



# **Cairngorms National Park Core Paths Plan**

## **Consultation and Engagement Process - Stage 1**

### **Report on engagement with Visitors**

#### **Introduction**

The core paths plan process targeted four main interest groups for engagement. These included; communities, land managers, people who recreate in the Park (visitors and residents) and visitors to the Park. The following report details how the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) engaged this final group, visitors, in the core paths planning process, the people who participated and the results that they provided.

#### **Engaging with Visitors**

The CNPA engaged with visitors at the Lonach Highland Games on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2006 and the Braemar Gathering on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2006. These two events were chosen due to the large numbers of visitors known to attend on an annual basis (approx. 12,000+ at each). A number of visitors also got involved at community drop-in events and in particular at the Carr-Bridge community drop-in event which was run during the World Porridge Making Championships on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> October (see the report on the Carr-Bridge Community Engagement results). The CNPA also interviewed staff at Tourist Information Centres in Braemar, Ballater and Aviemore to obtain their input on local path networks, visitor demands and visitor feedback.

#### **The Lonach Highland Games & Braemar Gathering**

The aim of speaking to visitors at these two events was to learn more about their needs and aspirations for paths when visiting the Park. The CNPA had a stand at each of the events and members of CNPA staff engaged visitors in conversation letting them know that one of the key things the CNPA are working on at present is to improve paths and routes

in the Cairngorms and to make them easier to use. Staff were asked to try and obtain the answers to a number of questions through informal discussion with visitors to the stand. A total of 59 people responded over both events, the information that they provided is displayed below.

*Participants by Gender*

Male	67%	Female	33%
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*Participants by Age Group*

Under 16	3%	16 - 24	5%	25 - 44	30%	45 - 64	47%	65 - 74	15%	Over 75	0%
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*Where people came from*

Visitor	85%	Resident	15%
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*Number of visitors who indicated that they take part in the following outdoor activities when visiting the area;*

Low-level Walking	61%	Dog Walking	5%
Hill-walking	46%	Watersports	2%
Running	2%	Cycling on-road	7%
Horse-riding	3%	Cycling off-road	14%
Other	7%	None	5%

*Number of visitors who indicated that they take part in these activities for the following reasons;*

Wildlife & Nature	58%	Peace & Quiet	15%
The Views	46%	History	3%
Adrenaline & Adventure	19%	Health	5%
Farming	2%	Other	8%

**Feedback from the Tourist Information Centres**

CNPA staff interviewed frontline staff at the Aviemore, Ballater and Braemar Tourist Information Centres. The aim of speaking to these staff was to find out how well the local path networks and infrastructure caters for tourists. Staff were asked about how much and what type of demand there is amongst tourists for outdoor activities, what opportunities and information currently exists, what feedback (if any) they receive from tourists about the local networks, and what improvements they feel could be made to the local network. Staff provided feedback for each of the areas as follows.

**Aviemore**

The experience of the Aviemore Tourist Information Centre is that approximately 75% of people visiting the office request information about walking, cycling and watersports. Visitors generally ask about the location and length of routes and are provided with free leaflets as appropriate or are directed to various publications available for purchase. Staff have found visitors generally to be very positive about the access opportunities locally although it was noted that public transport is poor and that there are a lack of walks around Aviemore and an off-road route to Glenmore. The Wolftrax facility at Laggan is very popular.

Staff felt that there is a need to provide more opportunities for people with disabilities as existing all-abilities routes tend to be very short. Longer all-abilities trails would cater not only for people with disabilities but also for families and pushchairs. It was also noted that the current network is not well integrated with public transport. It was identified that there is a need to improve off-road cycling, particularly for families and develop more circular walks. There needs to be better and more appropriate promotion, particularly of local attractions and current signage styles can be inconsistent and hard to follow.

### **Ballater**

Staff at the Ballater Tourist Information Centre noted that they are asked for information about low-level walking and hill-walking on a daily basis. They provide visitors with the Upper Deeside Access Trust (UDAT) leaflets (£1 charge) for Ballater or Dinnet and often recommend Glen Muick. They have some requests for watersports information and these are generally directed to local activity providers such as Cabin Fever and Bigfoot Adventures. Horse-riders are generally directed to Balmoral or Glen Tanar. Staff noted that people are generally not unhappy to pay for the UDAT leaflet although they do not generally explain to people why there is a charge unless asked.

Staff have found that they often have to provide visitors with directions to the start of walks but there was a general consensus that there is good provision locally for visitors and that most visitors prefer to stick to promoted paths. Staff felt that there is a need to provide better off-road and traffic free cycling opportunities.

### **Braemar**

Staff at the Braemar Tourist Information Centre also noted that they are asked for information about low-level walking and hill-walking on a daily basis. They also noted demand for information on skiing and mountain biking, but rarely have requests for information on watersports. They provide visitors with the UDAT leaflets for Braemar and Craig Leek although they do note that Craig Leek is less popular, possibly due to the

need for a transport link. Other popular publications are the Walks Deeside booklet and books on the Munros.

Staff have found that visitors generally want to know if a path is signed and way-marked and there are some issues with river crossings. There is a lack of provision for horse-riding and cycling in the area although the network for walking is very good although public transport links to it are poor. Wheelchair and pushchair access is limited locally due to narrow gates and cattle grids. Staff felt that there is a need for better public transport links and improved information on cycling opportunities.

## **Reflections**

In general visitors who recreate in the area do so for the wildlife, nature and the views. The highest demand is for low-level walking followed by hill-walking and also off-road cycling. There is a need to improve information and promotion of opportunities to encourage visitors to be more active when they come to the area as, in general, they prefer to use well signposted and promoted routes that are easy to find. There are of course many visitors who come to the area with a specific route or purpose in mind and as such do not visit tourist information centres. The information for this latter group is captured by the feedback report on people who recreate in the Park (see [www.cairngorms.co.uk/access/corepaths](http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/access/corepaths))

## **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.

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**1 March 2007**  
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