



Improving timber transport case study

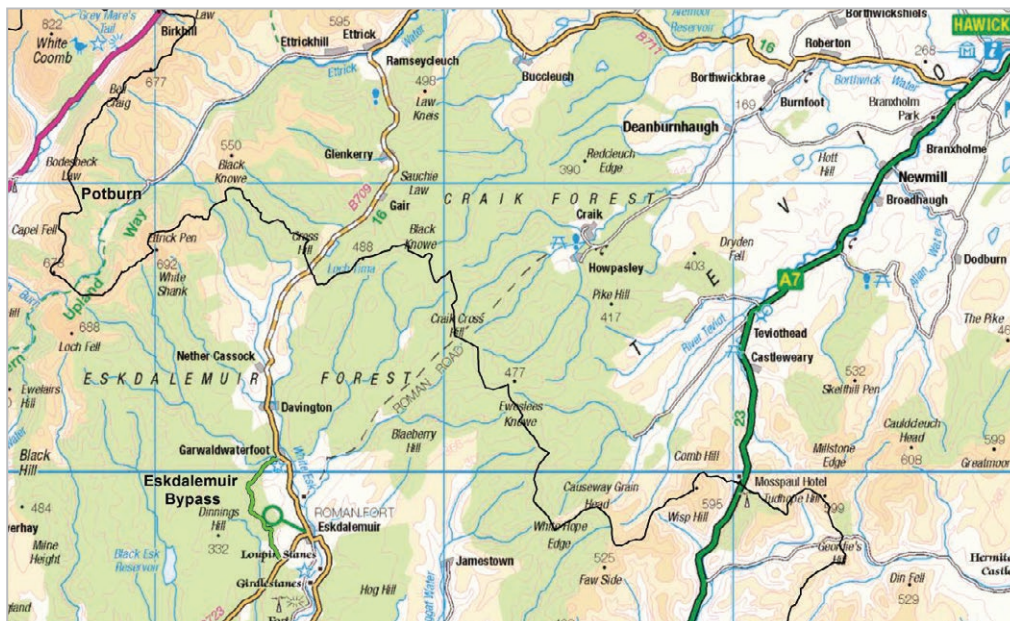
Craik Forest

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| What? | Improvements to the B709 and Potburn Road |
| When? | May 2009 – March 2012 |
| Where? | Craik Forest, Scottish Borders |
| Who? | Scottish Borders Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council |
| How much? | B709 phases 1 & 4: £1.354m (STTS £718 000) Potburn Road: £752 000 (STTS £335 000) |
| Timber tonnage | 1.5m tonnes over 10 years |



The B709 through Craik Forest.

The 16 000 hectare plantation is the largest in the Scottish Borders. Forestry Commission Scotland manage around a quarter with the rest split between 24 properties run by six companies.



Craik Forest location map.

In 2006, the Scottish Borders Timber Transport Group commissioned a study into how the timber from Craik Forest could be transported with minimal impact on the roads and local communities. The B709, a single track road to Eskdalemuir, was expected to take about half the traffic heading to timber processors in Lockerbie, with the rest heading east towards the A7.

The study proposed work in four phases;

1. Improvements to the B709 between Eskdalemuir and Gair Bridge (involving both Scottish Borders and Dumfries & Galloway Councils).
2. An in-forest link from the B709 to Craik Village.
3. New roading to continue the east-west link from Craik village as far as Teviothead on the A7.
4. Upgrade to the remaining stretch of the B709, north to Ettrick.

In May 2009 an initial project was offered a 53% grant (£1.15m) towards phases 1 and 2. The Councils quickly set to work upgrading their stretches of the public road, constructing passing places and strengthening and widening sections of road. Scottish Borders Council decided to strengthen the carriageway using a geogrid reinforcing mesh within the tarmac. They were still at work in the winter of 2009/2010 when the temperature hit minus 14°C. The extreme temperatures were creating potholes on minor roads across the country

and Forestry Commission Scotland had already agreed to make available the funds remaining in the scheme budget for immediate repairs to public roads critical to the timber industry. Both Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway Councils applied for additional funding to extend the works on the B709.

Plans for the in-forest road were not progressing so smoothly. The quarry sites were found to be distant from the road line and the rock was of poor quality so that stone for the running surface would need to be imported at increased cost. At the same time the project reached a legal impasse over access rights at the Gair Bridge. By July 2010 it was clear that the in-forest haul route (phases 2 & 3) could not be delivered.

The partners requested that phase 4 be taken forward instead. This was given the go-ahead in November 2010 and Scottish Borders Council upgraded the remaining 4.1 km of the B709 as far as Ettrick, complete with 13 lorry passing places and improved drainage, ditches and verges. The Council engineers developed a very effective community liaison process issuing weekly emails regarding road closures.

However, 2010/11 saw another prolonged and severe winter with the road through Ettrick to Potburn, serving 300 000 tonnes of timber, having to be closed due to the deep potholes. The parish of Ettrick has 30% forest cover and there was some criticism of the cumulative effect of continuing conversion from upland farming to forestry. The failure of this stretch of road seemed to support the view that the community was being left with much of the impact of forestry and few of the benefits.

Two severe winters had left the Potburn road with deep potholes.



Once again the STTS released funds to repair winter damage allowing the Council to fix the worst of the potholes. In March, the Council submitted a further bid to upgrade the 8 km stretch of road to Potburn. A 45% grant of £335 000 was awarded and the now experienced team rolled out the reinforcing mesh and tarmac.

These projects represent a substantial investment by both the local authorities and the Scottish Government in upgrading the roads serving Craik Forest. The improvements have been well received. An in-forest road that could take more of the timber east onto the A7 is still seen as a good idea and the Scottish Borders Timber Transport Group remains keen to see it happen.

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