

BGPP Final report “This is our story.....”

Executive Summary

The Badenoch Great Place Project was set up with the vision that by the end of the project, Badenoch would be renowned as a place within the Cairngorms National Park with a strong character and identity based on its distinctive cultural heritage. Over the last 3 years you may well have seen or been involved in the range of events and activities that have been organised to promote and celebrate the heritage of the area. Alongside this, much work has been ongoing behind the scenes to develop a tourism offering that draws on the tangible and intangible heritage of the area and presents it in modern and innovative ways. Initially work focused on the audit and possible interpretation of Badenoch’s cultural heritage sites. The emerging key themes were used to develop and test a Tourist Route which has since evolved into a number of walking, cycling and driving itineraries for visitors to follow based on Badenoch’s rich heritage. The “Badenoch The Storylands” brand also emerged from this work as did the website www.badenochstorylands.com. In 2020, content was developed that has been used in a suite of digital and published resources that will encourage people to come to the area, stay a while and learn more about this less well known part of the Cairngorms National Park. This culminated in the launch of the Badenoch Storylands mobile App in 2021; a smorgasbord of stories, imagery and song, all designed to celebrate the heritage of the area and enhance the visitor experience.

The Project concluded in September 2021 with another hugely successful Badenoch Heritage Festival plus a closing Conference and concert. They showcased the interest, passion and excitement that has been generated over the past three years. As the project comes to a close, all involved are keen that this is just the start of the area’s journey. The BGPP has put in place the building blocks from which it is hoped the community and partners will continue to develop the area to sustain a vibrant rural community, a place where tourists will choose to prolong their stay. This final report has been put together to help provide a snapshot of all that has been achieved. It is designed to be shared publicly, so please feel free to pass it on. It is also available online at www.badenochstorylands.com.

Background

In 2017, the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan 2017-22 (NPPP) identified Badenoch as a “spatial priority area” requiring focused investment and assistance. This was based on identified socio-economic issues and the need to plan positively for the impact caused by the dualling of the A9 between Inverness and Perth. Although visitor numbers to the Cairngorms National Park (CNP) had been growing yearly, Badenoch had not benefited proportionately from this tourism expansion, despite having two large visitor attractions and some of the best

heritage sites and potential experiences in the whole of the National Park, indeed Scotland. Opportunities existed to broaden the tourism offering and there was considerable potential for Badenoch to carve out a stronger regional identity within the Park on the basis of its heritage.

By encouraging visitors to spend longer in Badenoch this could also ease visitor pressures in the Aviemore-Glenmore-Cairngorm corridor. Badenoch Heritage, a community led group had been researching, auditing and mapping local assets but activity had stalled somewhat due to lack of funds and the necessary institutional support. When the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) announced that it wished to pilot a new Great Place Scheme in Scotland, it provided the opportunity to pull together these strands (special priority area, Badenoch Heritage's work, existing attractions, A9 dualling) and this helped to frame this specific project.

Aim and vision of the project

The Badenoch Great Place Project (BGPP) was a 3 year project that took stock of the rich cultural heritage of the area and looked to then put that heritage at the centre of future tourism and economic development. The Vision was that by the end of 2020 Badenoch would be renowned as a place within the Cairngorms National Park with a strong character and identity based on its distinctive cultural heritage.

The Project aims were to deliver a Place:

- Where there is a strong destination within the Cairngorms National Park and Scotland with a reputation based on its heritage, where the many key heritage attractions and features of interest are promoted to create a great visitor experience;
- Where the rich heritage assets are turned into a wide range of experiences and economic opportunities;
- Where a wider range of people are more directly involved in caring for and presenting the area's heritage;
- Which is managed by a sustainable partnership of organisations and communities who work and embed heritage at the heart of their plans.

This has been delivered through a package of over 20 interconnected activities that included research, visual, audio and digital material creation, destination development, community participation and skills development, heritage celebration and marketing and interpretation in all their forms.

The project timeframe was extended for nine months due to the impacts of the Covid pandemic which coincided with a change of Project Officer.

Project Funding and Governance

The project which was led by CNPA, has been majority funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund through its Great Place Scheme. Match funding has been provided by Transport Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, The Highland Council and Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA). The Project Board was made up of representatives from a range of partner organisations including High Life Highland, The Highland Council, Historic Environment Scotland, Royal Zoological Society Scotland, Badenoch Heritage, Transport Scotland and Voluntary Action in Badenoch and Strathspey (VABS). The Project funded a Project Officer who was employed by VABS. The officer formed part of the Project Team who met regularly to coordinate and deliver the Activity Plan. The team consisted of personnel from VABS, CNPA and Badenoch Heritage, a local heritage organisation.

Project Aims and Key Activities

The Project has spent almost 4 years working to deliver an Activity Plan that was agreed with the NLHF in 2017. The main activities fell into three broad themes:

Research and content

- Researching the area's heritage
- Collecting and recording local stories
- Researching Gaelic place names
- Creating visual content
- Composing music and song
- Setting up a Digital archive

Destination Development

- Developing a Heritage based visitor offering
- Badenoch Brand
- Launching a new website
- Creating a Badenoch visitor App
- Developing Interpretation and Marketing Plans
- Speyside Way Extension interpretation
- Promoting the area to the tourist trade
- Developing a sustainable legacy for the Project

Celebration and Involvement

- Running a Heritage Festival and events programme
- Developing a heritage volunteer network
- Using heritage to develop skills for young people
- Community and Business Skills building
- Hosting a Heritage Conference.

Project Outputs and Achievements

Research and content

Cultural Heritage Interpretation & Marketing Strategy study (CHITMS)

This study was undertaken to audit Badenoch's authentic cultural heritage. 3,684 sites were identified from National records which were eventually filtered down to about 75 sites (See website for information on each site). The intangible heritage of the area was also identified and catalogued through consultation events, discussion, online surveys and interviews. Key themes were identified as a means of presenting the region's stories in order to communicate important messages about the place and what it means to people. The contractors' plans for interpreting and marketing the area have been further developed and refined by the Project Team over the period.

Gaelic Place names

Gaelic is a huge part of Badenoch's cultural identity and heritage. Research was undertaken in 2018 into the origins of the place names of the area. This was then distilled into an accessible format that has been used in both digital and printed outputs such as the App and a Gaelic place name leaflet. Through verse and song it has been woven into the storytelling on the App. CNPA also used this work in its development of a Shinty Trail, showing how shinty and Gaelic are strongly intertwined in the history of the sport.

Collecting and recording local stories

Stories and songs sourced through the community and oral history events were developed and recorded by locally renowned musician and composer Hamish Napier. 17 tales covering the Picts, whisky, landscape, witches and Cluny Macpherson have been incorporated into the App. This brings the landscape and place alive, connecting people following the numerous self guided tours to the past.

Creating visual content

A silver lining to emerge from the pandemic was the opportunity for the project to focus on developing, creating and collating the baseline content that was required to populate many of the project outputs. Specialists developed a range of media for the Project including:

- Creation of layered GIS maps of Badenoch and the assets
- Aerial imagery and drone footage of key heritage sites
- Augmented reality visualisations of 6 key sites in Badenoch

- Creation and recording of musical pieces
- Composing music and song

Setting up a Digital archive to store for the future

A 5GB Badenoch Archive has been created that will sit within the established Am Baile archive site run by Highlife Highland. Volunteers have been recruited who are starting to upload content for this online archive of historical material which will be accessible to all.

<https://www.ambaile.org.uk/>

Destination Development

The process of developing a Heritage based visitor offering has evolved over several stages. From initial asset research, concept testing the suggested routes and understanding the visitor profile, to then developing the brand, itineraries and visitor resources. This has culminated in working with the travel trade to promote the area through an embryonic social media and print promotional campaign.

Creating a Brand for Badenoch

One of the clear recommendations from the research work was to create an area destination brand, based on the overarching interpretive themes that had been identified. The purpose of this branding is to: *“Seek to preserve the unique selling point of Badenoch’s intangible cultural heritage, whilst creating an identity that can be used by everyone in the area”*.

The challenge was to capture this essence whilst also being recognisable, place-based, unique, unambiguous and capable of reproduction on a range of outputs. Badenoch: The Storylands was chosen in June 2019 as it captured the connection between people and the land and placed an emphasis on the rich array of stories to be told about the area.

It is widely accepted that the use of this as a brand is only the first step in a marketing process that will require refinement and adaptation beyond the lifetime of the Project.

Developing a Tourist Route

Work was undertaken to develop and market test a tourist route for the Badenoch area based on the key assets and themes identified in the CHITMS study. This went through several iterations before finally being developed as a series of tours for walkers, cyclists and drivers. These

identify key heritage points of interest that can either be physically visited, viewed from afar or learnt about through digital media. Information about these tours can be found on the App, website and a set of destination leaflets that have been developed.

Website

Badenochstorylands.com was launched in August 2020. It celebrates the history and heritage of the area and has been used to provide up to date information about the Project itself. An interactive map provides information on the 75 places of interest identified in the CHITMS study.

The website continues to develop with recordings of previous Heritage Festival webinars and winter online talks available to view. Further content and resources will be added in the coming months with the intention that the website will become a live and vibrant portal for visitors to the area in the years to come.

App

The Badenoch Storylands App was launched in Spring 2021. It is an “Area Destination” App, showcasing the heritage of the area and bringing it alive for visitors in modern innovative ways. As well as an interactive map, the App includes tours designed to be undertaken by car, cycle or on foot. These have been brought to life through GPS linked storytelling and augmented reality 3D models at particular points of interest or viewpoints. On the ground visitors will be encouraged to link to the App to immerse themselves in the stories of that place.

Interpretation Strategy and Marketing Plan

New interpretation, benches and signposting on the ground have been developed, both within the communities and at specific identified key sites. This draws on all work to date and links into the App. Strategic Interpretation plans have been developed for each community in Badenoch which identify future requirements. Much of this will be delivered as part of the Project Legacy but that associated with the Badenoch section of the Speyside Way was completed during 2021. A Steering Group has been set up to help develop the strategic approach to marketing the area as a whole which will strengthen the identity of Badenoch for the visitor.

Promoting the area to the tourist trade

As the tourist offering developed, so the Project was able to work with new partners such as Visit Scotland and Visit Cairngorms on promoting Badenoch to audiences both new and old. A concerted local promotional campaign took place around the launch of the App, Familiarisation visits have been hosted for travel trade businesses and a stand at the next Discover Scotland Expo has been organised.

Promotional products to establish the Badenoch Brand in the public domain have been created which have been, and will continue to be, used to promote the area.

Celebration and Involvement

Throughout the project, talks, walks, workshops, schools careers days and drop in sessions have taken place enabling a wide range of people to engage in and share their knowledge of their local heritage. An ambitious annual heritage festival has been developed and finally, the Project culminated in a final celebration event and concert.

Art competition

The Great Badenoch Art Competition with a theme of the Culture of Badenoch, took place in 2019. Entries were invited in any medium, expressing what, to the individual artist, was important or special about the culture of Badenoch, past and present in the widest terms. Open to all primary and secondary school children in the area, well as adults, submissions included works covering the built, archaeological, sporting, legend, landscape and natural heritage that make Badenoch a Great Place. A touring exhibition of the entries took place as part of the 2019 Heritage Festival.

Heritage Festival and events programmes

From small beginnings in 2018, the festival developed into a 2 week 62 event programme in 2019, full of walks, talks and battle re-enactments. In 2020, XPO North assisted the Project in hosting a virtual festival from which the 2021 event became a hybrid of online and physical events. In all over 100 separate events have been organised, with many 100s of attendees. (virtual 400+). A summary of events that took place during the BGPP is given at Appendix 2

Our Heritage Ambassadors

A team of amazing volunteers were recruited in 2019 to support, share and celebrate the heritage of the area. They got involved in the festivals and supporting other elements of the project. . This included working with young people on skills development, bringing more local residents into the project, raising greater awareness of their local heritage, as well as helping inform visitors to the area. Unfortunately the pandemic curtailed volunteer involvement in many aspects of the project in 2020 and restricted the recruitment of further volunteers as originally planned.

Developing skills for young people

The Project has worked with local school children to give them a taste of heritage related skills and careers from using drones for aerial photography, learning how to become a conservator to getting involved in the Croftgowan archaeological dig and exploring some of the local heritage sites themselves. Traditional music workshops and residential weekends were held to explore and practice the music of the area, culminating in a performance at the project's closing concert.

Croftgowan Dig

With support from the BGPP, Badenoch Heritage succeeded in securing new funding from NHLF to organise an archaeological dig at Croftgowan, thought to be the largest Pictish barrow cemetery in Scotland. The results of the dig exceeded the expectations of the archaeologists with some unique finds being made including the discovery of human remains which have been sent off for carbon dating. This analysis should throw more light on the history of the area and the people that inhabited it in 600AD. The dig, undertaken by volunteers, attracted significant local interest with visits from both the public and local schools.

Storytelling Sessions

Building on the interest generated in developing the stories for the App, Badenoch Heritage instigated The Storylands Sessions; a series of community music, storytelling, poetry and song events across Badenoch. They acquired additional funding which has enabled them to host learning sessions focused on a specific skill such as Storytelling, Performance Poetry, Step Dancing or Ways to Make a Folk Jam Session Work Well. These have then been followed by open join-in sessions that include these various elements. All of this reinforcing and embedding the brand 'Badenoch The Storylands' within the local community.

Community and Business Skills building

Alongside regular community engagement events, as the brand and itineraries developed, skills building workshops took place with local businesses to help maximise the benefits that the Storylands concept could bring for them. This included marketing skills training and regular information and engagement events

The final Celebrations

Plans for a large 2 day National level conference had to be revisited in the light of the pandemic and instead a final day of celebrations was held. This included a celebration Webinar and panel discussion including an address by Kate Forbes MSP and a presentation on Scotland's Year of

Stories by Lord Thurso, Chair of Visit Scotland. 'The Story of Badenoch' celebration film (projected at Ruthven Barracks) was premiered, cake was eaten and the day culminated in a magical closing concert of traditional music and song with the premiere of a suite of composed for the Project by a local musician.

Legacy and Beyond 2021

In many respects, the BGPP is just the start of the journey. It has put in place the building blocks from which it is hoped the community and partners will continue to develop the area to sustain a vibrant rural community, a place where tourists will choose to prolong their stay. The National Lottery Great Place Scheme has been very much about development and involvement, not large capital investment in an area. The opportunities to build on the work undertaken will be numerous and multifaceted.

Over the course of the project, Badenoch Heritage has developed from an unincorporated community organisation into a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation with more than 50 members. It has also taken over the organisation of the annual heritage festival and developed a winter talks programme. It will use the experience gained through the Project to continue to build community interest and involvement in, exploring and celebrating the Badenoch's unique heritage.

A Legacy Board consisting of the CNPA, VABS, Badenoch Heritage and the Cairngorm Business Partnership has been formed. They will meet several times a year and provide strategic guidance and where possible support, to interested parties to build on the work to date.

Separate Legacy and Marketing plans have been developed to help shape and guide work beyond 2021. The Legacy Plan outlines how the investment made during the project will be secured and developed for the future. The aspiration is that the legacy will facilitate new projects that will build on the communities' assets and result in new opportunities for ongoing community benefit.

The marketing plan focuses on the specific actions required in the next 3 years to continue to build the destination experience for visitors. Funding has been secured to deliver the immediate work required to March 2022. Thereafter it is hoped that parties will use their own resources or respond to future funding opportunities as and when they arise.

2022 will be the Year of Scotland's Stories which will be a showcase of the country's rich literature, oral traditions and myths and legends. Badenoch is now well positioned to benefit from the opportunities that this year of celebration will bring and has the chance to become renowned for its rich cultural heritage.

APPENDIX 1 - References and links - Where to find materials referred to in this report

- Badenoch the Storylands website - <https://badenochstorylands.com/>
- Badenoch the Storylands App – search BadenochStorylands in your App store
- Tour Tales – the Black Watch Officer -
<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=black+officer++tour+tales++youtube&docid=608025235909000145&mid=D29F1D5325BB313EA7C1D29F1D5325BB313EA7C1&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>
- The Story of Badenoch – link to vimeo etc (waiting for this to be set up)
- Celebration conference – link to Kate Forbes, Lord Thurso presentations (waiting for these)
- Closing Concert – (to be uploaded to website)
- Badenoch Archive – <https://www.ambaile.org.uk/>
- Stories, music, augmented reality images – all to be found on the App
- Marketing plan – request via website
- Legacy Plan – request via website

APPENDIX 2 – Events held as part of BGPP

2019

- 5 archive drop-in sessions (part of Community Heritage Project)
- 2 oral history workshops (part of Community Heritage Project)
- 2 guided walks (part of Community Heritage Project)
- Conservation Learning Workshops for S2 pupils
- Folk Museum Collections Tours for schools
- Folk Museum township, Living History Tours for schools
- Gaelic workshops

2019 Badenoch Heritage Festival

- Bàideanach: Badenoch Festival Launch
- Native Species & Reintroduction Talks
- Storytelling Drop-in events
- Touring Badenoch Art Exhibition
- Women's Camanachd Cup Final
- The Dell: Camanachd Ground Tour
- Highland Pony Heritage Treks
- General Wade's Mystery Road – guided walk
- Gaelic place-names in the Landscape – walks and talk
- Wildcat talk
- Explore Medieval Kingussie – guided tour
- Dalwhinnie Distillery and its History – visit

- Highland Folk Museum Collection Tours
- E-bike adventures to Dun da Lamh Hillfort
- Deoch an Dorus: One for the Road – Talk
- Seanchas na Sgìre: Gaelic Heritage Walk
- Nechtansmere 685AD: Badenoch's Great Pictish Battle - talk
- Traditional Bothy Ceilidh at the Stables
- Discover the Highland Folk Museum – guided tour
- Victorian Horse and Carriage Picnic Drive
- Torr Alvie Hillfort – guided walk
- Ruthven Barracks – guided tour
- Scanning Badenoch -volunteer geophysics survey days
- Newtonmore Shinty Heritage – guided tour
- BGPP - Benefits for business – information sharing event
- HES Stonemasons demonstrations
- Recent Archaeological Discoveries at Raitts – talk
- The Real Black Officer – talk
- Wolf Training and Feed – visit
- Shared Stories: A Year in the Cairngorms – open mic evening
- Storytelling at the Park – local folktales
- Garvamore Inn, Garva Bridge and General Wade – guided visit
- A Tribute to Dr Mackay by his Pupils

- World Wide Spin in Public Day – spinning demonstrations
- Festival Celebration - music

2020 Virtual festival

- Heritage, Tourism and Place-making: Getting ready for Scotland's Year of Stories
- Into the Marshes: Journeying through the history which created Insh Marshes,
- Gaels, Camans, Badenoch – the centre of the Shinty universe,
- Dun da Lamh: A very Highland hillfort
- Newtonmore turns 200 – The Early Days.

Winter Talks 2021

3 talks inc Cultural Genocide "Badenoch and the toppling of statues and reputations – David Taylor

2021 Festival

- Northern Picts and Torr Alvie Dig - talk
- Meet the BTS App: Dun da Lamh – guided walk
- Clan Macpherson & Museum webinar
- Newtonmore 200 year exhibition
- Garva Bridge and Peatland Restoration
- Early Newtonmore – guided walk & talk
- The Black Officer - talk
- Dedicated lives – Macphersons in the Ministry

- Archaeological Dig – 5 day dig at Croftgowan,
- Black Officer – Life and Death - visit
- Ben Alder Estate - life and work on the Estate.
- Storytelling Sessions
- Meet the BTS App:
- Fairy mound and Macdonald cairn – guided walk
- Wildcats and the Highland Wildlife Park: past, present & future – talk
- The History of Loch Insh Outdoor Centre
- Glen Truim – guided walk
- Torr Alvie and Nechtansmere talk
- Meet the BTS App: Kinraig to Kingussie – guided walk
- Meet the BTS App: Torr Alvie Hillfort – guided walk
- The Shepherd's Tale – storytelling session
- Kinrara House – virtual tour
- Meet the BTS App: Raitts Township & Souterrain – guided walk

25th Sep 21 Final Celebrations

Webinar

- Keynote Speech – Kate Forbes MSP
- Fly through film of Badenoch
- Badenoch Great Place Project: Badenoch The Storylands
- Badenoch The Storylands: Meet the App
- Tribute to Dr Oliver O'Grady
- Scotland's Year of Stories 2022
- Spirit of the Highlands Project

- Legacy: The 'Story of the Future'
- Panel Discussion - Creating a culture of storytelling in our communities

Closing Concert