Impact Assessments on Open Hill Habitats; accompanying notes

1. Assessments are best carried out in April or early May, at the end of winter and before new season's growth masks the previous season's impacts

2. Assessments can be carried out during the course of other routine work which requires keepers in any case to be visiting different parts of the Estate

3. Assessments should be properly "stratified" - in other words they should be widely spread across different parts of the Estate (or beat) and across different vegetation types in order to gain a more representative picture of overall grazing and trampling impacts. BUT

4. Given that the main object of monitoring is generally to monitor the success of habitat manipulations in causing a reduction of impacts in sensitive areas, it makes sense to focus assessments primarily in areas known previously to sustain the heaviest impacts to ensure that these do not worsen... and hopefully improve.

Therefore

5. Assessments should be primarily focused in areas known previously to sustain heaviest impact. However to gain information about levels of grazing impact in the environment more generally, it is also appropriate to attempt a number of assessments in 'random' locations, picked to be more generally representative of the wider open hill ground.

6. I myself would suggest keepers pick the appropriate number of areas within their beat known formerly to have been suffering moderate-heavy or heavy impacts, and a number of other sites (minimum 10 in each habitat type) chosen for no particular reason, other than making sure that these other locations are distributed over the whole of the rest of their beat.
   Once sites have been chosen, it is sensible to stick with the same general areas (not the exact same square metre!!) for subsequent assessments to ensure some continuity and comparability.

7. Within each general area selected for assessment, assessors should pick 10 'stations' - simply points within the general area where they will position themselves and assess the condition of the vegetation in that immediate vicinity. [These 'stations' will not need to be the same on each occasion]. Six of these 'stations' should be located within the main vegetation type defining the area (dry heath, wet heath, bog etc) while the other four will either also fall within that same vegetation type (if it is the only habitat present) or be distributed within adjacent areas of different habitat type. [The reason for this is simply to ensure that grazing assessments are truly representative of a wide area, and not biased by sampling some 'hotspot' within an area of otherwise much lower grazing pressure (as might be returned by sampling a grassy knoll in the middle of a wide expanse of unattractive wet heath)]

10. At each of the 10 stations in each location, current and recent grazing and trampling impacts should be assessed accoring to the indicators given for each different habitat type. The actual grazing impact level returned should be the most predominant (i.e. if 7 out of 10 plots are assessed as moderate, the site is moderate; if 6 out of 10 are assessed as heavy and 4 are moderate, the site as a whole is assessed as 'moderate to heavy' and so on.)

11. The check sheet above should be used for recording: extend the table with more rows as required if more than 16 sites are to be assessed In filling in the table use abbreviations as:

Habitat types:
Dry Heath : DH;
Wet Heath: WH;
Blanket Bog: BOG;
Fine Grassland: GG
Coarse Grassland: AG

Impacts:
Light: L
Light-Moderate: LM
Moderate: M
Moderate-Heavy: MH
Heavy: H
Severe: S

HABITAT IMPACT ASSESSMENTS: Record Sheet

ESTATE: BEAT: YEAR:

Location/ PlaceName *e.g Garbh-choire*	Date	Main Habitat type	Number of survey points in main habitat	Average impact on main habitat	Other habitats surveyed adjoining [list]	Number of survey points in other habitats	**Overall assessment for geographic area** *Light, light-moderate, moderate, heavy, etc.*