

# Cairngorms National Park Core Paths Plan

## Consultation and Engagement Process - Stage 1

### Community Engagement & Results – **People who recreate in the Park**

#### Introduction

The core paths plan process targeted four main interest groups. These included: communities, land managers, people who recreate in the National Park (visitors and residents including businesses, national organisations and clubs e.g. Ramblers, Scottish Canoe Association, Cairngorm Club etc.) and visitors to the National Park (those who may not specifically come to the Park to recreate but may do so whilst they are here). The following report details how the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) engaged with people who recreate in the Park, the people who participated in the engagement process and the feedback and results that they provided.

#### Engaging with the People who recreate in the Park

The engagement period ran from 1<sup>st</sup> September to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2006. Questionnaires for all communities and areas in the National Park were made available on the CNPA website, through contacting the CNPA directly and at drop-in events. Two workshops aimed specifically at people who recreate in the Park were held to enable clubs, individuals, groups and businesses to find out more about core paths planning and to advise the CNPA of the routes, paths and areas that are important to them and why.

The first workshop was held at the Victoria Hall, Ballater on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> November from 6:30pm to 9pm and the second workshop was held at the Cairngorm Hotel, Aviemore on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> November from 6:30pm to 9pm. CNPA staff Murray Ferguson, Bob Grant, Fran Potheary, Adam Streeter-Smith and Sandra Middleton ran the events. The Ballater workshop was chaired by

CNPA Board member Nonie Coulthard and the Aviemore workshop was chaired by Local Outdoor Access Forum member Tim Walker.

### **Workshop Promotion**

The workshops were advertised at events and on posters in the area. Invitations were sent out by mail and email to a wide range of people involved in outdoor activities including businesses, clubs, organisations and individuals. Local Outdoor Access Forum and CNPA Board members were also invited.

### **Workshop Format**

The workshops provided an opportunity for people who came along to look at relevant publications and core paths planning questionnaires for settlements and areas across the National Park. CNPA Officers Sandra Middleton and Adam Streeter-Smith gave presentations which provided an overview of core paths planning and progress made to date in the National Park. Attendees were also introduced to members of the Local Outdoor Access Forum who were in attendance and given an overview of the role of the Forum. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and give their views.

Participants were given the opportunity to record their thoughts on the existing infrastructure in the Cairngorms for different types of activity. The results were recorded on 'H-Diagrams'. There was also an opportunity to draw lines on maps showing popular routes for different activities and also to annotate maps with any issues or comments.

### **Workshop Feedback**

Around 40 people attended the two workshops and participants were asked to complete an evaluation sheet of the event. The feedback was generally positive and the majority of people had found out about the event via a letter or email inviting them. All indicated that the event was either useful or very useful to them and most respondents indicated that they would be interested in attending a similar event in the future.

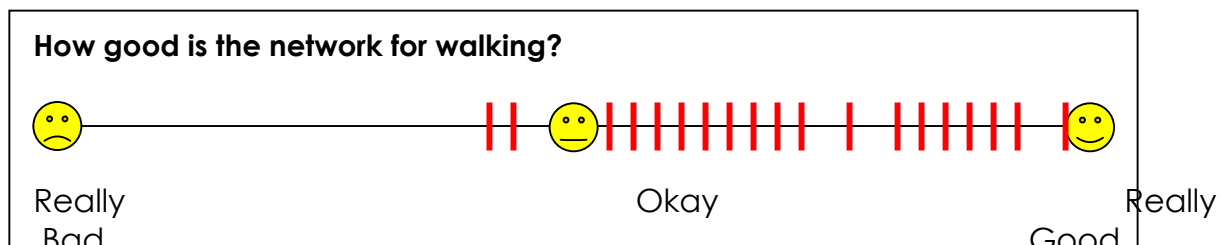
### **Results of the Workshop Activities**

At the workshops people were asked their views about the current infrastructure for different outdoor activities in the National Park. Participants

were asked to place a mark on a line to show what they thought of the existing network. The results have been combined for both workshops and are shown below for each activity.

### 'H-Diagram' Results

#### Walking



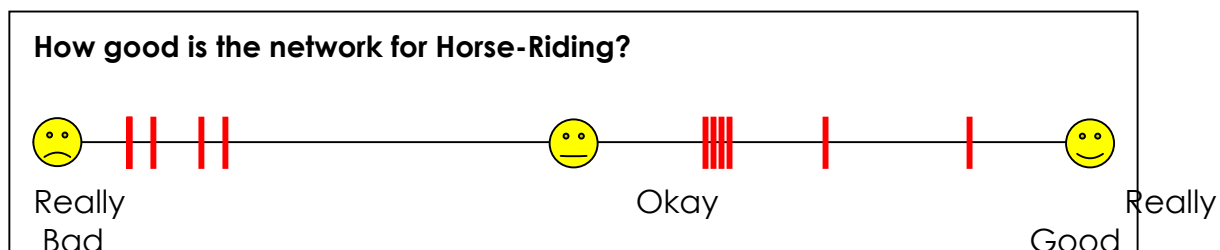
Participants were also asked what they think is good and bad about the network for walking and what could be improved. The results are shown below, the comments are recorded exactly as written by participants.

Comments on walking		
What is bad about the infrastructure?	What is good about the infrastructure?	How the infrastructure could be improved?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inadequate promotion.</li> <li>• Wall maps for walking shops in the area.</li> <li>• Better distribution of leaflets to activity businesses.</li> <li>• Not enough tourist literature and signage.</li> <li>• Not adequately promoted by VisitScotland.</li> <li>• Also need to be promoted in connection with Balmoral and Strathspey side.</li> <li>• Hill paths being "upgraded" for vehicles.</li> <li>• Access points (esp for cars etc) to some hills not adequate.</li> <li>• Footpath erosion in the Cairngorms is almost</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent walking in CNP for All Abilities.</li> <li>• Difficult to see this area as other than excellent for walking.</li> <li>• Keep them as natural as possible i.e. in wild land.</li> <li>• Great network in Partnership between Estates, UDAT, Aberdeenshire Council.</li> <li>• Not too many signposts.</li> <li>• Good for conservation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More variety and not too many waymarks etc.</li> <li>• Teach map reading in primary school.</li> <li>• Some sort of zoning areas.</li> <li>• Core may not be the best term to use.</li> <li>• Zone (or sign) for walkers but not bikers etc. if/where 'irresponsible'.</li> <li>• Effective network multi-purpose where possible.</li> <li>• Yes Slochd.</li> <li>• Make decision about Spey Way</li> </ul>

<p>unchecked – especially on plateau and some approaches.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Glen Feshie –path falling into river, bridge is dodgy, estate understandably unwilling to accept responsibility, needs a National Park involvement.</li> <li>• Excessively steep high stiles over deer fences.</li> <li>• Higher level paths do deteriorate massively over the winter (freeze/thaw &amp; run-off). Without maintenance they can get washed out e.g. track into sheachda.</li> <li>• Tracks that go nowhere.</li> <li>• High level paths not well constructed i.e. environmentally sustainable but used by 1000's.</li> <li>• In terms of safety:-paths leading from car parks can lure people into terrain for which they may be unprepared.</li> <li>• Why the delay in determining line of Aviemore-Newtonmore section of Speyside Way.</li> <li>• Still many locked gates.</li> <li>• Why should the 1000's of hill users denied any benefit of designated core paths because it is an area requiring a skill level. All paths require a skill level.</li> <li>• Lack of access along course of rivers – especially The Spey.</li> <li>• Management of land for</li> </ul>	<p>i.e. high level paths protect the vegetation under summer conditions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy access – fantastic scenery great path network.</li> <li>• Other interests i.e. Birds, photography, trees, bugs – species.</li> <li>• Incorporates old military roads and disused rail and roads.</li> <li>• There is a good variety of paths e.g. Badenoch Way and Strathspey Way.</li> <li>• Great variety of types of walking routes in truly fantastic settings and landscapes.</li> <li>• Signposting of Kingussie network very good with good maps in centre of village – could be promoted more.</li> </ul>	<p>extension.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good local networks e.g. walk to school/path etc.</li> <li>• Clearer circular routes around villages &amp; connecting villages.</li> <li>• Establish a good path along Spey from old bridge to Boat of Garten/Speyside Way</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• A parking place at Achlean – not 1km down the road as at present.</li> <li>• Clearer marking of Start points.</li> <li>• Link paths which could join up if a new start section of path created.</li> <li>• Regular walking management &amp; maintenance - you need a Ranger Service.</li> <li>• Education – A lot of people just want 2a short walk" and don't take into account the fact they are in the hills or by a highly conserved marsh. A short waymarked walk may be possible but a longer walk</li> </ul>
--	--	--

<p>entirely dubious pursuit of deer stalking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Erratic approach to promotion – many walkers end up in the same popular places because other walking routes aren't publicised and promoted.</li> <li>• <i>(unknown word)</i> a few circular routes.</li> </ul>		<p>for a couple of hours is not necessarily always possible (rant)</p>
---	--	--

### Horse-Riding



Comments on Horse-Riding		
What is bad about the infrastructure?	What is good about the infrastructure?	How the infrastructure could be improved?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of B&amp;B network incl horses.</li> <li>• Lack of INF/Promotion for equest tourism.</li> <li>• Too many pheasants.</li> <li>• Padlocked gates.</li> <li>• Barbed wire fences.</li> <li>• Locked gates.</li> <li>• Linkage.</li> <li>• Lack of dedicated horsebox/trailer parking.</li> <li>• Promotion of horesriding for visitors could be improved.</li> <li>• As a business taking groups of 9,10,11 horseriders out, difficulties arise when there</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Riding in 'wild' unspoilt country.</li> <li>• The challenge of navigating in difficult conditions (often) and overcoming bad ground.</li> <li>• Good going (on the whole) over challenging country in tremendous</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Published "routes" would be useful.</li> <li>• Some section repair on soft ground.</li> <li>• Opportunities for disabled riders.</li> <li>• Remove obstacle/locke d gates etc. dedicated parking.</li> <li>• Linkage – road crossings.</li> </ul>



<p>canoeing being denied to Loch Kinord.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plenty of them both recreational and school access</li> <li>• River Dee – Access points to river are poor and subject to landowners whims e.g. Ballator.</li> <li>• Loch Alvie?</li> <li>• Safety standards are not always enforced.</li> <li>• Who maintains?</li> <li>• Trees in rivers are dangerous.</li> <li>• Lack of support from Moray Council in access projects. E.g. yet another toilet at <i>(unknown word)</i> set for closure.</li> <li>• Moray council do not realise how much it <i>(unknown word)</i> to area via walkers and canoeists.</li> <li>• Trees are a natural part of a wild river so this should not be changed. Skills should be developed to avoid them.</li> <li>• Lack of easy access &amp; egress</li> </ul>	<p>with landowners &amp; fishing interests generally very good.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• River Spey from Kingussie down- good access.</li> <li>• Fantastic rivers Spey/Feshie etc. superb.</li> <li>• Variety of venues.</li> <li>• Variety of craft.</li> <li>• Courses offered for learning.</li> <li>• Improved understanding between Spey users – leading to improved relationships.</li> <li>• Spey fishery board very helpful in project such as removal of hazardous trees affecting navigation.</li> <li>• Good descriptive guides available for the major river (Spey Guide now on line – <a href="http://www.speydescentt.co.uk">www.speydescentt.co.uk</a>).</li> <li>• The Spey is one of the great rivers of Scotland that can be used by a great variety of craft and by all abilities, access and egress points are plentiful.</li> <li>• There are many other rivers as well.</li> </ul>	<p>Kinord as introductory area for watersports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• River Dee – Formalize access points at all villages.</li> <li>• Promote Dee as “classic” river trip. Famous rapids – Potarch, Invercanny, Cairnton</li> <li>• Develop loch access for canoeing instruction.</li> <li>• Carparking and other access incl steps etc Along the length of navigable river – esp Spey/Dee.</li> <li>• Some parking is a problem in some places.</li> <li>• Blackssboat camping area on river Spey would benefit from toilet facilities.</li> <li>• Greater education of some estate workers of rights of access. And training in how to be considerate to paddle sport users. (reciprocate).</li> <li>• Creation of camp areas for groups “collective camping” (i.e. to large to wild camp).</li> <li>• Spey needs to be</li> </ul>
---	--	--

<p>along most parts of the Spey.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Need more car parking areas.</li></ul>		<p>a core path perhaps managed and funded in connection with Speyside Way.</p>
---	--	--





<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternatives to Trunk Roads needed in place.</li> <li>• Some tracks (e.g. L Morlich –Loch an Eilan) have been ruined for cycling – turned into motorways!!</li> <li>• Too many gates or stiles to get bikes over.</li> <li>• Needs more purpose built trails e.g. what was planned for sluggan!</li> <li>• Some locked gates and high barriers on stiles – Deeside “kissing gates” &amp; gates.</li> <li>• Local network around villages appear to be well known and developed.</li> <li>• Links between these local village networks need developing.</li> <li>• Excellent provision in parts, but is not (yet) a practical network linking and thus serving communities and facilities and so to address future trends etc.</li> <li>• Frequency – big gap esp. for circular rides from (unknown word) /Aviemore on NW side of glenmmore/aviemore (unknown word) road.</li> <li>• Danger to walkers using same paths as cyclists.</li> <li>• Some poor signage e.g. Glenmore cycle trail doesn't tell you where the path goes consequently people do not use it. They use the road for fear of ending up in the middle of the forest.</li> <li>• Locked deer gates.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The tremendous opportunity that is there.</li> <li>• Lots of good single tracks which would be spoiled if publicised and over used.</li> <li>• Good tracks in e.g. Rothiemurchus – Nethybridge.</li> <li>• Much local interest and work going on to identify off-road routes.</li> <li>• Fantastic variety for easy flat on-road to long challenging off-road routes in remote terrain.</li> </ul>	<p>planned multi-purpose network soon/soonish.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove locked deer gates.</li> <li>• Moderate upgrading of bogs to link existing artery paths.</li> <li>• Remove kissing gates from bike routes.</li> <li>• New links to plug key gaps in cycling networks.</li> <li>• Need separation of horses and cycles.</li> <li>• Get gates unlocked.</li> <li>• Improve some path surfaces for cyclists to create better networks. Cycle routes need better signposting stating where starts and /or finishes.</li> <li>• Tracks down Cairngorms if a sustainable environmentally considerate construction) with access on the train for bikes!! I agree.</li> <li>• Important that tracks don't always follow major roads. I.e. need for more routes between</li> </ul>
---	---	---

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lots of key gaps in what could be a really extensive network.</li><li>• Functional e.g. commuting cycling provision poor – forced onto busy fast roads or slow off-road routes.</li><li>• Cycle routes with 90° bends need straightened out and links made between existing cycle paths. At the moment people have to cycle on busy main roads to link cycle routes.</li></ul>		villages that don't follow edge/near roads so quieter, healthier and more enjoyable.
--	--	--



<p>especially to Spey.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To many deer fence gates locked and chained. (especially when not on road boundaries so totally unnecessary).</li> <li>• Possibly not clear what degree of service is required</li> <li>• Changing expectation.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-use path network – higher spec where there is a perceived need.</li> </ul>
--	--	---

## Map Results

The comments and lines drawn on maps were fed into the feedback reports for the relevant geographic areas. Feedback reports for all settlements and areas in the Cairngorms National Park can be viewed on the CNPA website at [www.cairngorms.co.uk/access/corepaths](http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/access/corepaths).

## Summary

Through discussion it was clear that there is a great deal of confusion as to the meaning of the term 'core paths' and what the difference between a core path and a non core path might be and what relevance a core path has when there already exists a general right for responsible access.

The issue of funding for core paths was raised and suggestions such as visitor payback schemes (e.g. the Upper Deeside Access Trust at Loch Muick), Forestry Commission funding and Land management Contracts were suggested.

There was concern about people accessing areas in the Cairngorms that they are not equipped or skilled enough to be in. There was strong opinion at both workshops that way-marking and signage is inappropriate in the montane areas and, as such, core paths should not be designated in more remote and upland areas.

There was concern that new paths or increased use of paths may have a detrimental impact on the environment, but there was also questioning as to why some species require such a high level of protection.

A number of issues were raised in relation to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and incidences of locked gates or difficulties with Land Managers. It was suggested that core paths may be a mechanism for resolving some of these issues.

Most people identified the existing infrastructure for walking in the area as being good to very good. The main issues identified were the need to co-ordinate and improve the promotion of route although there was not a desire to see a much larger network of promoted routes. It was suggested that there is a need to provide greater education and information for people coming into the area to ensure that they are safe and acting responsibly. Maintenance was seen as a key issue with many paths.

There was quite a mixed opinion of the quality of the existing infrastructure for horse-riding in the Cairngorms. Whilst it was identified that the routes and terrain are often fantastic, barriers such as locked or inappropriate gates and poor path surfaces were a common problem. There is a need to better promote the area for horse-riding and horse-riding tourism.

A number of people indicated that provision for watersports in the area is good although there is a need to address issues of car-parking and access and egress points. It was suggested that this could be improved for the River Spey by managing the river in conjunction with the Speyside Way.

As with horse-riding there was quite a mixed opinion of the quality of the existing infrastructure for cycling. People were really positive about the variety of routes that exist but there is a need to better promote the area as a cycling destination. There was concern that many routes also require people to cycle along sections of dangerous and busy roads although it was noted that the Sustrans route is an excellent asset. There is a need to remove barriers such as locked or inappropriate gates to enable cyclists to access a wider area.

The majority of people indicated that the existing network is not good for all-abilities access although it was noted that there are some very good opportunities but these are limited to some very specific places in the National Park. There is a need for more varied opportunities at more locations throughout the area.

## **Reflections**

The workshops provided a useful discussion forum for informing key interest groups about core paths planning and to gather the views and comments of a wide range of very knowledgeable outdoor enthusiasts. The workshop in Aviemore was better attended than the one in Ballater although both workshops stimulated positive and useful debate.

## **Next Steps**

The issues raised and the information gathered throughout the process will be used to inform the development of selection criteria for core paths. The selection criteria will then be used to select core paths for the Cairngorms National Park. The selection criteria and maps of the selected paths will be drawn up into an Interim Draft Core Paths Plan which will be completed by the end of March 2007. This Plan will then be made available for the public to make comment.

**Cairngorms National Park Authority**

**1 March 2007**

[sandramiddleton@cairngorms.co.uk](mailto:sandramiddleton@cairngorms.co.uk)