-time professional would ensure much more was achieved. Such a person could undertake the role of ranger, education officer and honest broker in negotiations between the various interest groups. He/she could provide a contact point for canoeists over issues of concern to them. He/she could co-ordinate the production of educational and interpretative material about the river, raising its profile in the culture and history of Deeside. He/she might also liaise with youth and other community groups to encourage a healthy interest in salmon fishing, thus bringing new blood into the sport, and a positive channel for the energies of people who might otherwise prove a problem to the community and the river. Salmon fishing has the potential to be a great force for good.

9.5.2

Funding for the above post might well receive grant support from statutory bodies such as SNH and the Council, with a contribution from the DDSFB. Those proprietors who wished to make use of the officer to patrol their beats might be asked to make an additional contribution.

9.6 Ranger Services

9.6.1

Both Cambus O'May and Potarch are important amenities in the area, and positive decisions should be made, in conjunction with the proprietors as to how best they should be managed, especially in the light of the SSSI designation of the river banks at Potarch. Elsewhere on the river, the presence of a ranger would be a useful option in managing conflict.

9.7 Funding opportunities

9.7.1

Much of the work described above has obvious benefits for the wider community as a whole, and could only be undertaken if a full time person were employed. One means of raising funds for such a post would be through a Heritage Lottery bid, in partnership with local community groups and canoeing interests. This is a large subject which requires significant involvement to get off the ground, but could have huge benefits if successful.

10. Conclusion

10.1

While there are a few local problems on the River Dee due to the level of use of the river and its environs by a range of different interest groups, it is reassuring that on the whole, the river is enjoyed by a wide variety of people, both locals and visitors, with remarkably little conflict. This is largely a matter of good fortune, however, coupled with imagination and tolerance on the part of key individuals, and there can be no guarantee that such a situation will continue. In the few areas where there are difficulties, it is in the interest of everyone who uses the river that they should be resolved, and where there are currently no problems, it is important that positive steps are taken to ensure that none arise in future. In the light of the proposed new access legislation, now is a good time to introduce a coherent plan for the future management of access issues, and to identify those organisations and individuals who will take on the responsibility to deliver them. It is hoped that the suggestions put forward in this report will provide the basis for such a plan.

Appendices

Appendix I	-----	List of Contacts
Appendix II	-----	Supplementary Questionnaire to Proprietors
Appendix III	-----	Questionnaire to recreational and community users
Appendix IV	-----	Welcome to Potarch
Appendix V	-----	Teenage drinking problem at Banchory

Appendix I

List of Contacts

Dee Salmon Fisheries Co. Ltd.	
Aberdeen Harbour Board	
Robert Gordon Angling Association	Angling Association
Scottish Water	
Crown Estate	
Atlantic Salmon Conservation Trust (Scotland)	conservation
Garthdee Angling Association	Angling Association
Upper Feugh Fishings	Proprietor
Lower Blackhall/Kinneskie/Dess Fishings	Proprietor
Inverusk Fishings	Proprietor
Heughhead Fishings	Proprietor
Cowie Fishings	Proprietor
Little Blackhall & Inchmarlo Fishings	Proprietor
Upper Blackhall Fishings	Proprietor
Middle Blackhall Fishings	Proprietor
Cairnton Fishings	Proprietor
Woodend Fishings	Proprietor
Carlogie/Ballogie/Commonty Fishings	Proprietor
Borrowstone & Kincardine Fishings	Proprietor
Lower Crathes/ West Durris/Birse Fishings	Proprietor
Middle Blackhall Fishings	Proprietor
Lower Woodend Fishings	Proprietor
Feugh Fishings	Proprietor
Sluie Fishings	Proprietor
Drumnagesk Fishings	Proprietor
Aboyne Fishings	Proprietor
Glen Tanar Fishings	Proprietor
Craigendinnie Fishings	Proprietor

Dinnet Fishings	Proprietor
Invercauld Fishings	Proprietor
Morven Fishings	Proprietor
Abergeldie Fishings	Proprietor
Balmoral Fishings	Proprietor
Glenmuick Fishings	Proprietor
Birkhall/Balmoral Fishings	Proprietor
Mar Estate Fishings	Proprietor
Mar Lodge Fishings	Proprietor
Stonehaven & District Angling Association	Angling Association
Tarland Development Group	business
Ballater Royal Deeside	business
Birse Community Trust	community
Braemar Tourism Group	business
Mid Deeside Ltd	business
Banchory Paths Group	recreational
National Trust for Scotland	conservation
Glen Tanar Ranger Service	ranger
Leys Estate Ranger Service	ranger
Marr Ranger Service	ranger
Scottish Environmental Protection Agency	conservation
British Horse Society	recreational
Ramblers' Association Scotland	recreational
Ramblers' Association Scotland	recreational
CTC	recreational
Scottish Canoe Association	recreational
Scottish Canoe Association	recreational
UDAT	Access
Cairngorms Partnership	conservation
Paths for All Partnership	recreational
National Farmers Union Scotland	Nat org

Scottish Landowners Federation	Nat org
Scottish Landowners Federation	Nat org
Scottish Rights of Way & Access Society	Access
Spey Catchment Management Plan	conservation
Ballater & Crathie Community Council	community
Banchory Community Council	community
Birse & Ballogie Community Council	community
Braemar Community Council	community
Crathes, Drumoak & Durris Community Councils	community
Culter Community Council	community
Cults, Bieldside & Milltimber Community Council	community
Feughdee West Community Council	community
Finzean Community Council	community
Mid-Deeside Community Council	community
Deecastle	Ghillie
Abergeldie	Ghillie
Cambus	Ghillie
Crathie	Ghillie
Lower Invercauld	Ghillie
Birkhall	Ghillie
Aboyne	Ghillie
Dess	Ghillie
Kincardine O'Neil	Ghillie
Ballogie	Ghillie
Upper Blackhall	Ghillie
Cairnton	Ghillie
Middle Blackhall	Ghillie
Lower Blackhall	Ghillie
Little Blackhall	Ghillie
Birse	Ghillie
Lower Crathes	Ghillie

Middle Drum	Ghillie
Invery	Ghillie
Crathes Castle	Ghillie
Upper Drum	Ghillie
Altries	Ghillie
Peterculter	Ghillie
Banchory	Ghillie
Durris	Ghillie
Bigfoot Adventures	Commercial
Adventure Scotland	Commercial
Mountain Bound	Commercial
Aberdeen University	conservation
C E H	conservation
BSBI	conservation
RSPB	conservation
Tweed Forum	other fishing
Wye Foundation	other fishing
Inverurie Anglers	other fishing
Salmon & Trout Association	other fishing
Scottish Wildlife Trust	conservation
Dee District Salmon Fisheries Board	Proprietor
Aberdeenshire Council	ranger
National Trust for Scotland	ranger
Balmoral Estates	ranger
SNH	conservation
SNH	ranger
SNH	ranger
SNH	
conservation	
Association of District Salmon Fishery Boards	ASDFB
Aberdeen City Outdoor recreation Manager	recreational

River Ayr Salmon Fisheries Board	other fishing
SNH	ranger
Tweed Commissioners	other fishing
Riparian Owner - R Tweed	other fishing
Tay District Salmon Fisheries Board	other fishing
River Spey SCA River Co-ordinator	recreational
Grampian & Spey Paddle Sports Association	recreational
Spey District Salmon Fisheries Board	other fishing
River Spey District Salmon Fisheries Board	other fishing
Environment Agency - East Anglia region	

Appendix II

Supplementary questions to Proprietors & Ghillies

Nature of the Problem

- record all problems occurring & their (perceived) severity (How can this be measured?)
- which is the worst problem? Why?
- Which can you live with? Why?

Location

- Where do incidents occur?
- Where are the hotspots? (Why?)
- Is there anywhere free of problems? (Why?)

Timing

- What time of year do incidents happen?
- What time of week?
- What time of day?

Profile of the People involved

- what age?
- What sex?
- Are they locals or visitors to the area?
- From where?
- Numbers: 1-5 / 5-10 / 10-20 / 20-50 / upwards. Per day / week / year?
- How would you describe their attitude? (Why?)

Your Response

- How have you tried to deal with these problems?
- What success have you had? (Why?)

Effects

- What physical effects have you noticed from the problems listed above?
- How much time has been spent in dealing with these?
- What costs have been involved in dealing with these?
- What has been the response of the fishermen?

The Future

- Would you consider these problems to be specific to the River, or liable to be experienced wherever people visit the countryside? Why?
- Have you any suggestions on what should be done?
- By whom?

Any Other Comments

Appendix III

River Dee Access Study – Views of Local Communities

Recreational use of the river/ river bank

Where are the main areas that people currently use along the river or riverbank in your local area/ for your interest group?

What types of activity occur in these areas?

Historical use – have there been increases or decreases in the availability of access or fishings for community members? Where and why (in your view) have these changes occurred?

Does your community group have any aspirations for additional use of the river or river bank – If so, what or where are the new uses and why are these needed?

Available facilities – where are the car parks, picnic areas, fishing huts, paths or informal access, toilets that you currently use? (You may not need to ask this and/or it maybe easier to use a map?)

Are any of the areas used for recreation sensitive to (or have suffered) damage by over use or inappropriate behaviour? (eg, erosion, damage to wildlife habitats, deliberate vandalism) What are the likely effects? How might these effects be managed/ reduced?

Competing uses of the river/ riverbank

What, if any, are the conflicts between uses or users of the river or riverbank in your area / interest group? Where and how often do they occur?

Are there any reasonable measures that could be taken, by either party, to reduce these conflicts?

How would any changes to the current situation benefit the river/local community/ your interest group/river owner/fishermen?

What impact do you think that any changes would have on the current uses or users?

Welcome to Potarch

This riverbank is a special place for all of us. It is also a fragile habitat and damage to the bank in summer can lead to severe erosion in winter when water levels are sometimes over ten feet higher than in a normal summer.

In particular barbecues and fires of any kind can cause damage to bankside vegetation, including grass. They are also, of course, a fire risk.

Kincardine Estate is privately owned and managed with the aim of protecting the environment for all future generations. We cannot do that without your help and co-operation and respect for this place.

Enjoy your visit and please take your litter home with you.

So please:

No Barbecues

No Fires

No Litter

No Camping

The river bank is steep and rocky in places and the river can be colder and run swifter than you expect. Diving or jumping into the river may be very dangerous. You enter this ground at your own risk. Kincardine Estate cannot accept any responsibility for any loss or injury.

Thank you

Kincardine Estate

Appendix V Underage drinking Problem at Banchory

Safe haven for teeny drunks to sober up

EXCLUSIVE

by Alan Gorham

WORRIED residents of an Aberdeenshire town where children as young as 12 are drinking themselves into a stupor plan to set up a safe haven where underage drinkers can sober up.

The problem has reached such a level in Banchory that parents, health and community workers and church leaders fear the children are at risk.

They want to set up a drop-in centre for youngsters that would include a place for underage drinkers to sober up, if needed.

It would be manned by adult volunteers who would be able to talk to children about problems they may be having, including peer pressure.

The move comes days after it was revealed that Grampian has Scotland's highest level of under-16s admitted to hospital through drink.

MSPs yesterday backed the Banchory idea but warned that those involved in running the scheme must ensure it was done correctly and with the co-operation of other agencies.

From Page 1

buying crates of beer and then selling them on to underagers.

One shop in the town is already understood to have cracked down on those who are known to be selling drink on, by refusing to serve them at all.

Aberdeenshire Council and Grampian Health Promotions worker Dawn Tuckwood said the scheme is one which could prove ideal for children in need of help after using alcohol.

"Since 1995 there has been a wish to create a purpose-built facility for young people in Banchory in which this scheme could operate," she said.

"While that is still some time away from becoming a reality, we hope to be able to operate in

A group that includes local organisations and agencies has been established to set up and operate the centre.

Talks are under way to find a venue near Bellfield Park.

Former hospital ward sister Jean Henretty, a member of the local health care co-operative and Banchory Community Council secretary, told of the extent to which the problem had spread.

"I am aware of one youngster who was found drunk, and that child is only 12," she said.

"This is not a problem which is exclusive to Banchory – the number of underage children abusing alcohol is rising around the country.

"What we want to do is provide a safe haven for them – somewhere they can go to talk to an adult in confidence, and can relax.

"We will not be judgmental of the young people. We will be there to help them if they feel they need us.

"Finding a venue is a priority and we have options available to us, one of which would be more suitable than the others.

"At the moment we need to find somewhere this can be

an existing building on a temporary basis.

"Banchory has already seen shelters introduced at which young people can gather, but there is nowhere they can go to speak to an adult if needs be.

"I work with the council and Health Promotions on health policy and practice development, specifically relating to young people.

"This is a project which we hope would provide for young people who do need help, and be user-friendly for them."

North-east SNP MSP Richard Lochhead threw his weight behind the scheme, and said that if successful it could spread throughout Scotland.

He said: "I must congratulate

done on a temporary basis and we would like to look at using an existing building."

Banchory's former tourist information office, at the Bellfield, is already used by community education workers as an advice centre early on Friday nights.

This is understood to be the preferred venue for the centre since it would be cheaper than erecting a portable unit which would come with inflated costs for electricity and water.

Mrs Henretty added that while the scheme is at an early stage, discussions will continue and added: "We are preparing to bid for funding to employ a youth worker who will come to Banchory specifically to lead this project."

Volunteers wishing to aid the scheme would be fully vetted, to ensure they are suitable for regular contact with children, and are trained in first aid.

Retailers at Banchory are to be approached by police with a view to them voluntarily undertaking to serve alcohol only to those over 21.

The move comes after some teenagers over 18 were seen

Turn to Page 7

the group in Banchory who are working on this, because it is something which is sorely needed for young people.

"If successful, this is a scheme I would hope could become a pilot, through local authorities monitoring it with a view to following Banchory's lead."

Lib Dem MSP for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine Mike Rumbles also backed the idea, but urged caution saying that the issue is one so sensitive that work must be done to ensure it operates the right way. He said: "We must have co-operation between all the agencies connected to this, to ensure that young people are being looked after in the correct manner."

Comment – Page 17

Appendix VI Map of Study Area



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28500 metres

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Map Scale 1:400000

River Dee