
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

Title: **OUTDOOR ACCESS**

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Purpose

To consider the work of CNPA and partners in improving and promoting the path network in the National Park, and to update the Board on our ongoing partnership with the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust.

Strategic Context

This work supports the current National Park Partnership Plan Policy 3.3 Provide high quality opportunities for access and recreation, and the Draft National Park Partnership Plan actions on Visitor Infrastructure and Information and Active Cairngorms.

It supports the delivery of the following national strategies; a more Active Scotland, National Walking and Cycling Strategies, and Tourism Scotland 2020.

Recommendation

That the Board note the paper.

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Responsible Promotion

1. Since the adoption of the first Core Path Plan in 2007 considerable work has been undertaken in signing and promoting the low ground path network within the National Park including the development of guidance for path signs and leaflets.
2. There are now 17 community path leaflets in the new style with easy read maps, along with two area guides selecting the easy accessible, barrier free, routes in eastern and western Cairngorms. These are available locally and on CNPA website. The leaflets are also on display as larger static maps in many communities. However, the National Park Partnership Plan consultation indicated that many are unaware of this work: we need to get better at promoting the outstanding low ground path network.
3. The use of a standard, unbranded, green wooden signs with white lettering for directional path signs is now well established. While not all partners have adopted this simple approach there is still scope for further roll out including as part of the Tomintoul and Glenlivet Landscape Partnership.
4. Low ground walking is by far the most popular physical activity undertaken by visitors with 44% walking during their stay. In 2015 some 94% of visitors surveyed said the paths in the Cairngorms were in 'good or very good' condition compared to 79% in 2010.
5. Good progress in promoting walking is contrasted by little progress in developing a consistent approach to promoting cycling opportunities. The Highland eGuide only lists six 'mountain bike' routes in Cairngorms of which two are 'easy'. Part of the challenge is that cycling routes often go through multiple land ownerships and reaching agreement to promote these is problematic. An issue which limited the range of routes in the Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland E-Guide. A new cycling group established by the Cairngorms Business Partnership may provide the vehicle to take this forward.
6. We continue to promote responsible access under the banner of 'Tread Lightly' with specific messages put out at key times of year such as lambing and bird nesting. We rely heavily of our partnership with ranger services to deliver these messages to visitors.

Strategic Route Development

7. In the last five years our main focus on low ground paths has been on the development of strategic routes:
 - a) Speyside Way
 - b) Deeside Way
 - c) National Cycle Network
8. Following protracted and well-documented challenges we now have an agreed route for the Speyside Way Extension to Newtonmore. The new path is constructed to Ardgael (south of Kinncraig) with planning consent applied for the next section. We will be applying for a combination of SRDP and Sustrans funding for the build. The likely completion to Newtonmore is now 2018.
9. We have also secured Sustrans funding to upgrade a bridge and remove barriers on the section of Speyside Way between Nethy Bridge and Grantown-on-Spey. This will make the section much far more useable. Beyond Cromdale the route is challenging for all but the committed walker. Realigning this section to make it more accessible will require a concerted effort with Highland Council. There are options here to look at promoting alternative cycling sections on quite roads. We have also assisted and advised a landowner to secure SRDP funding to divert the Speyside Way at Balliefurth Farm around a silage clamp.
10. Scottish Enterprise has provided 50% funding to develop a detailed specification and planning consent for the first section of Deeside Way Extension from Braemar to Invercauld Bridge. We anticipate planning consent will be submitted in May after which we will need to source funding for the build.
11. Transport Scotland is committed to constructing a non-motorised user (NMU) route parallel with the dualled A9 and through the consultation process we are working to ensure that this has good links to communities, visitor attractions and the wider path network. There is a strong case for creating an off road link from Grantown-on-Spey to Gaich on A95 completing the link to Dulnain Bridge but Transport Scotland will not progress this until agreement is reached on how to progress 'Rails to Grantown'.
12. It is pleasing to report that local groups continue to maintain and upgrade both the Dava Way (Grantown to Forres) and the Catheran Trail (Glenshee). The former with the support of COAT.

Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust

13. Our partnership with Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT) continues to deliver access improvements with two main strands of work:
 - a) Developing and maintaining the low ground path network
 - b) The Mountains and People Heritage Lottery Project
14. COAT has project managed the Speyside Way Extension from design, planning consent through to construction. It is also taking forward work on the first section of Deeside Way Extension. In the last year COAT has played a significant role in repairing storm damaged paths (para 21). COAT is also good at accessing funds that are not available to us as a public body (para 12) and has a track record of generating significant income from two managed car parks in Deeside, with potential to take on more.
15. The £5.6m **Mountains and People Heritage Lottery Project** covers both National Parks and runs to 2020. It is a partnership led by COAT with both National Park Authorities, Forest Enterprise Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage. In the Cairngorms the project will deliver:
 - a) 41km of upgraded mountain paths
 - b) 12 new path trainees
 - c) 50 'volunteer days'
 - d) A range of education, engagement and interpretation opportunities
16. The project is progressing well and to date in the Cairngorms 12.2 km of mountain path has been upgraded, six trainees have completed a six month programme and 63 people have volunteered 87 days toward path repairs. Annex I shows progress the mountain paths in the Cairngorms being upgraded as a result of this project.
17. By 2020 COAT, and its predecessor UDAT, will have upgraded all the main mountain paths in the Cairngorms.
18. The Mountains and People Project has spread COAT's activity beyond the north east and this combined with our own changing needs, including maintenance commitments on Speyside Way, has led to both organisations developing a Memorandum of Understanding that clearly sets out our partnership requirements until 2020.
19. COAT has indicated that its expansion beyond the north east will also lead to a name change that better reflects this wider working.

Storm Damage to Access Infrastructure

20. On 30th December 2015 Storm Frank hit the north east of Scotland causing massive structural damage to the area. A year earlier the tail end of Hurricane Bertha had also damaged the path network in the Cairngorms. A combined effort with Aberdeenshire Council to secure additional funds from Scottish Government to repair damage to access infrastructure was unsuccessful.
21. Despite no additional central funds being available for repairs considerable progress on has been made. COAT has repaired the damaged path bridge at Newtonmore, the riverside path in Carr-bridge, and the path at Crathie. The golf course path in Ballater is passable but waiting a decision on flood prevention works before a decision is made on how to reinstate. The National Trust for Scotland, supported by Scotways, has replaced both the damaged bridges at Derry Lodge and Linn of Quoich. Forest Enterprise will repair and reopen the Allt Mor trail this spring.
22. Unfortunately, the damage to both the Pollollick and Cambus o' May suspension bridges and their continued closure leaves much of the path network in Ballater inaccessible. Aberdeenshire Council is leading on this work but with a repair bill estimated at £1.5m it will require a sustained effort by a range of partners to secure funds. We have offered our support to any fundraising activity. Annex 2 lists the main path infrastructure that remains damaged. We continue to support partners in seeking ways of repairing this damage.

Maintenance of Access Network

23. The major improvements in the path network in the last decade mean that both CNPA and COAT have legal obligations to maintain some routes, and there is a wider expectation amongst communities, land managers and visitors that the access network as a whole in the National Park will be well maintained. The harsh Cairngorm environment and the sheer volume of use on some routes (60,000 per year on the Old Logging Way) mean that maintenance will be an ongoing annual requirement.
24. If we assume an average annual maintenance cost of five percent of capital cost (20 year life span) we are looking at an average figure of some £250,000 per year. This increases further if we add in the whole public estate including Forest Enterprise and Scottish Natural Heritage where both organisations are particularly good at providing extensive path networks.
25. Good land management, regular checking, small scale maintenance and the support of volunteers have a role to play in reducing costs but we will still need significant funds annually. Recent storms have also emphasised the need to build up a 'rainy day fund' (see Para 22).

26. Car park charging has been the traditional way of generating significant funds from visitors to the countryside and COAT has been particularly successful at producing reliable income from Loch Muick and in Dinnet car parks, as has Forest Enterprise, and CairnGorm Mountain – the latter with their voluntary car parking scheme. There is certainly scope for both expanding the number of car parks managed by COAT and looking at an integrated approach to charging in areas like Cairngorm and Glenmore. However, this collaborative approach with multiple partners has to date proved extremely difficult to deliver.
27. Developing a reliable access maintenance fund is our most significant access infrastructure challenge in the next five years. Car park charging has a role to play but we would also strongly support a visitor giving scheme that positively encourages path users to contribute to path maintenance. For this to generate the income required it would need widespread support and promotion from tourism businesses who arguably derive significant benefit from the path network (para 4).

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March 2017

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Annex I Mountains Paths in Cairngorms upgraded as part of Mountains and People Project

TMTP Project Path Contracts - Progress						Steering Grp: 02.03.17
Path	Name	Build length (m)	Completed lengh to date (m)	Contract Status		report
Deeside						
UL-13	Mount Keen	1872		Pre-tender development		Project deferred to yr3 pending Landowner/CNPA negotiation.
				Tendered		
				% Complete		
UL-14	Lochnagar Main Path	1862		Pre-tender development	progressing	
				Tendered		
				% Complete		
UL-15	Lochnagar Plateau Path	2191	2089	Pre-tender development	✓	
				Tendered	✓	
						Yr1 Hand Build complete; Yr2 Hand Build complete; short section remains to finish up in yr5.
				% Complete	95%	
UL-16	Meikle Pap	154	154	Pre-tender development	✓	will be included as part of UL15.
				Tendered	✓	
				% Complete	100%	Completed
UL-18	Dubh Loch	1284	1284	Pre-tender development	✓	
				Tendered	✓	
						Yr1 Hand Build complete; Yr1 Hand Build complete.
				% Complete	100%	
UL-33	Mount Keen (Mounth path)	1560		Pre-tender development		Project deferred to yr3 pending Landowner/CNPA negotiation.
				Tendered		
				% Complete		
UL-19	Corrie Chash and Broad Cairn	1443		Pre-tender development	✓	
				Tendered	✓	
				% Complete	0%	
Angus Glens						
UL-20	Glittering Skellies	1078	1078	Pre-tender development	✓	
				Tendered	✓	
				% Complete	100%	Completed
UL-21	Jock's Road	598	598	Pre-tender development	✓	
				Tendered	✓	
						Hand build site 1 contractor returned Aug 2016. Completed
				% Complete	100%	
UL-22	The Snub - Loch Brandy	608		Pre-tender development	✓	
				Tendered	✓	
				% Complete	0%	
UL-30	Mayar	997	997	Pre-tender development	✓	
				Tendered	✓	
				% Complete	100%	Completed.
UL-31	Dreish	2497				
UL-32	Mayar-Dreish summit	2080				
Highland/Perthshire						
UL-37	A' Mharconaich from Balsnorrnan Cottages	3951				Planning?

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Path	Name	Build length (m)	Completed length to date (m)	Contract Status		report
UL-38	Geal-charn from Balsoorran Cottages	1429				Planning?
UL-39	A' Mharconaich to Geal-charn	1102				Planning?
UL-40	Cairn Liath (Beinn a Ghlo)	5942		Pre-tender development		
				Tendered		
				% Complete		
UL-41	Airgoid Bheinn (Beinn a Ghlo)	5460	1840	Pre-tender development	✓	
				Tendered	✓	
				% Complete	34%	
UL-42	Beinn a Ghlo return	3796	3101	Pre-tender development	✓	
				Tendered	✓	
				% Complete	82%	
UL-44	Allt Gargh Buidhe (upper Glen Tilt)	1063	1063	Pre-tender development	✓	
				Tendered	✓	
				% Complete	100%	landowner/client expectation for a light touch approach therefore agreed; project completed ahead of schedule. Completed.
Cairngorms National Park		40967	12204			

Annex 2 Main Storm Damaged Paths still requiring repair

Area	Path/Hill	Impact
Ballater	Seven Bridges Walk	The Polhollick suspension bridge is closed preventing access to the woods on the south side of the Dee.
Ballater	Golf Course Walk	The riverside path in Ballater around the golf course was severely damaged by the floods. The original path has gone but you can with care walk around the golf course. Important: This route is not promoted at present.
Cambus o'May	Cambus o'May Bridge	The path along the south of the Dee through Torphantrick Wood cannot be accessed from the north side of the Dee as the Cambus o'May suspension bridge is closed.
Glen Doll	Bachnagairn	The footbridge bridge above Moulzie at NO277789 is washed away but an alternative is in place. There are maps in the car park showing the diversion
Glenlivet	Drumin Circular Walk	The Livet Footbridge (NJ 189 300) over the River Livet approx. 0.5km upstream of Drumin Castle has been completely washed away.
Glenmore	Allt Mor	The Allt Mhor Trail is closed above Utsi's Bridge due to landslips, other parts lower down are washed out but passible with care..
Invercauld	Allt na Claise Moire path	The bridge River Garin at NO172998 has badly damaged and is currently closed.
Mar Lodge	Quoich	Allanaquoich road bridge suffered serious damaged and is impassable. West track at Quoich significant loss of track and fords washed out.