

# MY FAVOURITE PATH

Personal stories about the paths weaving through the Cairngorms

Some people are surprised to find out that over 10 years £4 million has gone into improving and building paths, bridges, signs, interpretations and leaflets in the Cairngorms National Park. Why? It's for two reasons.

**One:** because 1.5 million visitors come here each year and we want to make sure everyone can be safe and enjoy the fascinating heritage and astounding beauty.

between local communities have been restored by a new pedestrian bridge over the Don, thanks to the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT). Other projects such as Walking to Health are helping many locals who might otherwise not get out and about. There's even a COAT training project, a Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) in Environmental Conservation, which is also changing people's lives for the better.

"My favourite walk is walking up and over Creag Bheag. There are always new paths to discover and trees to climb! In the pine woods there is a great array of biodiversity, with red squirrels scampering up the trees and birds chirping in the sky. When you get to the summit you are greeted with brilliant views. On a clear day you can see up the valley to Newtownmore! Near the summit there is a stone shelter, which is a perfect picnic spot! I have drunk many happy cups of tea while huddled in there!

Hannah Robertson, aged 13

## Did you know?

- 14 people of different ages and backgrounds have achieved Level 2 SVQ in Environmental Conservation to date, learning the skills of path construction, repair and maintenance, fencing, dyking and building bridges
- The popular new Duack Burn bridge in Nethybridge, mostly funded by the CNPA, was completed in December 2012, and is one of Cairngorms Wilderness Contract's biggest projects
- More than 32 Walking to Health groups meet around the Park. Over 1,200 walks have been enjoyed and 60 volunteer walk leaders trained in this COAT project - the repaired and new lowland paths are especially important to people in these groups.

**Two:** because we're guardians of nature and need to protect ecologically precious sites - the Cairngorms National Park is home to a phenomenal 25% of Britain's threatened wildlife. Well-planned, beautifully crafted paths are the answer to all these needs.

Thanks to a lot of hard work on the paths weaving through the Cairngorms, people of all levels of ability are enjoying the great outdoors, on foot and on bike. There's no doubt that the paths are helping people walk their way to better health, as well as experiencing the joy of feeling closer to nature. And it's not just visitors who are feeling the benefits. Links

"My favourite path is the one I'm working on at the moment at the back of Creag Bheag, because it's like climbing a mountain without climbing a mountain - the views are so beautiful, so spectacular."

Alan Wright, SVQ Environmental Conservation graduate who started his own business, Cairngorms Wilderness Contracts, with three other graduates.

"My favourite path is the one up Lui Beg that led me to Bob Scott's bothy where I met my future husband, Sandy, in March 1953. We moved to the foothills of the Cairngorms 20 years ago - happy ever after!"

Mabs Murray

"One path I'm very fond of climbs up from Lurcher's Meadow and traverses the western slopes of Cairn Lochan before dropping slightly towards Lochan Buidhe. The views along the great trench of the Lairig Ghru are fantastic and the jutting nose of The Devil's Point dominates everything else."

Cameron McNeish, Mountaineer, lecturer and author

My favourite path starts off at the Invercauld estate office and leads round the shoulder of Craig Leek where you get the most beautiful views up the River Dee and there's a house that's covered in moss where we take a drop of tea from our flask - it's where the Queen Mother would come and take her tea up there.

Julie Kilgour, age 72, Walking to Health participant

