

4. VISITOR AND RECREATION RESOURCES



4. VISITOR AND RECREATION RESOURCES

4.1 Introduction

The attractiveness of the Park as a visitor destination lies in the blend of outstanding natural beauty and the rich natural and cultural heritage of the area. The Cairngorms has a scenic quality distinct from that of the rest of Scotland. The diversity of habitats and landforms and the variety of heritage create a wide range of opportunities for outdoor recreation.

This chapter sets out information currently available about the visitors to the Park and the facilities available to them during their stay. It acknowledges the contribution that visitors make to the natural, cultural, social and economic resources within the Park and their impact on them.

This chapter is arranged into nine sections:

- Data Sources;
- Visitor Numbers and Characteristics;
- Visitor Attractions and Locations;
- Recreational Activities and Networks;
- Visitor Facilities and Information Centres;
- Outdoor Access;
- Access for All;
- Ranger Services;
- Information and Interpretation.

4.2 Data Sources

4.2.1 Basis of Data Collection

The number of data sources on visitor numbers in the UK and Scotland is considerable, and the challenge lies in identifying data specific to the Park. Currently, the only data available on a Park-wide basis is the Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey of 2003/4 and the Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Monitor (STEAM) report for 2004. All other data prior to this depends on manipulation and analysis of non-specific datasets. In general, data on visitor numbers and resources is somewhat fragmented, may not always be consistent, and resolution at Park level is frequently not possible.



Photo: Jimmy Mitchell.

With effect from 1 April 2005 there has been a re-organisation of Area Tourist Boards in Scotland. This has reshaped the Area Tourist Boards into 14 Network Offices integrated with the national tourism body, VisitScotland. Each Network Office is directly accountable to VisitScotland and will have responsibility for the delivery of the national tourism strategy in its area. There have been no changes made to the numbers or boundaries of former Area Tourist Board areas. The data used in this study is shown at former Area Tourist Board level, that being the structure in place at the time of collection.

4.2.2 National Statistics

At a national level, the UK Research Liaison Group produces a wide variety of tourism statistics for the UK, primarily the UK Tourism Survey which is published, along with other data, on the internet at www.staruk.org.uk

At a Scottish level VisitScotland compiles and co-ordinates Scottish statistics and publishes them through a website called www.scotexchange.net Scottish Natural Heritage also carries out a Scottish Recreation Survey, measuring levels of participation in walking in the countryside, as well as participation in a number of other open-air recreational activities (see www.snh.org.uk for 2003/04 findings).

These statistics allow identification of trends at a national and regional level, but it is not possible to disaggregate them to a Park level.

4.2.3 Tourism in Scotland

The annual report 'Tourism in Scotland', published by VisitScotland, collates figures estimating the tourism value and volume in Scotland and breaks the information down to former Area Tourist Board or Network Office level. There are three Network Offices operating within the Park; Aberdeen, Dundee and Inverness.

4.2.4 Visitor Attraction Monitor

The 'Visitor Attraction Monitor' collates information on the numbers of people who visit participating visitor attractions in Scotland and is compiled by the Moffat Centre for Travel and Tourism Business Development, Glasgow Caledonian University. It is published on behalf of VisitScotland. An annual report in 2003 provided data on 723 visitor attractions, 19 of which were within the Park.

4.2.5 Visitor Surveys

Visitor surveys have been undertaken over the last 12 years and provide a broad indication of the number of visitors to the Cairngorms area. Caution must be taken when working with outputs from the various surveys, however, as each has used different formats, sampling or surveying methods, and all have been carried out within different timeframes.

The Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey 2003/4 is the only survey to date which has collected information specifically from the defined Park area. The survey's aim was to establish a baseline dataset, and it is envisaged

that the survey will be carried out on a two-yearly cycle from now on to update the baseline information. This will enable the gathering of trend data and the measurement of change to deepen analysis and understanding of the Park. Building on the Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey, annual STEAM surveys have also been commissioned up to 2007.

4.2.6 People and Traffic Counters

In addition to the visitor surveys there are also a number of people and traffic counters in use within the Park. These are mainly operated by Scottish Natural Heritage, the Forestry Commission and a number of estates including Mar Lodge, Rothiemurchus, Cairngorm and Invercauld. The reliability of the data varies between different counters, making it difficult to establish long-term, aggregated trends using data originating from automatic people counters in the Cairngorms.

Estimates or counts for the number of vehicles entering the Park exist for all roads into the Park.

4.3 Visitor Numbers and Characteristics

Visitors to the Park are predominately from Scotland, travel in parties of two adults, and two thirds of them are staying away from home overnight. They are generally older, with 56 per cent over 45 compared with the Scottish average of 44 per cent. The Park attracts a higher than average number of overseas

Photo: David Gowans.



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visitors, and compared with the national 'Tourism in Scotland' Survey the visitors appear to be relatively affluent.

The visitor profile does vary, however, depending on the reason for visiting. Visitors taking part in more active pursuits tend to be younger, male and are more likely to be from other parts of the UK.

4.3.1 Visitor Numbers and Spend

Until relatively recently the Cairngorms National Park Authority has only been able to estimate visitor numbers. However, a mechanism is now in place which will allow interpretation of existing data to generate figures more specific to the Park. This is being undertaken through a tourism economic activity model called STEAM (Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Monitor), developed by Global Tourism Solutions.

In 2003 it was estimated that the Park might attract as many as 1.2 million visitors, generating around £240 million a year, but the geographical area used for this research was much greater than the Park. At the Park level, draft STEAM figures for 2003 gave a total visitor figure of 1.4 million and a total visitor spend of £154 million. Visitor numbers dropped very slightly in 2004, but visitor spend rose to £161 million.



Table 4.3.1: Visitor statistics – numeric summary of STEAM report 2004

<i>Total Revenue by District (£s millions)</i>	2004	2003	% Change
Badenoch and Strathspey Area	127.68	125.67	2
Rest of the Park	32.96	28.75	15
Total	160.64	154.42	4

<i>Analysis by Sector of Expenditure (£s millions)</i>			
Accommodation	35.97	34.08	6
Food and Drink	23.30	22.66	3
Recreation	9.30	9.05	3
Shopping	12.93	12.62	2
Transport	23.07	22.22	4
Indirect Expenditure	37.78	36.18	4
VAT	18.30	17.61	4
Total	160.64	154.42	4

<i>Revenue by Category of Visitor (£s millions)</i>			
Serviced Accommodation	97.63	94.96	3
Non-serviced Accommodation	32.62	27.78	17
Visiting Friends and Relatives	1.86	1.72	8
Day Visitors	28.54	29.97	-5
Total	160.64	154.42	4

<i>Tourist Days (Thousands)</i>			
Serviced Accommodation	1,035.89	980.05	6
Non-serviced Accommodation	1,086.25	909.45	19
Visiting Friends and Relatives	92.28	85.92	7
Day Visitors	850.96	894.09	-5
Total	3,065.39	2,869.52	7

<i>Tourist Numbers (Thousands)</i>			
Serviced Accommodation	387.39	369.02	5
Non-serviced Accommodation	149.75	137.92	9
Visiting Friends and Relatives	20.18	18.92	7
Day Visitors	850.96	894.09	-5
Total	1,408.28	1,419.95	-1

<i>Sectors in which Employment is supported (Full-time Equivalents)</i>			
Accommodation	2,254	2,234	1
Food and Drink	690	671	3
Recreation	274	267	3
Shopping	369	360	2
Transport	587	566	4
Total Direct Employment	4,175	4,098	2
Indirect Employment	906	868	4
Total	5,081	4,966	2

Source: STEAM Report 2004

4.3.2 Visitor Trends

At a national level, overall domestic and overseas visitor trends in the UK have increased by 2.6 per cent over the period from 1995-2003 (UK Tourism Survey and International Passenger Survey). This has been most noticeable in the overseas market, which increased by 5.1 per cent. During the same period there has been a fall in Scottish tourism of up to 8.8 per cent. The figures also indicate that there has been an almost 20 per cent drop in overseas tourists to Scotland.

At a Scottish level, Tourism Scotland 2003 reports that 18.1 million tourists (domestic and overseas) took overnight trips to Scotland, and the annual expenditure was about £4.4 billion. This compares with 2002 when 20.1 million tourists took overnight trips and spent almost £4.5 billion. This indicates a decrease of 10.2

per cent for visitor numbers and a decrease of 2.2 per cent for visitor spend from 2002-2003.

At a Park level, it was estimated in 2003 that the Park would attract 1.2 million visitors annually, generating around £240 million a year. While the Park attracts a higher number of overseas visitors than Scotland as a whole, visitors are predominately from Scotland and travel in parties of two. Fifty six per cent of visitors are over 45. Two thirds stay overnight, with the most popular type of accommodation being hotels and guest houses. The main reasons for visiting were the wide range of outdoor activities, the natural beauty and the rich cultural heritage. The most popular activities were general sightseeing and walking. Visitor attitudes and perceptions of the area were very positive.

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The availability, collection and analysis of trend data on visitors to the Park is expected to increase through specific approaches such as repeating or further developing the Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey and using the data collected to carry out annual STEAM surveys, which will quantify visitor economic activity.

4.3.3 Visitor Profile

Table 4.3.3 shows a summary of key statistics which reflect the profile of visitors coming to the Cairngorms area.

Table 4.3.3: Profile of visitors (%)

	<i>Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey 2003/04</i>	<i>Tourism in Scotland 2003</i>	<i>Highland Visitor Survey 2003 (Moray, Badenoch and Strathspey)</i>	<i>Rothiemurchus and Glenmore Recreation Survey 1998/1999</i>	<i>Cairngorm Mountain Recreation Survey 1997/1998</i>
Origin of Visitors					
Scotland	58	44	45	58	56
Other UK	28	47	38	31	38
Overseas	15	9	17	11	4
Gender					
Male	52	n/a	51	54	n/a
Female	48	n/a	49	46	n/a
Age					
16-24	8	13	5	8	8
25-44	36	43	39	45	44
Over 45	56	44	55	41	48
Number in Party					
One	16	n/a	8	11	24
Two	47	n/a	51	49	57
Three or Four	29	n/a	14	25	21
Five +	8	n/a	n/a	14	9
Type of Trip					
Day Visit	33	n/a	16	22	27
Away from home overnight	67	n/a	84	78	73
Accommodation Type					
Bed and Breakfast	15	9	18	n/a	n/a
Hotel/Guest House	35	33	32	n/a	n/a
Self-catering	16	6	17	n/a	n/a
Hostel	3	2	3	n/a	n/a
Time-Share	5	n/a	7	n/a	n/a
Staying with Friends	8	40	14	n/a	n/a
Touring Caravan/Tent	8	8	10	n/a	n/a
Other	2	7	4	n/a	n/a

4.3.4 Accommodation

There is a wide variety of reasons for visitors to come to the Park and a corresponding range of accommodation types on offer. A wide spectrum exists ranging from top-class hotels to bunkhouses and hostels. The highest concentration of accommodation is found in the Badenoch and Strathspey area, which includes Aviemore and the A9 corridor.

Much of the information on accommodation has, in the past, been gathered locally by former Area Tourist Boards and in some cases the Local Enterprise Company. This means that there is not a common basis for data collection, format or timeframe for gathering information on a Park-wide basis. It has not, therefore, been possible to identify trends. Gathering specific data on occupancy levels is a common problem, as this information is understandably viewed by tourism businesses as being commercially sensitive and is commonly provided to national bodies only on the understanding that it remains confidential.

At present there is no definitive list of accommodation providers within the Park which includes those registered with VisitScotland, as well as those which are not. The Cairngorms National Park Authority is in



the process of compiling a Tourist Business Database from a variety of sources including VisitScotland-registered providers, local Visitor Guides, Chamber of Commerce information and local knowledge. Currently the database records 379 accommodation providers within the Park. VisitScotland operates a Quality Assurance Scheme, of which 319 accommodation providers are members within the Park.

The most popular visitor accommodation type in the Park is hotel/guest house. There is a much higher number of visitors staying in bed and breakfast accommodation (15 per cent) than the Scottish average (9 per cent), and a much lower number of visitors staying with friends and relatives (8 per cent) than the Scottish average (40 per cent). This highlights the high level of dependency on commercial accommodation. There is a high percentage of overnight visitors spending all their time in the Cairngorms area, with short breaks of one to four nights being most popular.

Table 4.3.4 shows the number of different types of accommodation within the Cairngorms National Park.

Table 4.3.4: Accommodation supply in the National Park

Accommodation Type	Total	Former Tourist Board Area		
		Aberdeen and Grampian Highlands	Angus and Dundee	Highlands of Scotland
Hotel	84	26	1	57
Guest House	55	9	0	46
Bed and Breakfast	102	42	0	60
Self-catering Unit	97	34	0	63
Hostel	23	6	1	16
Timeshare	4	1	0	3
Caravan and Camping Site	14	3	0	11
Total	379	121	2	256

Source: Cairngorms National Park Authority Tourism Database (2005).

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4.3.5 Visitor Attitudes and Perceptions

The attitudes and perceptions of respondents to the Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey were in general positive, with 85 per cent giving their overall visit to the Cairngorms a rating of 8 out of 10 (1 being low and 10 being high). The visitors indicated that there were plenty of things to see and do in the area, and that the Park was well managed and cared for.

The most appreciated aspects of the Cairngorms area were the beautiful scenery, the mountains and the peaceful easy-going pace of life. There was no perception of there being too many tourists.

There was a high level of awareness (69 per cent) amongst visitors that they were in a National Park, and 88 per cent of these were aware of National Park status prior to arrival. This did not appear to have been a major influence on their decision to come to the area, however, as only 9 per cent stated that National Park status was very important, and 38 per cent said that it was not important at all.

4.3.6 Reasons for Visiting

The reasons for visiting the Park are many and various, but are largely focused on the wide range of outdoor activities, the natural beauty

and the rich cultural heritage which the area has to offer.

Walking is recorded as the most popular reason for visiting the area, with beautiful scenery ranked second. There were variations apparent between the different categories of visitors surveyed, including day trippers, short break and long break. Day trippers were more likely to be visiting for walking rather than for general sightseeing or heritage. Visitors on longer breaks were most likely to include general sightseeing and heritage and least likely to take part in active pursuits.

The surveys highlighted the perception of wildness and tranquillity as a reason for visiting. The Cairngorms area is seen as offering unspoilt landscapes, inaccessible areas and a feeling of peace and solitude.

Table 4.3.6 shows the reasons for visiting given by respondents to the Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey. The responses given are specific to the Park and are the most recent data available. At present there is no trend data available on reasons for visiting.



Photo: Jimmy Mitchell.

Table 4.3.6: Main reasons for visiting the Park

Reason given for Visiting*	% of Respondents
Walking	14
Beautiful scenery	11
Visiting friends/families	8
Like the area	8
Been before	7
Peace and quiet	4
Never been before	4
Mountains/Hills	3
Cairngorm Mountain Railway	3
Wildlife/Plants	3
Recommended by a friend	2
* Based on a survey of 2,837	

Source: Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey (2004).

4.3.7 Activity Intentions

General sightseeing and walking were the most popular activities in the Cairngorms area. Walking was popular across the different categories of visitor, while general sightseeing was particularly popular with people on longer breaks. This may correlate with the fact that almost half of this category of visitor was aged 55 and over and may have been looking for a less active holiday. Active pursuits were most popular with Park residents.

The number of respondents visiting heritage sights within the Cairngorms is low compared

with Scotland as a whole. Heritage was most popular with overseas visitors (33 per cent) and least popular with day trippers (9 per cent). Although the Park’s rural nature may in part be responsible for this, there are nevertheless a number of significant heritage attractions within the Park.

Table 4.3.7 highlights the most popular activities in which respondents took part in or were going to take part in during their trip to the Cairngorms area.

At present there is no trend data available on activity intentions.

Table 4.3.7: Activities undertaken during visit (%)

Activity*	Total	Resident	Day Trip	Short Break	Long Break	Scottish Average
General Sightseeing	56	35	29	59	76	n/a
Walking	48	50	43	52	48	33
Heritage in total	22	14	9	19	33	n/a
Museum, art galleries, heritage centres, etc	12	3	4	9	21	29
Castles, monuments churches, etc	15	3	6	13	26	39
Watching performing arts	2	8	0	1	2	16
Active Pursuits	20	35	?	19	14	n/a

* Based on a survey of 2,500

Source: Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey and Tourism Scotland (2004).

Trends and Observations

- At present it is difficult to establish trends beyond the extrapolation of national trends, due to the way data has been collected in the past. Trends should become apparent through future National Park visitor surveys.

Monitoring

Visitor numbers and characteristics are monitored by the National Park Authority in conjunction with VisitScotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and other bodies.

4.3.8 Information Gaps – Visitor Numbers and Characteristics

- Trend data on reasons for visiting;
- Trend data on activity intentions.



Photo: Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

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4.4 Visitor Attractions and Locations

The definition of a visitor attraction used in this report comes from the Visitor Attraction Monitor, published on behalf of VisitScotland. The Visitor Attraction Monitor is published annually and is the most comprehensive source of trend data available on visitor attractions. In summary, it states that the visitor attraction must be a permanent facility which is open to the public, whose main purpose must be sightseeing and which allows access for entertainment, interest or education.

There is currently no single, comprehensive dataset recording all visitor attractions in the Park area, and many of the attractions are not registered with official bodies. However, some of the larger attractions are members of the

Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions and the Quality Assurance Scheme operated by VisitScotland.

Using a broad range of sources it has been possible to identify 73 visitor attractions within the Park, including sites where entry is free and where an entry fee is paid. The majority of these are based in Highland (44), followed by Aberdeenshire (25) and Angus (4). Nature Reserves, Wetlands and Wildlife Parks are the most numerous attractions in the Park (16), followed by Castles and Forts (11) and Museums and Art Galleries (10).

Table 4.4. provides a summary of visitor attractions in the Cairngorms National Park.

Table 4.4: Summary of visitor attractions in the Park

Attraction	Former Tourist Board Areas			Total
	Aberdeen and Grampian	Angus and Dundee	Highlands of Scotland	
Castles and Forts	7	1	3	11
Distilleries, Vineyards and Breweries	2	0	5	7
Gardens	3	0	1	4
Heritage and Visitor Centres	1	1	6	8
Highland Games	4	0	3	7
Museums and Art Galleries	3	1	6	10
Nature Reserves, Wetlands and Wildlife Parks	4	1	11	16
Places of Worship*	1	0	0	1
Steam and Heritage Railways	0	0	1	1
Other	0	0	8	8
Total	25	4	44	73

* Crathie Church

Source: Aberdeen and Grampian Highlands Tourist Board; Angus Council Ranger Service; Cairngorms Countryside Events 2004; Cairngorms National Park Visitor Guide 2004.

4.4.1 Popularity of Attractions

The Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey is the first attempt to identify the popularity of visitor attractions within the Park, providing baseline data for future monitoring. Consequently it is not possible to establish trends at this time. It appears from the data collected in the survey that 34 per cent of all visitors (rising to 50 per cent of day trippers) did not visit any attractions during their stay. This may be a reflection of the high number of return visitors to the area. Notwithstanding this, 84 per cent of visitors agreed that there was plenty to see and do in the Park.

Table 4.4.1 identifies the top 10 visitor attractions in the Cairngorms area from the 32 different attractions cited in the survey. There were 19 visitor attractions within the Park that contributed to the Visitor Attraction Monitor in 2002 and 2003, allowing year-on-year comparisons to be made. In the period 2002-2003 visitor attraction numbers in Scotland increased by 2.2 per cent and by 4.7 per cent from 2001-2002.

The Visitor Attraction Monitor indicated that overall there had been a year-on-year drop of



Photo: Jimmy Mitchell.

5.6 per cent in the 19 participating visitor attractions within the Park. This may have been skewed by a large drop in two of the visitor attractions, which if omitted, result in an overall increase of 4.2 per cent in visitor numbers for the remaining attractions. By contrast in 2003 there were significant increases in visitors to The Glenlivet Distillery (up 24.6 per cent), Tomintoul Museum and Visitor Centre (up 13.9 per cent) and Cairngorm Mountain Railway (up 10.8 per cent). Cairngorm Mountain shows the largest visitor numbers in the area (from 98,000 in 2000 to 187,015 in 2003), an increase of 90 per cent. It is significant that the funicular was established during this period.

Table 4.4.1: Top 10 most visited attractions in the Park

Attraction*	% of People Visiting
Cairngorm Mountain Railway	18
Rothiemurchus Visitor Centre	9
Speyside Heather Centre, Dulnain Bridge	9
The Lecht	9
Glenmore Forest Park Visitor Centre	8
Landmark Visitor Centre	8
Loch an Eilein, Rothiemurchus	8
Balmoral	8
Glen Muick	7
Highland Folk Museum, Kingussie	7
* Based on a survey of 2,500	

Source: Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey (2004).

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4.4.2 Natural Attractions

The Park is, by its very nature, substantially comprised of natural attractions. In the absence of primary research, a definition of what exactly constitutes a natural attraction of importance to Park visitors in this context is not feasible. It is, however, possible to include a short description of some of the more commonly known natural attractions within the Park.

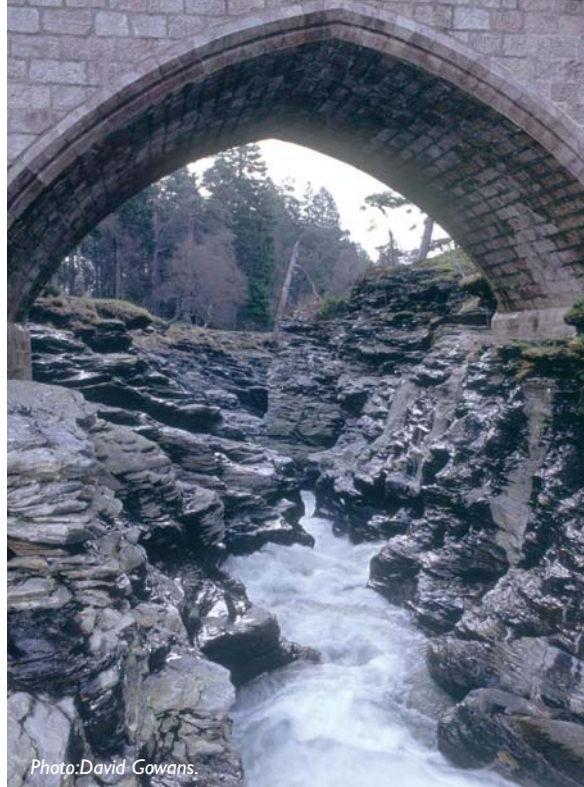


Photo:David Gowans.

Table 4.4.2: Natural attractions in the Park

<i>Attraction</i>	<i>Description</i>
The Cairngorms	Mountain range with one of the largest granite hill intrusions in the British Isles. Excellent example of glacial erosion.
Burn o'Vat	Geological feature created by meltwater during the Ice Age.
Corrie Fee	A large, relatively easily accessed corrie, containing beautiful alpine flowers, rare mountain willows clinging to the crags, golden eagles and peregrines.
Invercauld	Including The Punch Bowl, a hollow in the rock created by water erosion.
Spittal of Glen Muick	Part of the Nature Reserve at Glen Muick, from where it is possible to see the glacier-formed corries of Lochnagar.
Muir of Dinnet	An area of moorland and birch forest designated as a National Nature Reserve. Landforms at this site have been formed due to glacier ice melting, eskers and kettle holes.
Linn of Dee	A narrow gorge and waterfall on the River Dee.
Rothiemurchus Forest	A large area of easily accessed Caledonian pine forest with good examples of montane scrub.
Allt Mor	A river walk where a number of geological features are highlighted.
Dalnain Bridge	Display of Roches Moutonnées, a type of glaciated rock which has been smoothed and shaped by glacier scouring.
River Feshie	Important for river studies in that past and present river systems can be seen through landforms.
Farleitter Crag	Highlights some features associated with glaciation such as kettle holes, erratics and roches moutonnées.
Abernethy Forest	Encompasses Loch Garten Visitor Centre, famous for ospreys and also a rare Caledonian pine forest.
Ryvoan	A narrow pass connecting Glenmore and Abernethy with features including eskers, u-shaped valley, moraines which have been created due to glaciation.

Trends and Observations

- A substantial proportion of visitors do not visit attractions during their visit;
- Attractions listed in the Visitor Attraction Monitor showed a drop in visitor numbers within the Park in 2002-2003, while in Scotland as a whole numbers rose by 2.2 per cent;
- There is significant polarisation in the performance of listed attractions, with the poorest showing a 57 per cent drop in visitor numbers in the period 2002-2003, while the strongest showed a 25 per cent increase.

Monitoring

Visitor attractions are monitored by the National Park Authority, VisitScotland, Ranger Services and other tourist providers.

4.4.3 Information Gaps – Visitor Attractions and Locations

- Single, comprehensive dataset of all visitor attractions in the Park.

4.5 Recreational Activities and Networks

4.5.1 Activity Types

Research confirms that it is difficult to obtain reliable data on outdoor activities due in part

to the different research methodologies used and a general sparsity of research into this area.

It has not been possible to identify all of the activity providers within the Park as there is no centralised dataset. As with visitor attractions, this is partly due to the low number of businesses registered with official bodies. There are, however, 11 associated members of the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority within the Park, and they are without exception multi-activity providers. Eight of these multi-activity providers have a dual role acting as Outdoor Education Centres.

Using a wide variety of sources including visitor guides, local tourist information and the internet, it is possible to identify up to 70 businesses based within the Park that offer recreational activities. The major activities are described in the following sections. In addition to those described there are a number of golf clubs and pony-trekking businesses.

Table 4.5.1 shows the number of businesses based within the Park offering recreational activities.

Table 4.5.1: Number of businesses based in the Park offering recreation opportunities

Attraction	Former Tourist Board Areas			Total
	Aberdeen and Grampian	Angus and Dundee	Highlands of Scotland	
Multi-activity providers including watersports	1	0	10	11
Cycling including off-road	1	0	9	10
Angling	3	0	5	8
Golf	2	0	7	10
Pony-trekking	2	0	2	4
Skiing/Wintersports	4	0	6	10
Walking/Mountaineering	3	0	6	9
Other activities	1	0	7	8
Total	17	0	52	70

Source: Aberdeen and Grampian Highlands Tourist Board; Angus Council Ranger Service; Cairngorms Countryside Events 2004; Cairngorms National Park Visitor Guide 2004.

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The General Household Survey, carried out annually, covers many different topics and has had a section on sport every three to four years. It helps to highlight trends in outdoor activity participation rates. Since 1987 the general trend for participation in one sport (including walking) has shown a small decline. However, the survey indicated that Scotland had the highest participation rates in the country, and it is suggested that this is due to the higher proportions of people walking. Based on annual participation, walking (46 per cent) was the most popular sport, and men were more likely than women to have participated in sport.

VisitScotland has produced an 'Activities Holidays 2003' factsheet which indicates that there were as many as 2.5 million holidays per year in Scotland where 'activity' was the main purpose of the trip. The factsheet reports the top five activities for visitors as walking (18 per cent), visiting heritage sites (14 per cent), watching the performing arts (10 per cent), golfing (9 per cent) and visiting artistic or heritage exhibits (7 per cent).

The average length of stay was four nights and the former Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board area was the most popular destination (21 per cent). The former Aberdeen and Grampian Highlands Tourist Board area attracted 5 per cent of the visitors, and the former Angus and Dundee Tourist Board area attracted 3 per cent. This generated on average £607 million per annum, concentrated over the months July to September (35 per cent). The seasonal spread of activity holidays may be more even in the Park due to the higher levels of wintersports available.

Increases in participation in outdoor recreation have been recorded since the 1950s. This is evidenced by the number of hillwalkers of all abilities completing all 284 Munros, the number of mountain rescues made and the number of hillwalking and mountaineering clubs which have been established.

4.5.2 Hillwalking, Mountaineering, Climbing and Orienteering

With five peaks above 4,000 feet, the Cairngorms has long laid claim to being the 'roof of Scotland'. A popular destination for walkers of all standards, the Cairngorms have something for everyone, from all ability low-level walks to the higher and more technical summits which demand good map-reading and navigational skills.

Within (and in part forming) the Park boundary there are 49 Munros (hills measuring 3,000 feet or over) and 23 Corbetts (hills between 2,500 and 2,999 feet high). Heather moorland accounts for around 45% of the Cairngorms area and is often accessed without the use of paths and tracks. It is a popular means of accessing uplands, high plateaux and summits, particularly Munros.

In the major river valleys and their surrounding areas, lowland and woodland paths and tracks provide links and shortcuts between settlements, as well as opportunities for a wide range of outdoor recreation activities.

Climbing takes place on mountain and lowland crags in both summer and winter. Winter climbing is confined to the upper mountain crags (above 900 metres) in the Cairngorms and to a slightly lower level in the Angus Glens. The Northern Corries of Cairngorm are particularly busy, due to ease of access, car parking and associated facilities at 600 metres and reliability of condition.

The central Cairngorms massif has several bothies, but none are located near to climbing areas, with the exception of Hutchison Memorial Hut in Upper Glen Derry and the very basic Garbh Coire emergency shelter under Braeriach. Howffs exist at Clach Dhian at the foot of Shelter Stone crag and on the access route to Ben A'an and Beinn a'Bhuird. The recently rebuilt Bob Scott's Bothy offers a simple base for climbing parties near Derry Lodge.

The Park is a prime location for orienteering, with The National Orienteering Centre at Glenmore Lodge in Badenoch and Strathspey, providing an opportunity for clubs throughout the UK to train and participate in orienteering. There is a permanent trail orienteering course at Glenmore Forest and a number of permanent and mapped foot orienteering courses at various other locations throughout the Park.

The Park has been home to a number of orienteering events including the World Masters Championships in 2004 and the World Orienteering Championships in 1999. The Scottish Six Day International Orienteering Festival, held once every two years, was held in Strathspey in 1995, Moray in 2003, Deeside in 2005 and is due to be held on Speyside in 2007.

In the Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey 26 per cent of respondents stated that during their stay they had or would take part in hillwalking, which was most popular with residents at 41 per cent. Climbing/mountaineering was cited by 4 per cent of respondents as an activity they would or had taken part in, again being most popular with residents at 12 per cent. This smaller number of climbers/mountaineers is likely to reflect the remote locations where climbing takes place, and the difficulty in capturing information from this group of visitors. In the Highland Visitors Survey by contrast, 19 per cent of respondents took part in hillwalking and 3 per cent took part in climbing/mountaineering.

It would be almost impossible to ascertain the number of hillwalking, mountaineering and climbing clubs which use the Cairngorms; however, there are 140 clubs in Scotland affiliated to the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, and it is reasonable to assume that the majority of these visit the area. Within the Park 95 accommodation providers participate in the 'Walkers Welcome' Scheme developed by VisitScotland and the Mountaineering Council of

Scotland. The scheme requires accommodation providers to provide certain facilities for walkers, including drying areas, packed lunches and walking information.

4.5.3 Snowsports

Three of the five Scottish ski centres are located in the Park. These are Cairngorm, Glenshee and the Lecht, providing facilities for downhill skiers, snowboarders and telemarkers. Ski-mountaineering, back and cross-country skiing opportunities exist in the areas surrounding the ski centres. There are also three dry ski slopes in the Park at the Lecht, Loch Insh Watersports and the Hilton Craigendarroch Country Club near Ballater. Adaptive equipment and instruction for all disabilities is available at Cairngorm and Glenshee.

Established in 1960, the Cairngorm Ski Centre covers approximately six square kilometres and has capacity for 5,000 to 6,000 skiers. The Glenshee Ski Centre, which was established in 1962, covers an area of 8.1 square kilometres and has capacity for 6,000 skiers, while The Lecht Ski Centre, established in 1977, is the most recent of the ski centres. It is also the smallest, with an area of 1.1 square kilometres and capacity for 2,500 skiers.



Photo: Paul Tomkins, VisitScotland/Scottish Viewpoint.

The number of downhill skiers in the Cairngorms area has declined substantially since the late 1980s. Between 1986 and 1991, the mean number of skier days per annum was 491,393. By contrast, the mean number of skier days per annum between 1995 and 1999 was 265,058, and in 2000/03 the number fell to 205,165.

4. VISITOR AND RECREATION RESOURCES...cont

In the face of declining skier numbers, ski centres have sought to diversify into non-skiing activities, so as to continue operating and retain core staff. The CairnGorm Mountain Railway development with its funicular railway, visitor centre, footpaths and mountain garden is the most popular visitor attraction in the Park with 187,015 visitors in 2003, a 90 per cent increase since 2000. The Glenshee Chairlift Company diversified its activities by opening the Glen Isla Golf Club in nearby Alyth, although there have since been further changes in management. The Lecht has upgraded its visitor facilities and activities and now provides go-karts and quad bikes at the centre's car park during the non-skiing season.

Snowsports provide significant social and economic benefits; however, they can also have local adverse impacts on montane habitats, wildlife and landscape quality. These impacts can include habitat damage and loss, changes to the species composition of habitats, erosion, disturbance to species and effects on landscape and qualities of wildness.

4.5.4 Cycling and Mountain Biking

Cycling is a popular sport in the Park, with 9 per cent of respondents to the Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey indicating that they have or would take part in the sport during their stay. The Park provides facilities for many different types of cycling, whether it is purpose-built, low-level cycling tracks or the more adventurous mountain biking centre at Laggan. Cycling is one of the top five sports in the UK as a whole, with 19 per cent of the population participating, according to the General Household Survey 2003. This figure has risen slightly since 1987, but follows the overall sports participation trend of peaking in 1996 and reducing in 2002.

Much of the cycling in the Park is road biking carried out on road networks throughout the area. Currently there are no dedicated cycle

lanes on these roads. A number of routes in and around the Park are specifically promoted for cycling through leaflets and waymarking. The Glenlivet and Rothiemurchus estates, in particular, have good networks of off-road trails.

Mountain biking is carried out on the lowland and woodland paths and tracks identified in the Outdoor Access Section (4.7). The WolfTrax facility developed at Strathmashie Forest near Laggan provides challenging blue, red and black routes for mountain bikers. Specialist trails have also recently been developed at Glenmore Lodge.

There are 89 accommodation providers in the Park signed up to the 'Cyclists Welcome Scheme', which ensures that visitors are provided with information on local cycle routes and repair shops, secure bike storage facilities, clothes drying areas, packed lunches and other facilities. In addition, there are 18 cycle hire businesses in the Park, 44 per cent of which are situated in the Aviemore, Inverdrue and Glenmore area.

There are three cycling clubs in the Park and also a number of organisations which take an interest in cycling at a national level. The National Cycle Network is one of the most prominent as it provides a comprehensive network of safe and attractive places to cycle and walk throughout the UK.



National Cycle Network Route 7 runs from Carlisle to Inverness and passes through the Park from Drumochter to Slochd. A recent survey by Sustrans in 2003, which interviewed 119 people over a 48 hour period, indicated that the route was used by cyclists (35 per cent) and pedestrians (61 per cent). It showed that men (45 per cent), women (35 per cent) and children (20 per cent) use the route, and that these trips were for recreation (75 per cent) leisure (3 per cent), utility (11 per cent) and tourism (5 per cent).

In addition to the many advertised walking and cycling routes which are available from estates and local authorities, organisations such as the Forestry Commission offer access to many of their forests. In particular, the Commission promotes Bunzeach, Glenmore Forest, Inshriach Forest and Glen Doll as areas with cycle routes.

4.5.5 Watersports

Water-based recreation is a popular activity carried out on rivers and lochs throughout the Park and includes sailing, swimming, diving, gorge-walking and all forms of paddling/canoeing. Businesses offering water-based recreation opportunities are predominantly based in the Badenoch and Strathspey area, although one business is based in Strathdon, and many businesses based outside the Park organise trips to the area.

Canoeing and kayaking are particularly associated with the watersports centres at Loch Morlich and Loch Insh, where there are hiring and teaching facilities. In the past, boat access has been restricted on some lochs such as Loch Kinord due to environmental sensitivities. The rivers Spey, Dee and Avon and their tributaries also provide a wide range of kayaking opportunities.

The majority of sailing takes place at established locations such as Loch Insh and Loch Morlich.



Photo: Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Loch Morlich Watersports supplies sailing equipment and instruction for individuals and organisations. Nethy Bridge Outdoor Centre co-funded and utilises the Sailing Club, which provides a centre for local sailors. Visitors to the Forest Enterprise camp-site also use their own dinghies, canoes and wind-surfing equipment on Loch Morlich.

Swimming in the rivers and lochs is popular for a limited period in the warmer summer months. Snorkelling and scuba-diving are known to take place at locations around the Glen Tanar Estate, on the River Dee and at the Linn of Dee, as well as at Loch Morlich and Loch an Eilein.

4.5.6 Angling

Scottish Executive research 'The Economic Impact of Game and Course Angling in Scotland' and the Spey Catchment Management Plan both indicate the economic importance of game fishing in the Cairngorms. However, once again it is difficult to extract data specifically for the Park.

The available data from the Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey and the Cairngorms National Park Marketing Strategy 2004 suggest that between 3 and 5 per cent of visitors to the Park fish during their visit. Scottish Executive research estimates that 62,100 rod days were taken on the Spey in 2003, with 56,800 on the Dee. Angling-related spend for the Spey was £11.3 million and for the Dee £10.2 million, with a significant proportion accruing within the Park. The area is best known for its salmon angling, which elicits the greatest interest and is of significant economic importance.

4. VISITOR AND RECREATION RESOURCES...cont



Photo: Jimmy Mitchell.

Salmon and sea trout fishing is generally let by the week, with parties of anglers taking a beat on a river with a given number of rods. Such angling is frequently managed in association with other fieldsport activities. The principal salmon and sea trout rivers with nationally significant angling resources in the Park are the Spey, the Dee, the Don, the North Esk and the South Esk. Wild brown trout fishing is available at many sites throughout the Park. The majority of this is available in lochs, although there are notable river stretches, particularly on the Spey and Don. Coarse fishing for species such as pike, perch, roach and eels is a relatively new and undeveloped sport in Scotland, accounting for only 3.5 per cent of angler days in the Highlands. This type of fishing is concentrated in the Aviemore area, with seven locations listed on the 'Coarse Fishing in the Highlands' website.

4.5.7 Shooting and Fieldsports

Many of the estates within the Park and its adjacent area derive significant income from sporting activities, including pheasant and grouse shooting and deer stalking. Red and roe deer stalking is an important sporting activity which has a significant influence on land-use and the landscape, discussed further in the Natural Resources and Cultural Resources chapters of this report.

The Game Conservancy Trust estimates that there are at least 44 sporting estates in the Park, with two sporting interests or more operating as businesses. These estates are likely to employ full-time gamekeepers, stalkers or ghillies. There is a further group of estates with a smaller or single interest. The Game Conservancy Trust estimates that holdings of over 1,000 acres (some 80-90 per cent of the area of the Park) have some form of sporting interest. Shooting is let directly by estates, through land agents, specialist sporting agents and operators and through some accommodation providers. Substantial numbers of overseas visitors come from Europe to the area to shoot. Data on visitor numbers does not appear to be collated and is held by the individual operators.

4.5.8 Horse-riding

Horse-riding is an increasingly popular activity, with an estimated two million riders in the UK (Scottish Tourist Board 2001). In many cases horse riders use the same access routes as walkers and cyclists, particularly in the forests; however, the demand for horse-riding within the Park is not high.

There are no routes within the Park specifically promoted for horse-riding at present. However, the Forestry Commission has plans to implement a network of horse-riding trails adjacent to the mountain-biking trails at



Photo: Paul Tomkins, VisitScotland/Scottish Viewpoint.

Strathmashie Forest. In the meantime, there is significant scope for horse riders to use quiet roads and routes such as forest and upland tracks.

4.5.9 Other Activities

A number of other outdoor access activities also take place across the Park, including dogsledding, hill and road-running, hang-gliding and para-gliding/scending, wildlife and bird-watching and photography.

4.5.10 Clubs

There are a number of sports clubs operating within the Park. According to data held by Sports Councils in each of the local authority areas and the 'Community Development in the Cairngorms' report, there are 29 different interests represented, with a total of 84 different clubs in the Park. They cover interests as diverse as gun clubs to aqua aerobics clubs. The most numerous types of clubs are bowling and golf clubs, of which there are ten of each within the Park.

Trends and Observations

- Participation in one sport (including walking) has shown a small decline since 1987 in the UK;
- Increases in participation in outdoor recreation have been recorded since the 1950s;
- Scotland has the highest participation rates in the country due to a higher proportion of people walking (the most popular sport);
- Walking is the most popular form of activity for those on an activity holiday in Scotland (18 per cent) – this is even more popular with visitors to the Cairngorms (26 per cent);
- Downhill skier numbers in the Cairngorms have declined by over 50 per cent since the late 1980s;
- Ski centres and businesses are increasingly diversifying their activities;
- There is increased specific provision for cyclists in the area;
- The economic importance of fieldsports and game fishing is increasingly recognised, but poorly recorded or quantified.

Monitoring

Governing Councils and interest groups monitor participation in several sports and activities. The National Park Authority, VisitScotland and others also monitor recreation activities.

4.5.11 Information Gaps – Recreation Activities and Networks

- Visitor numbers participating in fieldsports.

4.6 Visitor Facilities and Information Centres

4.6.1 Tourist Information Centres

Tourist Information Centres are an important point of contact between the visitor and the organisations and agencies charged with promoting the Park's activities and attractions.

In total there are nine Tourist Information Centres operating within the Park boundary. Of these, three are open all year (Aviemore, Ballater and Braemar), four are open seasonally (Crathie, Grantown-on-Spey, Kingussie and Tomintoul) and two (Nethy Bridge and Newtonmore) are based in other accommodation (shop and post office respectively).

There are high numbers of people who visit the Cairngorms area on a frequent basis, with 76 per cent of respondents to the Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey indicating this was not their first trip to the area, and 19 per cent having visited the area more than 20 times in the last five years. This may reduce the need to visit Tourist Information Centres to obtain local information, but also provides a challenge for those marketing the area as to where they can effectively publicise existing and new products and services.

4. VISITOR AND RECREATION RESOURCES...cont

Information on the activities and attractions within the Park is also available at other venues, including accommodation outlets, visitor centres and ranger stations.

4.6.2 Commercial Promotion

Landmark Press produce and distribute tourist information brochures to approximately 330 businesses within the Park. Businesses in Strathspey receive about 60 per cent of these, with businesses on Deeside receiving about 24 per cent, the Angus Glens about 13 per cent and the Glenlivet area 3 per cent.

Tourist information is provided by many tourism businesses and attractions, while a substantial proportion of accommodation providers, including almost all hotels and a large number of guest houses, provide visitor information leaflets.

4.6.3 Community Websites

There are a number of local websites which promote the Park, the culture and heritage of its communities and the activities which take place within its boundary. There is, however, no definitive list of the resource, which is dispersed.

4.6.4 Visitor Information

Information about the Park was seen as being easy to access by 45 per cent of all respondents to the Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey.

The Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey recorded 82 per cent of visitors to the area that had made no trips to a Tourist Information Centre during their stay; this peaked at 97 per cent for day trippers. Only 17 per cent intended to visit a Tourist Information Centre at all during their stay. The Rothiemurchus and Glenmore Recreation Survey recorded that 31 per cent of respondents had visited a Tourist Information Centre in the last 12 months, indicating a greater use of Tourist Information Centres.

However, this referred to a much longer time period. It is not clear where visitors are accessing Park information, given the low levels of Tourist Information Centre use and the high information satisfaction rating recorded.

Trends and Observations

- There is no trend data available on the provision of visitor facilities and information within the Park;
- To date the number of Tourist Information Centres has remained reasonably stable. As a result of the restructuring of the Area Tourist Boards and VisitScotland, there may be more changes in the future.

Monitoring

Provision of visitor information and facilities is monitored through VisitScotland, the National Park Authority and use of facilities through visitor surveys.

4.6.5 Information Gaps – Visitor Facilities and Information Centres

- Comprehensive list of community websites;
- Information on where visitors access Park information;
- Trend data on the provision of visitor facilities and information.

4.7 Outdoor Access

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 ensures that everyone visiting the Park has the right to access most land and water if they behave in a responsible manner, respecting the privacy, safety and livelihoods of others and causing no harm to the environment.

The Park Authority has a duty to uphold the right of outdoor access within the Park, to establish a network of core paths and a Local Access Forum and to promote the Code so that everyone in the Park is aware of their rights and responsibilities.

The work of gathering the relevant information in relation to outdoor access is ongoing. An Outdoor Access Audit has been completed, encompassing audits of supply, demand and policy and highlighting protected and promoted path networks, including Rights of Way. The audit also provides information on access points to popular outdoor destinations, car parks, visitor information points, interpretation boards and picnic sites.

4.7.1 Promoted Paths

A number of path networks and long distance paths have been created within the Park. Some have been established for a long time and have Right of Way status while others, such as those developed by the Eastern Cairngorms Access Project, have been created more recently.

These paths are promoted by landowners and managers, environmental organisations, access organisations such as the Highland Access Project, the Upper Deeside Access Trust and the Eastern Cairngorms Access Project (jointly managed by Upper Deeside Access Trust and Angus Council), Scotways, community-based initiatives and specialist walking websites and clubs.

Throughout the Park there is also a number of promoted long distance routes to suit all levels of ability. Popular examples include The Speyside Way, The Badenoch Way and the Dava Way. There are also a number of projects within the Park area currently underway which will add to the network of promoted paths and



Photo: Jimmy Mitchell.

long distance routes. Promoted trails also exist as private business ventures at a number of locations.

4.7.2 Rights of Way

A record of all rights of way in Scotland is maintained by the Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society and was compiled in conjunction with Scottish Natural Heritage with the co-operation of local authorities. This record is known as the National Catalogue of Rights of Way and places rights of way into one of the following three categories:

- Vindicated – all routes declared legally to be rights of way, with evidence of continued usage;
- Asserted – all routes where the landowner accepts right of way status or where the local authority would take court action to protect the route, if necessary;
- Claimed – routes which meet the required criteria for right of way, but which have not been formally asserted or vindicated.

Table 4.7.2 provides a breakdown of rights of way classifications for the Park area.



Photo: Jimmy Mitchell.



Photo: Jimmy Mitchell.

4. VISITOR AND RECREATION RESOURCES...cont

Table 4.7.2: Summary of rights of way classification in the Park

<i>Right of Way Classification</i>	<i>No. in Aberdeen-shire</i>	<i>No. in Angus</i>	<i>No. in Highland</i>	<i>No. in Moray</i>	<i>No. in Park</i>	<i>% of all Rights of Way in Park</i>
Vindicated	5	1	0	1	7	4%
Asserted	11	0	0	0	11	6%
Claimed	36	5	73	81	145	81%
Other Route	0	0	0	16	16	9%
Total No. of Rights of Way	52	6	73	48	179	100%
% of all Rights of Way in Park	29%	3%	41%	27%	100%	

Source: Cairngorms National Park Outdoor Access Audit, October 2005

In Scotland there are over 7,500 rights of way recorded, 179 of which lie within the Park.

At present not all rights of way are signposted, although 15,000 signposts have been erected throughout Scotland, with 46 of the rights of way in the Park signposted.

4.7.3 Transport

Transport is addressed as a separate topic in the Socio-Economic chapter of this report. In common with much of rural Scotland, tourism in the Park is highly car-dependent. Only 2 per cent of respondents in the Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey thought public transport was very good, and 74 per cent said that it had not been applicable. This would correspond with the very high proportion of visitors (83 per cent) who had travelled to the Park by private car. This compares with 87 per cent of visitors in the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Visitor Survey who travelled to the Park by private car. In Scotland as a whole 65 per cent of tourists from the UK travelled to Scotland by private car.

Once visitors are in the Park area there appears to be good car parking provision, which achieved the highest rating of very good and good (79 per cent) of all the facilities investigated in the Cairngorms National Park Visitor Survey.

There are 112 formal car parking areas within the Park and approximately 45 informal areas. A number of private estates and organisations charge for parking, using the money raised to improve car parking and toilet facilities, as well as developing and maintaining their access networks.

The second most popular mode of transport is private bus/coach, which accounts for 8 per cent of visitors to the Park. There are no records of the number of visitors travelling to the Park by train.

The transport infrastructure within the Park is heavily dependent on trunk roads, particularly the A9. There are good train links in the north of the Park, with mainline trains stopping at Dalwhinnie, Newtonmore, Kingussie, Aviemore and Carrbridge on their way to Inverness. It is different in the south and east of the Park, where Aberdeen provides the nearest rail link to the Braemar and Ballater area.

The bus links to the Park are again stronger in the north of the Park, with regular services on the A9 to and from major UK cities, passing through Glasgow, Edinburgh and Perth. In the south and east of the Park there are good links between major UK cities and Aberdeen. From there more local buses are the means of transport into the Park.

Postbuses are another important form of transport within rural areas. Postbus routes operating in the Park include Ballater to Glenshee; Dalwhinnie to Drumochter; Kirriemuir to Glen Prosen; and Kirriemuir to Glen Clova.

There are several community car and transport schemes operating in the Park. The Angus Transport Forum is a leader in Demand Responsive Transport, offering an example of what can be achieved when all public transportation is co-ordinated.

There are some initiatives to improve cycle carriage on buses in and around the Park. Cycle carriage is available on several routes out of Aberdeen and Inverness.

The National Park's integrated timetable and cycle/walks brochure (May 2005) combines local transport information and suggested routes for cyclists and walkers travelling to the Park from major cities.

The nearest air links are at Inverness and Aberdeen airports, which are both within one hour's drive of the Park.

4.7.4 Outdoor Access Events

The Park is the setting for many types of event. These include competitive sporting competitions such as mountain biking, skiing, telemarking, hill-running and orienteering, but also charity fund-raising events involving mass-participation walks. There is also a number of competitive hill races across the Park, some of which are connected to Highland Games.

A number of walking festivals take place across the Cairngorms from May to October and are publicised in one leaflet for the whole of the Park.

In Badenoch and Strathspey the Aviemore Walking Festival runs for one week during May, with ten different guided walks available each day graded from easy to strenuous. The festival

is in its third year, and walks are led by the various ranger services and other outdoor leaders. The Spirit of Speyside Walking Festival takes place in August and is now in its fourth year. It offers around 20 walks over five days for a range of abilities.

In Deeside, the Ballater, Royal Deeside Walking Week has run every May since 1998 and offers three walks of different grades each day. The Active Aboyne Outdoor Festival takes place in July and offers a range of walks for different abilities.

The Angus Glens Walking Festival has been running for three years and takes place over four days each June. The Blairgowrie and East Perthshire Walking Festival, now in its second year, takes place over six days from the end of September/beginning of October and offers a range of activities from low-level walks to more challenging routes.

Trends and Observations

- There is an increasing focus on countryside access, through legislation (particularly the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003) and through specific local initiatives.

Monitoring

The National Park Authority and Local Outdoor Access Forum monitor some aspects of outdoor access supply and demand. Scottish Natural Heritage also monitors outdoor access.

4.8 Access for All

4.8.1 All Abilities Access Survey

Following the Disability Discrimination Act in 1995, the Cairngorms Partnership initiated wide-ranging discussions with local and national bodies concerned with disabled access. In June 2001 The Cairngorms Partnership commissioned Reforesting Scotland's 'Woods for All' project to undertake a piece of work resulting in the All Abilities Access Survey. The survey looked at 15 specific sites in detail, 12 of which are within

4. VISITOR AND RECREATION RESOURCES...cont

the Park boundary. The main findings of this survey are summarised here.

Parking

The quality of parking spaces was important for disabled visitors. The key requirements were that there should be specific spaces for disabled drivers in small and/or busy car parks. Parking spaces needed to be long and wide, with an even surface, where possible.

Buildings and Amenities

Toilets and sheltered seating areas were very important to visitors, and although there was perceived to be a relatively high number of disabled toilets, poor access to them reduced their value. It was suggested that improvements should be made to the design of amenities, for example picnic table design to allow disabled visitors and their carers to use them.

Signage and Information

Most of the sites used waymarking posts and corresponding leaflets, which seemed for the most part effective. The main concerns raised were over-complicated and non-user-friendly leaflets. There were also issues over faint or complicated presentation of text and graphics on interpretation boards. One popular suggestion was tactile waymarking symbols, or possibly even tactile maps. Rangers for guided walks were seen as a valuable resource.

Paths and Access

It was noted during the survey that there was a large difference in the quality and accessibility of paths, due in part to the nature of the terrain, the visitor demand, historic and aesthetic issues and the stage of development of the site. It was suggested that there were a number of improvements that could be made, for example gate type and width. It was noted that every effort should be made to improve access, while ensuring the safety of all visitors.

Trends and Observations

- No specific trends identified.

Monitoring

There is no comprehensive approach to monitoring access for all.

4.9 Ranger Services

The provision of ranger services throughout the Park is complex and is affected by a wide range of issues. The Cairngorms National Park Authority is currently unique among UK National Park Authorities in not directly employing rangers.

There are 13 organisations within the Park employing 26.5 full-time equivalent rangers and delivering a programme of activities which covers the four essential aims of a ranger service as defined by Scottish Natural Heritage, namely:

- Welcoming visitors to the countryside;
- Mediating between the public and land managers;
- Promoting awareness, understanding and responsible use of the countryside;
- Caring for and enhancing natural heritage enjoyed by visitors.

These ranger services appear to provide services to three broad customer groups:

- Land managers;
- Visitors;
- Local Communities.

There are, however, differences in the make-up of each of the services, and in particular, in the remit of the staff. The diverse mechanisms that exist to fund staff, statutory roles and responsibilities of each of the organisations and their lack of uniformity means that co-ordination of ranger services is complex.

Ten services are part-funded by Scottish Natural Heritage through their discretionary grant funding. Four of these are employed by local authorities, four by private estates, one by the National Trust for Scotland and one by a

community group. Of the remaining three services one is managed by the Forestry Commission Scotland, one by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and one is entirely funded by a private estate.

The services work in three geographic groupings:

- Nine services cover defined sites often corresponding to an estate;

- Three services operate over a local authority area;
- One service is community-based.

Eight of the services operate bases or centres that are open to the public and provide visitor information and interpretation.

Table 4.9.1 details the area of operation and funding sources for each of the ranger services operating within the Park.

Table 4.9.1: Ranger Services – areas of operation and funding sources

<i>Ranger Service</i>	<i>Area of Operation</i>	<i>Funding</i>	<i>Scottish Natural Heritage Discretionary Ranger Grant</i>
Angus Glens	Angus Council	Angus Council Forestry Commission Scotland	Yes
Aberdeenshire Council	Aberdeenshire Council	Aberdeenshire Council	Yes
Highland Council	Highland Council	Highland Council	Yes
Speyside Way	Speyside Way	Moray Council	Yes
Forestry Commission Scotland	Forestry Commission Scotland Land	Forestry Commission Scotland	No
The National Trust for Scotland (Mar Lodge Estate)	Mar Lodge Estate	The National Trust for Scotland	Yes (part of the national agreement between The National Trust for Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage)
Balmoral Estate	Balmoral Estate	Balmoral Estate	Yes
Invercauld Estate	Invercauld Estate	Invercauld Estate	No
Glen Tanar	Glen Tanar Estate	Glen Tanar Charitable Estate	Yes
Glenlivet Estate	Glenlivet Estate	The Crown Estate	Yes
Explore Abernethy	Nethy Bridge	Explore Abernethy Community Group	No
Rothiemurchus Estate	Rothiemurchus Estate	Rothiemurchus Estate	Yes (Scottish Natural Heritage grant aid is for agreed outputs, many of which are delivered by the ranger service)

Due to the wide remit of the local authority rangers, there is technically only a small area of the mountain core of the Park that is not covered by ranger services. However, there is no analysis of the coverage based on customer need.

In addition to ranger services there are a number of wardens and site managers who undertake some of the activities covered by rangers, but do not call themselves rangers. It is unlikely that the public differentiate between these groups.

4. VISITOR AND RECREATION RESOURCES...cont

4.9.1 Information Gaps – Ranger Services

- Analysis of ranger services coverage against customer need.

4.10 Information and Interpretation

As part of its Interpretive Framework, the Cairngorms National Park Authority has identified the need to undertake an audit of all interpretive facilities across the Park. In 1999 the Highland Interpretive Strategy undertook an audit of interpretive facilities, including built items, structures and buildings, but excluding leaflets, books and websites. The audit identified 154 facilities in the Badenoch and Strathspey area of the Park. There is no comparable information available for the rest of the Park.

The recent Cairngorms National Park Authority's Outdoor Access Audit compiled data on waymarking, leaflets and notice boards providing information about promoted paths.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority currently produces with partners a number of Park-wide publications providing information for visitors. These include:

- Visitor Guide;
- Cairngorms Countryside Events;
- Intergrated timetable;
- Gaelic Place Names;
- Walking Festivals Leaflet.

Explore Abernethy is a community initiative working to improve the understanding between land managers and recreational users of the area, while The Crown Estate at Glenlivet has developed a range of interpretive materials. The Mountaineering Council of Scotland has developed a small leaflet entitled 'Where to Go', which aims to raise awareness amongst

walkers and other users of the Scottish countryside of their potential impact on the environment and to inform them of ways of reducing the environmental damage caused by human sanitation. Scotways has also produced a leaflet on hill tracks within the Park.

There are currently nine specialised Outdoor Education Centres throughout the Park which provide a wide range of outdoor activities for individuals and organised groups.

Ranger Services in the Park provide guided walks and are very often the local contact able to offer advice and information to visitors when they are exploring the countryside. There are also a number of organisations involved specifically in the sustainable education elements of recreational and leisure activities. They include The Highland Council, the Forestry Commission, Forest Enterprise, the National Farmers' Union, Scottish Natural Heritage, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, The National Trust for Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and The Mountaineering Council of Scotland. These organisations provide an educational and information service through their presence at agricultural shows and games, by running or helping to fund visitor centres and by providing interpretation boards, signage and visitor guides.

Local estates are also actively involved and provide guided walks, information on flora and fauna, visitor guides, displays, code of conduct for water users, a mountain bike leaflet and map, familiarisation for local tourism businesses and pathfinder packs.

4.10.1 Information Gaps – Information and Interpretation

- Audit of interpretive facilities.