

# Cairngorms National Park

## Guidance for organised outdoor access events

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### Introduction

#### Welcome to the Cairngorms

The Cairngorms National Park is a great place to hold organised outdoor events. The area offers unrivalled opportunities for event participants to enjoy the spectacular landscapes, high-quality environments and the remarkable wildlife of the National Park.

Well-planned, sustainably organised and responsibly managed events can provide rich experiences for the people taking part, make positive contributions to the economy of the area and have a minimal environmental impact on the National Park.

The Cairngorms has an international reputation for its landscape and wildlife and many event organisers choose to hold events here to take advantage of this stunning scenic backdrop. There may be additional considerations that need to be respected when planning an event in the National Park, to ensure the special wildlife and habitats aren't disturbed, and the planning stage might take a bit longer, but it will be worth it!

This document is based on the "[Outdoor events in Scotland](#)" guide produced by the National Access Forum Scotland and NatureScot, with an added Cairngorms National Park perspective, so that everyone understands how best to manage events in this particular and special part of Scotland.

This guidance will be useful to anyone planning an event in the National Park to ensure that your event meets our shared vision: **An outstanding National Park, enjoyed and valued by everyone, where people and nature thrive together.**

## Outdoor events

The sort of events that this guidance is aimed at are those which are based on active outdoor recreation, for example:

- Hill races, orienteering events, sponsored walks, running events
- Mountain bike races, gravel bike events
- Paddle sport competitions (eg canoe, kayak, paddleboard), sailing events
- Triathlons, outdoor swimming events
- Long-distance horse riding events
- Challenge events, off-road fundraising events

Group outings by outdoor recreational club members are not classed as formal events. However much of this guidance and many of the pointers to best practice (particularly the planning section on page X) will help clubs ensure activities are being run responsibly and thus within access rights. Further guidance about orienteering activities, which have a higher risk of impacting on protected wildlife, has been developed in partnership with the Scottish Orienteering Association and can be viewed [here](#).

Events such as road-based events, car rallies, Highland games, and television broadcasts do not fall within the scope of this guidance, as they are not covered by access rights (as defined by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003).

## The Cairngorms National Park Authority

The role of the Park Authority regarding events is to:

- Promote best practice in the organisation of events
- Ensure events are organised following the Park Authority's position on outdoor access events (see annex A)
- Uphold access rights in relations to events
- Arrange, if appropriate, for temporary suspension of access rights
- Provide advice regarding events to both event organisers and to land managers

The Park Authority does not decide which events can go ahead, nor can it give any permission for an event. If permission is required – this is for the relevant landowner or land manager to grant, in consultation with others.

## Scottish Outdoor Access Code

The [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) (the Code) is the guide to responsible behaviour in the Scottish countryside. It includes detailed guidance on a range of different activities as well as advice on organising and hosting outdoor events (see sections 3.60 and 3.61 of the Code).

The three principles of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code are:

- Respect the interests of other people
- Care for the environment
- Take responsibility for your own actions

Outdoor events should follow all advice in the Code. Event organisers should ensure that event participants are aware of, and follow, the Code.

### Any questions?

If you need any advice about organising your event in the Cairngorms National Park, please reach out to us by email:

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

### Park map



## Planning

**It's good to talk! Start your discussions with stakeholders early, when you begin planning your event.**

When planning your event please remember that when you are considering potential impacts of your event that should also include any associated activities (eg practice days, social rides / activities) which may occur either side of the main event.

These may be considered events in their own right, so you should ensure you are clear when liaising with land managers exactly what and how many events / activities you are proposing.

## Event size

General guidance about event size is given in the table 1, this is given as a rough rule of thumb. In planning and assessing impacts of an event, spectator numbers also need to be taken into account.

	Event size		
Event type	Small	Medium	Large
Foot-based	25 – 50	50 – 200	200+
Cycle	25 – 50	50 – 100	100+
Equestrian	10 – 25	25 – 50	50+

Table 1: Classification of events by number of participants

## Planning schedule

Nearly 50% of the National Park is designated as “protected areas” – this means that additional permission from nature agencies and / or environmental assessments may need to be carried out. Similarly, events across a large geographical area may also need to consult with multiple landowners and several local authorities. All these things can take additional time.

Table 2 gives a rough indication of what timescales might be required, dependent on event size.

Event size	Research and consultation time
Very large / competitive events	At least 2 years
Large	1 – 2 years
Medium	6 months – 1 year
Small	3 – 6 months

Table 2: Indicative timescales for planning your event

## Planning framework

Our event planning flowchart will lead you through the steps to work through for planning a successful event in the National Park. Each step is covered in detail in the following sections.

Planning framework / flowchart

	Step		
Concept stage	1	Check your event is consistent with the National Park aims ➤ page <b>X</b>	
	2	Confirm if landowner <b>permission</b> is required ➤ page <b>X</b>	Undertake early dialogue with landowners on the principle of your event
Research and planning	3	Research areas, routes, timings and wildlife considerations ➤ page <b>X</b>	Ongoing liaison and consultation with land managers, nature agencies, VisitCairngorms, communities, business etc
	4	Complete an environmental check and assessment ➤ page <b>X</b>	
	5	Plan your biosecurity measures ➤ page <b>X</b>	
	6	Check your event is meeting best practice for sustainability and accessibility ➤ page <b>X</b>	
	7	Check your promotion is comprehensive ➤ page <b>X</b>	
Final planning	8	Finalise landowner permissions, pre-event notices etc	

## Aims of the Cairngorms National Park

**Well planned events that showcase the National Park are welcome**

Outdoor access events have an important role to play in helping promote the enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park, while also contributing economic and social benefits to communities.

The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 sets out four key aims for National Parks:

- To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area.
- To promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area.
- To promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area to the public.
- To promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities.

## Access rights and permissions

### There's a subtle but important difference between liaison and permission

While some outdoor events can run under access rights, others will need permission from the landowner.

For every type and scale of event it is good practice to liaise with, ie speak and listen to, all the relevant land managers.

### Land manager permission

For some events, you may need to specifically ask for a land manager's **permission**. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code gives guidance on the circumstances where land manager permission is required (section 3.60 of the Code), and this is illustrated more fully in Table 3 (below).

If permission is required, this can be granted with or without conditions or can be refused at the discretion of the land manager. Land managers can also make an appropriate charge for hosting events to cover administration, management time and / or use of facilities.

If permission is granted to host an initial event this does not confer any right that the event can be repeated in future years. Potential cumulative impacts on eg communities and the environment may need to be considered.

Table 3: Circumstances where land manager permission is likely to be required

Does the event, no matter how well organised, have the potential to:	Permission is likely to be required from the relevant land manager when:
need new or temporary facilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Car parking is required</li> <li>• Fencing, toilets, litter bins, marquees, roped off areas, marked courses or signs are required</li> </ul>
unreasonably hinder land management operations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timing conflicts with planned land management operations or seasonal sensitivities, eg lambing, forest harvesting or grouse shooting</li> <li>• The event takes place close in time to other events over the same land and their combined effects may hinder land</li> </ul>
unreasonably interfere with other people's enjoyment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large numbers of participants / spectators will be in remote areas or areas popular for recreation</li> <li>• High volumes of people will be on narrow paths, passing in short timescales</li> <li>• Noisy events will take place in quiet areas</li> <li>• Competitive behaviour is likely, ie races</li> <li>• The event takes place close in time to other events over the same land and their combined effect is likely to interfere with other people's enjoyment as above</li> </ul>
unreasonably affect the environment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Numbers involved are likely to cause damage to paths or vegetation</li> <li>• The event will use specific areas which have suffered, or are likely to suffer, from the cumulative negative effects of events and need time to recover <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The event could cause disturbance to protected areas or sensitive species, in particular, during the breeding season</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

This list is indicative rather than definitive and is based on an interpretation of the Code by the National Access Forum (National Access Forum (2017) [Outdoor Events in Scotland, Guidance for organisers and land managers](#)).

## Consulting with land managers

Land managers really appreciate early discussions about events and can assist organisers considerably with their wealth of knowledge and experience. It is worth entering into an early dialogue with all interested parties before the event proposal develops too far.

Where events could damage or disturb protected areas or species, there may be a statutory requirement for the land manager to seek an appraisal or further consents from nature agencies, to permit an event to go ahead. Therefore, it is important they are consulted in good time.

Land managers may require events to carry public liability insurance, and this may be a condition of granting permission.

Event organisers should also allow sufficient time to trace landowners or their representatives (which may also include individual farms), as this information is not always readily available.

### **Access Authority referral**

If event organisers or land managers are concerned about the effectiveness of the liaison or aspects of the proposed event, or there are other concerns from any relevant community, then the National Park Authority can facilitate meetings to resolve any issues.

Contact us on [outdooraccess@cairngorms.co.uk](mailto:outdooraccess@cairngorms.co.uk)

## **Research**

**There is a lot to consider; allow plenty of time, consult widely and be flexible!**

Nearly half of the National Park is classed as 'designated sites' for wildlife protection or habitat conservation. This doesn't mean that events can't take place here, but it does mean that there may be additional steps in the planning process to ensure the event isn't negatively impacting on the environment. Equally, the National Park has areas that are well-suited to holding spectacular and successful events.

Key to successful research is liaising early with land managers, nature agencies, communities and businesses. Many communities in the Cairngorms have a community development organisation alongside their community council and liaising with both of those will help prevent any negative impacts of your event. The [Cairngorms Business Partnership](#) can help you engage with the local business community. The 'useful links and contacts' section of this guide on page **X** has some of this information.

## Locations and land use

The Cairngorms National Park is a rural area, and events can bring significant benefits for the local economy, but they can also put pressure on small communities and local infrastructure, so it's important to consult with local communities and business, as well as land managers.

The Aviemore – Glenmore area is particularly popular for outdoor events and comes under considerable pressure from multiple events. Event organisers who wish to use this particular area should expect to plan their activities in very close co-operation with the relevant land managers.

Other areas of the National Park are often overlooked for events, but these can be hidden gems with much to offer. It's worth taking a bit of time to investigate different options and locations.

All the land in the National Park is managed to some degree and provides a living for many people. It is important to consider the potential impact of an event on those that live on and work the land and the activities they undertake eg farming and forestry works.

## Environmental considerations

The conservation of the natural and cultural heritage underpins the economic, social and recreational value of the National Park. You should ensure your event strikes the right balance between welcoming people to enjoy the recreational activity while not impacting negatively on the environment and resident wildlife.

- a) **Protected areas.** Some places that you might want to hold your event may be “protected areas” (also known as “designated sites”). These include Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Areas (SPA's) or Special Areas of Conservation (SAC).

You can check where these are using [Sitelink map](#).

If you are proposing to host an event on a location that is a protected area you may need to seek advice directly from NatureScot who can advise on any special precautions or restrictions. In some cases, the land manager may need to obtain formal consent from NatureScot before they can grant permission for an event. It is likely that before any consent or advice is

given NatureScot may need to carry out site visits and further assessments, all of which can take time.

- b) **Wild land area.** The sense of wildness and space in the central core of the high mountains of the National Park is one of the outstanding special qualities of the area. The Park Authority does not support the use of this area by medium-scale or large-scale events.

The Cairngorms wild land area is the area as displayed on the [NatureScot wild land map](#).

- c) **Management of recreational disturbance.** The Park Authority has identified priority areas for the management of recreational disturbance to species and habitats. These areas are shown on the map (Plan 2) opposite.

To support the reduction of recreational disturbance events should ideally avoid these areas. If not possible, then organisers of medium-scale and large-scale events will need to take significant steps to clearly demonstrate their event will not impact on the wildlife sensitivities of these areas.

*Please note – other species-specific wildlife sensitive area maps may also exist which may identify different or larger areas than this map where recreational disturbance may be a risk to specific species.*

Map –showing rec disturbance area



Plan 2 – Priority areas for the management of recreational disturbance. Events should ideally avoid these areas.

## Time of year

There are several factors to consider when thinking about the optimal timing for your event.

- a) **Wildlife sensitivities.** If the preferred event location is in an area where there are wildlife sensitivities, then the event may need to avoid certain

times of year eg the bird breeding season (usually spring and summer), to avoid disturbing wildlife or impacting breeding success.

This is particularly relevant if there are protected species breeding. Protected species are those specifically named in legislation that makes it an offense to disturb them. Land managers may be able to advise of any protected species present.

- b) **Land management activities.** It is important to consider the potential impacts an event might have on seasonal activities such as lambing, field sports (grouse shoots, deer stalking) and fishing.

The [countryside calendar](#) provides details of the different land management activities going on throughout the year.

- c) **Other events.** If there are other events taking place on the same day consider what the impacts of that might be for participants, spectators, land managers, other recreational users, accommodation providers and emergency services.

Check the [VisitCairngorms event calendar](#) for what's on and don't forget to [list your event](#) here too for others to see.

- d) **Off-peak season.** Holding events outside the main holiday periods can provide an economic boost for an area at quieter times. This can benefit the event participants (better availability of accommodation and services) as well as local businesses and communities.

## Route choice

The National Park is a popular destination for those seeking quiet recreation. Try to envisage the impact your event might have on the public and other recreational users, and whether you need to consider additional measures eg staggered starts, to avoid potential conflicts with other access users.

Land managers may request that the agreed event route is embargoed until the time of the event, to prevent it being publicised and used prior to the event.

Once an event has been hosted the route used will inevitably be recorded on recreational activity apps and on the web. Event organisers should take responsibility in taking steps to manage this long-term legacy of the event route.

For example, if the route is particularly sensitive, events participants could be asked to not publicly post the route and ensure app settings are set to private.

## Environmental assessment

### Be confident that your event will run responsibly

It will really help land managers and nature agencies to understand your event and any potential impacts if you address each of the points below. The level of detail required will be relative to the scale of event and / or the sensitivity of the location.

### Environmental checklist

Consider the impact of your event, including its long-term legacy, on:

- **The natural environment** - wildlife, plants, habitats
- **The physical environment** - soils, peatland, water courses
- **Infrastructure** - bridges, tracks, paths, fords
- **General countryside** - litter, human waste, legacy of promotion
- **Other people** - disturbance to, or displacement of, other recreational users, noise, disruption to land managers or local residents
- **Protected sites** – wildlife and landscape designations, scheduled ancient monuments, historic routes

Any events that are likely to cause significant impacts - ie all large, very large or competitive level events, or those significantly affecting protected sites - should complete their own environmental assessment and produce an environmental statement addressing all the above, and any other relevant points. This should include any mitigation measures eg to reduce impacts, and how you will make good any damage.

## Biosecurity

### Help keep the National Park a special place by preventing the spread of invasive species, pathogens and diseases

Invasive non-native species, plant pathogens and diseases can harm the environment and native wildlife. They can easily be spread on footwear, clothing,

bike tyres, hooves, boats, wetsuits and equipment. The risk is higher at events and competitions where participants have travelled from other parts of the country, or from abroad, and could be unknowingly carrying invasive species on their kit.

Event organisers have a role in ensuring participants follow a good biosecurity routine to reduce the risk of the event introducing invasive species or plant pathogens into, or around, the National Park.

Basic biosecurity procedures for events should be followed:

- Pre-arrival information to participants, asking to arrive with kit clean and dry
- Provision of appropriate cleaning stations for those that turn up with dirty kit
- After the event, all participants should clean equipment, clothing and footwear onsite before departing

## Further information

Water activities biosecurity - [information for event organisers](#)

Land based biosecurity – [Keep it Clean](#)

## Sustainability and accessibility

### Sustainability should be at the heart of your event

Events in the National Park should be delivered in a way which is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable, and be accessible to the widest range of participants and spectators.

### Towards net zero

It is critical that the Cairngorms National Park – as the largest protected area in the UK – is an exemplar in achieving net zero.

Factors to consider in running a sustainable event and reducing the event's carbon footprint include:

- **Sustainable travel options** - encourage participants to use sustainable travel by promoting the availability of public transport, car sharing and

active travel options eg e-bike hire. If the event location is remote, consider providing a pick-up service from the nearest transport hub.

- **Support local** – prioritise using local suppliers, caterers, traders and services, and look for those that have relevant accreditations and sustainably sourced or fairtrade products and foods. [VisitCairngorms](#) can help put you in touch with local suppliers, services and venues etc. Encourage participants to use local accommodation and restaurants while here, and to stay longer – suggest taking a mini-break to explore the Park while in the area.
- **Waste prevention** – prioritise reducing your waste by eg asking participants to bring reusable items like cups and ensure any waste is appropriately recycled. Avoid single use items. Use digital media and go print free where you can – this also makes it easier to keep your event information up to date.
- **Energy use** – avoid high carbon energy (like generators) by using mains electricity or renewable energy. Consider your actual needs eg if you need to light your whole site or only certain areas, and options like solar lights.

Use a carbon calculator to calculate the carbon footprint of your event. If, despite all your best efforts, you can't reduce your carbon footprint to run a net zero event, consider off-setting the difference.

## Ensure you welcome everyone to your event

Events can be organised to appeal to a broad spectrum of society and should therefore be inclusive in encouraging excluded groups to participate. Organising a shorter, easier event (eg a 5km fun run), in parallel with the main event, can encourage a wider range of people to participate.

The accessibility of your event for both competitors and spectators should be considered at the planning stage. Think about how to make your event accessible for people with disabilities, families with young children, older people, people with specific dietary requirements etc and if you can make any adjustments to make it easier for everyone. Consider what advice you can provide ahead of the event eg getting to the location, parking, the accessibility of the site. Make any communications and information provision as accessible as possible.

Event Scotland has lots of guidance and free guides to running a sustainable and accessible event - [Event Sustainability Advice | VisitScotland.org](#)

## Create benefit

Consider how your event can give something back to the local community. This could form part of your liaison with local community representatives. You might like to:

- **Recruit local stewards** – partner up with a local activity club or community group to provide stewards in exchange for a donation to the club.
- **Support a local charity** – make a direct donation or pledge an amount from each event entry fee. The [Cairngorms Trust](#) is a charity which supports sustainable and community-led development across the Cairngorms National Park.
- **Donate any excess gear** – if you've got eg spare t-shirts, snack bars or goody bags, donate them to a local charity shop, foodbank, community hall or school.
- **Extend your litter pick** – as you are clearing up your site anyway, you could also offer to litter pick a community space.
- **Offer community drop-in sessions** – if you have experts on site could you offer eg skills mentoring or bike repair.
- **Volunteer** – encourage your event crew to do a day's volunteering after you've finished breaking down and clearing up your event. Have a look at what's on offer on the [Volunteer Cairngorms](#) listings.

## Promotion

### Give the Cairngorms a big shout out!

Events can play a key role in helping people enjoy and experience the amazing landscapes and cultural and natural heritage of the Cairngorms National Park. Events might bring people here for the first time and you can help us to spread the word about what a special place this is and how to enjoy it responsibly.

We would encourage events to promote the Cairngorms National Park by:

- Describing the event location as being “in the Cairngorms National Park”
- Using the Cairngorms National Park brand – available to [download here](#)

Events can also play a role in helping promote responsible behaviour in the National Park through:

- Promoting the Scottish Outdoor Access Code

- Using the Code logo – available to [download here](#)

If you need any assistance in promoting your event to the public, then [VisitCairngorms](#) have an event coordinator who can help.

## Useful links and contacts

### Cairngorms National Park Authority

- Outdoor Access team – email [outdooraccess@cairngorms.co.uk](mailto:outdooraccess@cairngorms.co.uk)

### VisitCairngorms

- [Event planners guide and Event organisers toolkit](#)
- Contact – [events@visitcairngorms.com](mailto:events@visitcairngorms.com)
- [Cairngorms Business Partnership](#)

### Landowners

- Find a landowner - [The Land Registry of Scotland](#)
- NatureScot [National Nature Reserves](#) (Abernethy, Corrie Fee, Craigellachie, Invereshie & Inshriach, Muir of Dinnet)
- [RSPB](#) (Loch Garten, Insh Marshes, Crannach)
- [The National Trust for Scotland](#) (Mar Lodge Estate)
- [Forestry and Land Scotland](#)

### Communities

- [National Park communities](#)
- [Find a community council](#)
- [Find a community development trust](#)

### NatureScot

- [NatureScot area offices](#)  
(Two areas cover the Cairngorms; 'Central Highlands' and 'North')

### Event planning and organisation

- [Event planning and management advice on VisitScotland.org](#)
- [Event sustainability and accessibility advice on VisitScotland.org](#)
- [Event safety - HSE](#)
- [Organising an event - Scottish Athletics](#)

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## Annex A

### The Cairngorms National Park Authority's position on outdoor access events.

Organised outdoor access events should:

1. Follow Cairngorms National Park Authority guidance, the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and be aligned with the aims of the National Park.
2. Take place in locations and at times of year that do not significantly affect or disturb:
  - a. other recreational users
  - b. land management activities
  - c. sensitive species and habitats.
3. Support the identified "priority areas for the management of recreational disturbance to species and habitats" by avoiding organising events in these areas (as shown on [map x, p xx](#)).

If use of these areas is unavoidable then the event must clearly demonstrate that it will not impact on the wildlife sensitivities of these areas.

4. Respect the wilderness of the central core of the high mountains of the Cairngorms National Park. The Park Authority does not support the use of the wild land area (as displayed on the [NatureScot wild land map](#)) by medium or large scale events.
5. Be economically, environmentally and socially sustainable and provide benefits to local communities.