



## Design Guidance for Directional Path Signs

Cairngorms National Park

## **Acknowledgements**

This guidance has been developed by the Cairngorms National Park Authority through engagement with a wide range of interested parties including: land managers; non-governmental organisations; public bodies; the Cairngorms Local Outdoor Access Forum; Inclusive Cairngorms; the Paths for All Partnership and the Fieldfare Trust.

We are grateful to the consultancy 'Walking the Talk' for workshop facilitation and drafting the text.

## **Feedback and Advice**

The Cairngorms National Park Authority is committed to reviewing the guidance and welcomes feedback. Please email your comments and suggestions to the CNPA: email: [outdooraccess@cairngorms.co.uk](mailto:outdooraccess@cairngorms.co.uk) or send to the address below. You can also contact the CNPA for advice on implementation of the guidance and on potential sources of funding for path signs.

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Cover: The Old Logging Way path sign, Rothiemurchus © CNPA

The Cairngorms National Park has an extensive network of paths that provide numerous opportunities for residents and visitors to travel through, explore and enjoy this special place. We believe that by providing clear and consistent path signs throughout the National Park we will encourage more people to use these paths responsibly and develop healthier lifestyles.

We are particularly grateful to the wide range of individuals and organisations that have helped us in developing this document and we hope that you will find it both informative and easy to use.

**David Green**, Convener,  
Cairngorms National Park Authority

Tha lionra farsaing de shlighean-coisich ann am Pàirce Nàiseanta a' Mhonaidh Ruaidh a' toirt iomadh cothrom do mhuinntir an àite agus do luchd-tadhail eòlas a chur air an àite shònraichte seo agus tlachd fhaighinn às. Tha sinn den bheachd le bhith a' toirt seachad stiùireadh soilleir agus cunbhalach air soidhnichean nan slighean-coisich air feadh na Pàirce Nàiseanta gu bheil sinn a' brosnachadh barrachd dhaoine gus na slighean-coisich a chur gu feum ann an dòigh chiallach agus a' toirt orra caitheamh-beatha nas fhallainne a leantainn.

Tha sinn air leth taingeil do chaochladh dhaoine agus bhuidhnean a tha air taic a thoirt dhuinn ann a bhith a' leasachadh na sgrìobhainn seo agus tha sinn an dòchas gum bi i an dà chuid feumail dhuibh agus furasta a cleachdadh.

**Daibhidh Green**, Neach-gairm,  
Ùghdarras Pàirc Nàiseanta a' Mhonaidh Ruaidh

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- 1.1** This document provides guidance about the signs that people use to get around the path network in the Cairngorms National Park. The guidance is primarily about those signs that help people find out where a path goes and how far it is to the destination. For the sake of clarity, we will call such signs ‘directional path signs’, of which there are two basic types:
- **Fingerposts** – which direct the user along a path and contain information about the direction of the path, destination and the distance to that destination; and
  - **Intermediate waymarkers** – which help to guide people along a path that has fingerposts at either end. Waymarking is used to provide the user with reassurance and inform route choice along a path and within a network of paths. Not all paths with fingerposts will require intermediate waymarking.
- 1.2** Directional path signs are very important to help people get the most out of the path network in the Cairngorms National Park. Such signs are especially important for people who are unfamiliar with the area or who are less confident in their ability to navigate safely. As such, they can play a significant role in helping visitors enjoy the Park and in helping encourage people to become more active. The policy on directional path signs, as appears in the Outdoor Access Strategy for the Park, is reprinted in Annex A (see p19).

**I.3** This guidance is for anyone who is:

- Considering installing any directional path signs;
- Considering replacing old and worn directional path signs;
- Preparing a proposal for funding for such signs from the Scotland Rural Development Programme;
- Expecting to receive financial support from any public sector organisation for installation of directional path signs.

**I.4** This guidance deals only with the path signs that help people find their way. There are of course many other signs not covered by this guidance that path users may encounter, for example signs that:

- Promote responsible behaviour;
- Provide information about route conditions or hazards;
- Provide interpretation, telling stories about the place;
- Provide information about who manages the path and/or financially contributes to the work;
- Mark the boundary of land ownership, or designated sites, for example a National Nature Reserve.

**I.5** This guidance sits within the context of the national guidance provided by Paths for All Partnership in their publication *Access Signpost Guidance - A Guide to Good Practice* ([www.pathsforall.org.uk](http://www.pathsforall.org.uk)) and provides the 'local format' for path signs in the Cairngorms National Park.

**2.1** Many paths are already signposted in the Cairngorms National Park. However, the current system of path signage in the Park is the result of a piecemeal approach. Signs have been installed in parts of the Park over a number of years in a variety of styles, each of which looks quite different. Directional signs across the Park are currently made of varying materials (for example wood, plastic and metal), are different colours and they provide users with varying information (for example distance in miles, kilometres, meters or with estimates of time to reach a destination).

**2.2** We believe that the current system, inherited from the past, is unlikely to meet the needs of the future. Following discussions with a number of interested parties the Cairngorms National Park Authority is committed to promoting a new approach. This is particularly important for the following reasons:

- **Promoting high standards of design in a National Park**

All signs are, to some extent, an intrusion in the landscape. In the Cairngorms National Park we need the highest standards of design to ensure that people can find their way around but with the minimum impact on the landscape.

- **Signs for many different types of user**

In the past some signs have been developed specifically with walkers in mind, for example where estimated walking times are provided. Scotland's new access legislation encourages responsible use of paths by a variety of users, including cyclists, horse riders and wheelchair users. Sign design should cater for all these needs together, and good design should make signs easier to read by a wide range of users.

- **Signs for a network of paths**

In the past directional path signs have been installed on land where the land manager was particularly positive about encouraging people. In the future paths will be signposted over a much wider area – especially in, around and between communities and in other places of interest. The system of path signs should reflect the needs of people to move around this network.

- **Agreeing the format for new signs**

As a result of ongoing work we are likely to see more directional path signs installed in the next few years. It makes sense to agree now what those signs should look like and what information they should convey in order to provide the widest possible range of benefits. Providing an effective standard design at this stage can also help keep maintenance costs to a minimum.

- **The need for a strategic approach**

Providing an effective system of directional path signs is only one part of what it takes to help people enjoy the Cairngorms National Park. For example, the work on signage needs, to be linked to the provision of visitor information and the maintenance of the paths themselves. The Outdoor Access Strategy for the Park was approved in March 2007 and provides the strategic context for this work.

## 3. Rationale for directional path signs in the Cairngorms National Park

- 3.1** Directional path signs are primarily provided to improve people's experience of a path, or network of paths, and can be used to confirm that users are:
- Welcome to be there;
  - Where they thought they were; and
  - Going somewhere.
- 3.2** Path signs can also be a useful 'tool' for land managers to help encourage people to remain on paths, and to avoid sensitive areas or areas with busy or hazardous land management activity.
- 3.3** Following discussions with a range of interested parties this guidance has been developed based on a number of fundamental principles:
- **A user-based approach**  
The experience of path users is the single most important factor in deciding what any sign should look like.
  - **Simplicity**  
The signs should be as simple as possible and should avoid information that is not essential for path users, for example marketing brands or logos, names of organisations, etc. This information can be provided on other signs, perhaps located near the trailhead. Fingerposts should primarily display:
    - Direction of the path (normally through orientation of the fingerpost);
    - Destination of the path;
    - Distance to the destination.
  - **Separation of sign types**  
Directional path signs should be provided independently of any other signs. Other information that users may need, or which land managers may want to provide, should be provided on other signs or information boards to suit the specific circumstances.
  - **Consistency**  
A consistent approach should be used across the Park. This will, in time, increase the confidence of path users, particularly those unfamiliar with the area.
  - **Placing signs only where they are needed**  
This guidance cannot prescribe where each sign should be placed: a balance is required between providing sufficient information for users and cluttering the landscape with signs. This needs to be considered at a local level, taking into account a number of factors. The policy in the Outdoor Access Strategy already contains a presumption against signposting or waymarking in wild, remote or sensitive areas (see Annex A, p19).

## 4. Content, design and location of fingerposts

**4.1** Fingerposts direct the user along a path and contain information about the direction of the path, destination and the distance to that destination. The standard design recommended for fingerposts is shown in Figure 1 (see p10). The design allows for two lines of text. If, in exceptional circumstances, three lines are essential, a wider blade width will be required.

**4.2** Key features of the standard design are used for the following reasons:

- **Materials**

Wood is a sustainable resource and signs can be manufactured locally. Water based paints have low environmental impact.

- **Colour**

White letters on green background are high contrast and easy to read. This colour scheme is the most commonly used for path signs across Scotland.

- **Fonts**

Use of Arial / Helvetica fonts give the most flexibility and are two of the fonts that meet accessibility standards for the visually impaired. Font size follows national guidance.

- **Dimensions of posts**

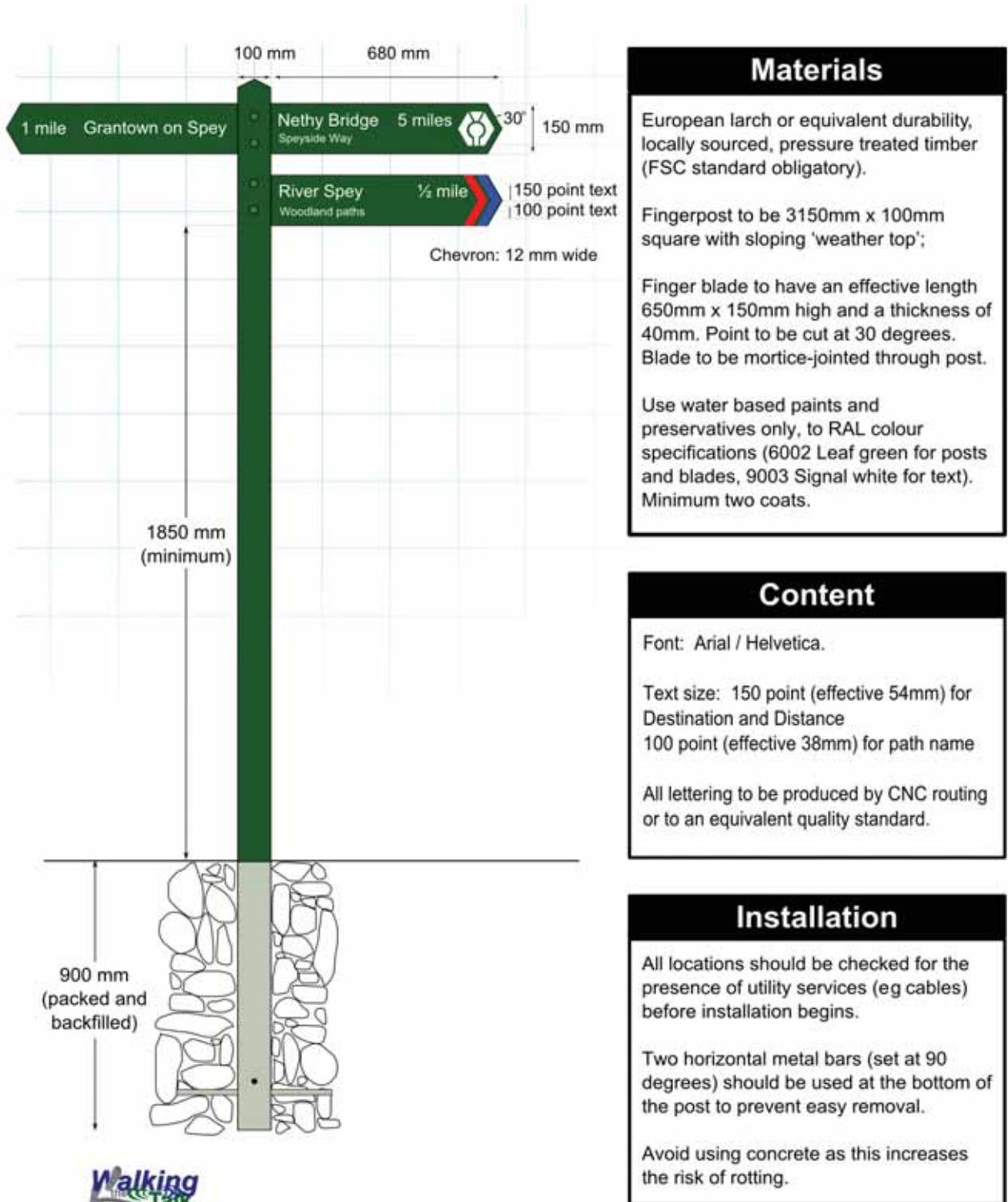
These are in line with national standards. A standard minimum height for a free-standing fingerpost of 1850mm is recommended. However, there may be situations where a directional sign could be better located in a different position to

improve the effectiveness of the sign. Mid-height directional posts may be more effective on paths popular with wheelchair users or be less intrusive in some landscapes. Figure 2 (see p11) shows the recommended design for a fingerpost located at mid-height. With careful thought, some directional signs can be added to existing furniture without the need for a new post.

### **4.3 Location**

Fingerposts should be placed at either 'end' of the path and at significant intermediate junctions where new users are likely to join the route for the first time.

Figure 1: Standard design specification for fingerpost in the Cairngorms National Park





## Information on signs

### 4.4 Direction

The fingerpost should point along the route of the path.

### 4.5 Destination

Careful consideration needs to be given to the choice of destination so that it is meaningful to users, ie a place where people want to visit and which they will recognise once they arrive. Often it will be a settlement or significant feature found on a map. The destination shown on the sign may often be beyond the land management area on which the sign is located. In some circumstances it may be useful to add an intermediate destination, for example 'via Bridge of Muick'. Where a path is designed as a recreation loop without destination, it may be appropriate to sign it 'Circular Path'.

### 4.6 Distance

This is simply the distance in miles, or crude fractions of miles, to the destination, for example 1½ miles. Please note, decimal fractions of miles should not be used.

**4.7** In addition, and only if it is relevant, the following information may also be provided:

- **Path name**

Use the strategic route name, (for example Speyside Way), or the locally agreed path name, if appropriate. Note that the font size for the path name is smaller than for the destination as this is of secondary importance to most users. The development of a relevant local name for a path can contribute towards local distinctiveness. Use of Gaelic or Doric path names may also be appropriate.

- **Path identity symbol**

Where a path has an agreed symbol, such as the 'thistle' on Long Distance Paths, this can be incorporated into the fingerpost. Other organisational logos and brands should not be used.

- **Coloured chevron**

These can be provided on fingerposts but only if the path subsequently uses intermediate waymarking with colours.

## Maintenance

**4.8** Painted wooden signs will require regular maintenance about every five years, including repainting. Path managers should consider this when planning signs for a path or network of paths.

## Special circumstances

**4.9** The following three sets of circumstances have been identified where it would be appropriate to depart from the standard design specification for the Cairngorms National Park as described in Figures 1 and 2 (see pp10-11).

- **Within settlements with agreed sign design format**

Some settlements within the Park have agreed styles of directional signs, as shown in Figure 3.1 (see p14). These should be used for path signs located within the settlement in order to retain a coherent appearance and to reduce the potential for confusion. Towards the edge of the settlement it will be appropriate to change to the standard design specification as shown in Figure 1.

- **Within settlements, when adding a path sign to an existing road sign**

Here, metal is the best option for the fingerpost, such as that shown in Figure 3.2, (see p14). The content of the sign should, however, follow the standard design specification (see Figure 1) in terms of destination and distance. The size of font may need to be adjusted so that the new path signs fit with the existing signs.

**Figure 3.1: Agreed sign design format in Aviemore**



- **Replacement of path signs of historical significance**

In some specific locations, the existing path signs are themselves of historical interest, for example the cast iron path signs that have been in place in some locations for many years and which were installed by the Scottish Rights of Way Society (now Scotways). In these specific instances, the retention of the original signs, or installation of replica replacements, is recommended.

**Figure 3.2: Use of a metal fingerpost with a road sign**



- 5.1** Intermediate waymarkers guide people along a path which has fingerposts at either end. Waymarking is used to provide the user with reassurance and inform route choice along a path and within a network of paths.
- 5.2** This guidance does not prescribe where intermediate waymarking should be installed, nor specify the form it should take in the Cairngorms National Park. The merits of four broad styles are outlined in Table 1 (see p16) and the decision is left to the path manager.
- 5.3** A consistent approach to waymarking will be required along the length of a path between fingerposts, which may include crossing land managed by different organisations. This consistency in waymarking style should be maintained within a network of paths. Consideration should be given to how users access the paths in question. For example, not all users may have passed the trailhead where the system of waymarking is explained.
- 5.4** On many path networks, roundels have been developed that include some text that ‘wraps’ round the outer edge of the arrow or symbol. It is considered appropriate to use the name of the path, where one exists, which may help to reduce colour confusion. Roundels should not be used to convey any other information, for example warning or advisory notices.
- 5.5** Path managers may find it useful for maintenance programmes to discretely number all path signs individually and accurately record their location. Individually identifiable markers can also provide exact reference points on promoted paths in such rare circumstances as when someone has a serious accident on the route.

**Table 1: Comparison of commonly used styles of waymarking**

	Coloured bands		Arrow	
<b>Advantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simple, cost effective and relatively easy to maintain.</li> <li>• Can be used in any direction.</li> <li>• Can be easily integrated with fingerposts through use of coloured chevron.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simple, cost effective and relatively easy to maintain.</li> <li>• Can be coloured to identify path and integrated with fingerposts through use of coloured chevron.</li> <li>• Provides directional information.</li> <li>• Can be used in a roundel with path name.</li> <li>• Easy to add to existing structures.</li> </ul>	
<b>Disadvantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No route choice can be shown unless extra 'confirmation' posts are installed after junctions.</li> <li>• Careful colour contrast is needed to distinguish different paths.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Careful colour contrasts needed to distinguish different paths.</li> <li>• Can appear unprofessional, especially when over-used.</li> </ul>	
	Symbol		Symbol and arrow	
<b>Advantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Symbols, especially when combined with a colour, offer the most distinctive type of waymarking accessible to all.</li> <li>• Can be used to develop path identity.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Symbols, especially when combined with a colour, offer the most distinctive type of waymarking accessible to all.</li> <li>• Can be used to develop path identity.</li> </ul>	
<b>Disadvantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be complex, expensive to develop and difficult to maintain.</li> <li>• No direction information.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be complex, expensive to develop and difficult to maintain.</li> <li>• Not interchangeable with different locations.</li> </ul>	

**6.1** If the directional path signs are to work effectively, a wider range of information is required to support the needs of the path users. This can be provided in a variety of ways including:

- Map and information boards at the start of paths;
- Separate specific signs;
- Leaflets and websites.

**6.2** These media offer the opportunity to inform users about the role of land managers in managing the paths and to present the paths as part of a wider network in the Cairngorms National Park by use of the Park brand. For further information on the brand please contact the CNPA at: [enquiries@cairngorms.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@cairngorms.co.uk) or telephone 01479 873535.

**6.3** Some specific requirements are considered below.

- **Interpretation**

Drawing users' attention to specific points of interest along a route or telling stories of the area or the path is often worthwhile and can add considerably to the users' experience. This can be done using panels and other forms of static interpretation or, more creatively through artistic approaches. It is recommended that site managers wishing to create a distinctive 'sense of place' for their site use creative interpretation and design at key visitor locations without

resorting to the need to customise functional path signs. Land managers should also give careful consideration to the impact that such additional infrastructure can have on the landscape and be mindful of the need to regularly maintain and update any information. Such structures are likely to require planning permission.

*Shaping the Stories of the Cairngorms National Park* provides guidance on how to interpret the National Park ([www.cairngorms.co.uk](http://www.cairngorms.co.uk)).

- **Land management signs**

It is recommended that path users are informed about temporary land management practices and seasonal conservation issues and by using the publication *Signs Guidance for Farmers and other Land Managers* provided by Scottish Natural Heritage ([www.snh.gov.uk](http://www.snh.gov.uk)) and agreed by the National Access Forum.

- **Grant aid or commercial sponsorship**

Some paths and path networks receive grant aid or commercial sponsorship and funding bodies legitimately want their support recognised. Instead of adding logos to directional path signs, which can create a cluttered appearance, it is recommended that path managers inform users in a variety of alternative ways as described above.

- 7.1** While many of the existing path signs do not meet current best practice standards, the wholesale replacement of path signs with the standard design is **not** recommended. Priority should be given to installing the new design of path signs in the following order:
- Install directional signs on promoted paths that are not currently signposted; then
  - Replace directional path signs that are illegible/worn/damaged; then
  - Replace directional path signs that do not meet best practice standards.
- 7.2** Creating a consistently signposted, coherent network of promoted paths across the Cairngorms National Park will require the active co-operation of many partners. It is anticipated that this work will take a number of years.
- 7.3** Replacing existing path signs is unlikely to require planning permission. New signs, depending on location and impact, may require permission. In all situations, path managers are advised to consult the relevant planning authority as a matter of course.
- 7.4** The Cairngorms National Park Authority can be contacted for advice on implementation of the guidance and on potential sources of funding for path signs.

## Policy on directional path signs in the Cairngorms National Park

Directional path signs have a crucial role to play in encouraging people to take access and in assisting them orientate their way around the Cairngorms National Park. The policy for the Park is based on the following principles:

- There should be a network of signposted and waymarked routes around and between every community, including good information to orient people and find the start of such routes;
- Fingerposts must include a direction pointer, destination and approximate distance at the start of the route;
- It should be easy to find the start of promoted paths from the heart of nearby communities;
- Giving approximate times to complete the route at the starting point will help to provide comfort to those who might otherwise lack the necessary confidence to embark on the route;
- There will be a presumption against waymarking in wild, remote or other sensitive areas, especially in mountainous terrain, where people value the sense of wildness and are expected to be self reliant;
- The Park Authority will work with relevant partners to produce and keep under review technical guidance, in line with national best practice, which will lead to high standards, a consistent approach and the promotion of a feeling of being within a National Park.

Source: *Enjoying the Cairngorms: Cairngorms National Park Outdoor Access Strategy 2007-2012*, Cairngorms National Park Authority, 2007



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