





Sharing the stories of the Cairngorms National Park

**A guide to interpreting the area's distinct
character and coherent identity**

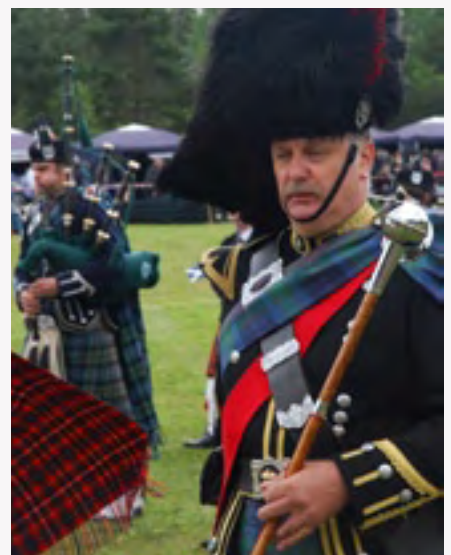
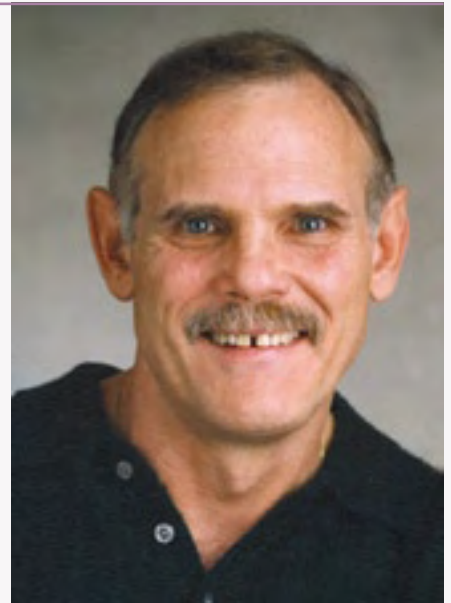
...a fresh and original approach...

Foreword – by Sam Ham

Establishment of National Parks throughout the world has mainly involved drawing lines around pristine lands and setting them 'aside,' to be forever protected in their natural state, spared both from cultivation and the influences of urbanisation. This has been comparatively easy in countries such as the USA which entered the National Parks business early in its history, when it had the luxury of massive tracts of relatively unmodified land along with enormous agricultural regions to grow its food and take care of the everyday economic needs of people. Such has also been the experience of other developed countries such as Canada, New Zealand, and Australia where the benefits of nature conservation were easier to balance against the economic opportunities 'lost' to protection, and sometimes the displacement of indigenous populations.

But the experience of these countries is not the norm in places where human resource exploitation has been ongoing for many centuries and where drawing lines around 'undeveloped' lands of any significant size is virtually impossible. Indeed, if National Parks are to be established in most of today's world, they cannot be set *aside*; rather they must be set *within* the human-modified landscape. Scots, arguably more so than any other people, have seized upon this idea and have led the rest of the world into a new and enlightened way of understanding the role of National Parks in contemporary society.

Nowhere is the brilliance of this new way of viewing National Parks more evident than in the Cairngorms National Park, where about 16,000 people live in one of the most strikingly beautiful landscapes on Earth. Here, the National Park Authority does not 'manage' the Park in the traditional sense, but rather, it provides guidance and facilitates decisions taken largely by the communities themselves. This document about interpreting the Park, *Sharing the stories of the Cairngorms National Park*, is a perfect example of this thinking, and to my knowledge represents the first of its type anywhere in the world.



The document does not prescribe how the Park should be interpreted, nor does it dictate how the people who live and work in the Park should interpret themselves. Rather it provides broad directions for collectively presenting the region through the key concepts that define and describe its unique character. Thus, the themes outlined in this document provide an all-important *starting point*, allowing every land manager and every community to find its own way to each theme, deciding how to express it, how to tease from it the nuances that connect most strongly or resonate most loudly in each case and for each audience. I cannot overstate how important this approach will be to the interpretation of the Cairngorms National Park now and long into the future.

The reader who turns these pages will be treated, not to a 'how-to' or 'do it only this way' discussion of the enormous interpretive potential of the Park, but rather to inspiring, exceptionally well written words of encouragement that they can, and should, represent the National Park and themselves as part of what makes it special. If you are looking to be told what to do, the guidelines offered in *Sharing the stories of the Cairngorms National Park* will probably not be wholly adequate. But readers who are looking for a starting point, and the motivation to tell their own story in the context of the National Park, will find the document immensely valuable. The guidelines it offers are based on state-of-the-art thinking and the findings of current research on how thematic interpretation can deliver to communities the kinds of outcomes they expect and deserve. As such, it stands in my mind as a fresh and original approach to interpretive planning that is long overdue.

I have always felt that there are few places in the developed world outside the North of Scotland where the people reflect the land as much as the land reflects the people. To the visitor's eyes, this is an inescapable observation, one that is borne out in your language, your food and drink, your music and your literature, your roads and schools and farms, and in your sports and pastimes. It is a moral to the story of every visit to the Cairngorms National Park, and it is a conclusion that one inevitably draws from reading this superb document. I am pleased and proud to be associated with such an important and potentially far-reaching effort. The lessons about sustainable living we can all learn from your example are priceless. May the experience of every visitor and the life of every resident be enhanced as a result.

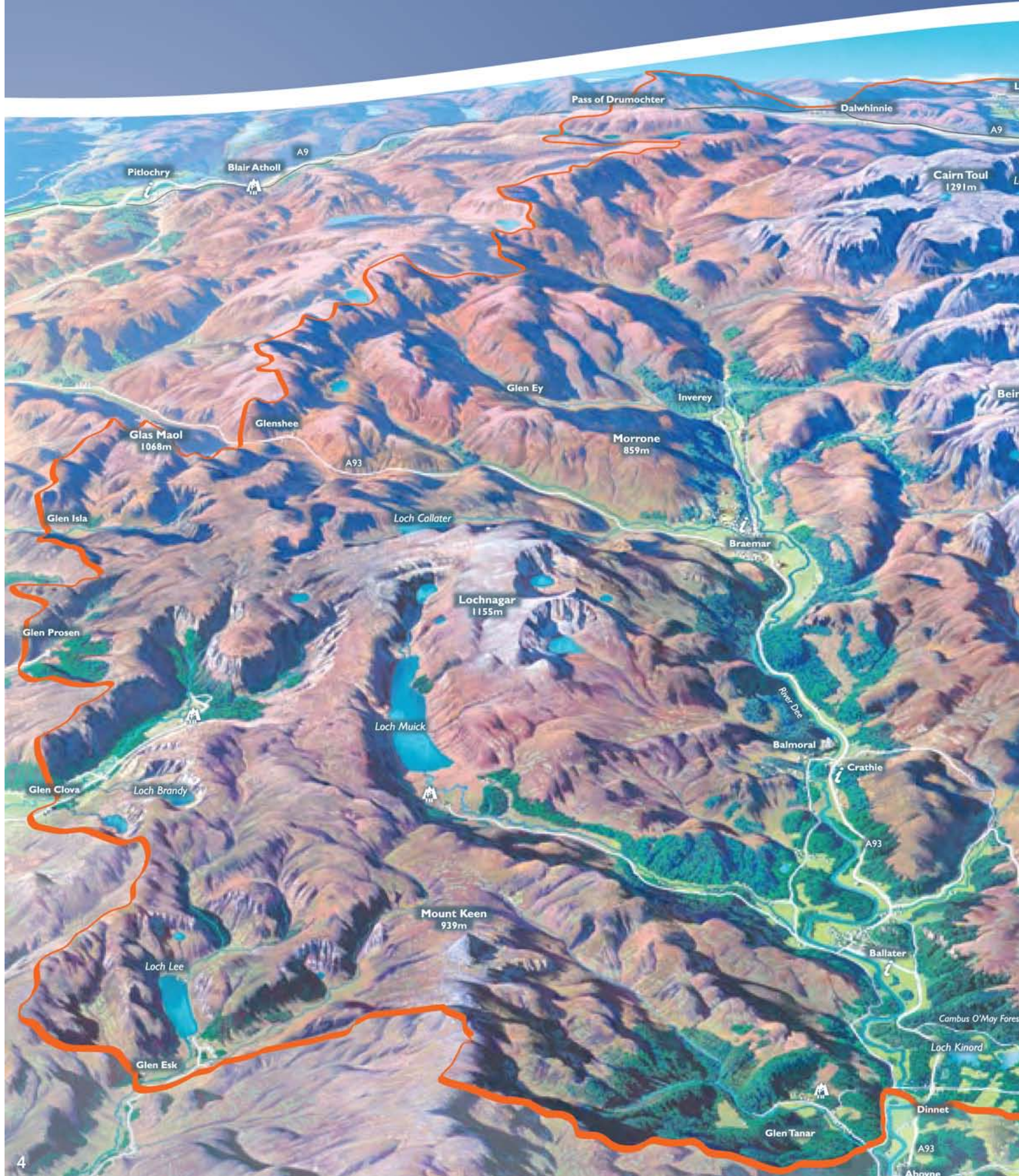
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam H. Ham". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'S' and a distinct 'H'.

Professor Sam H. Ham

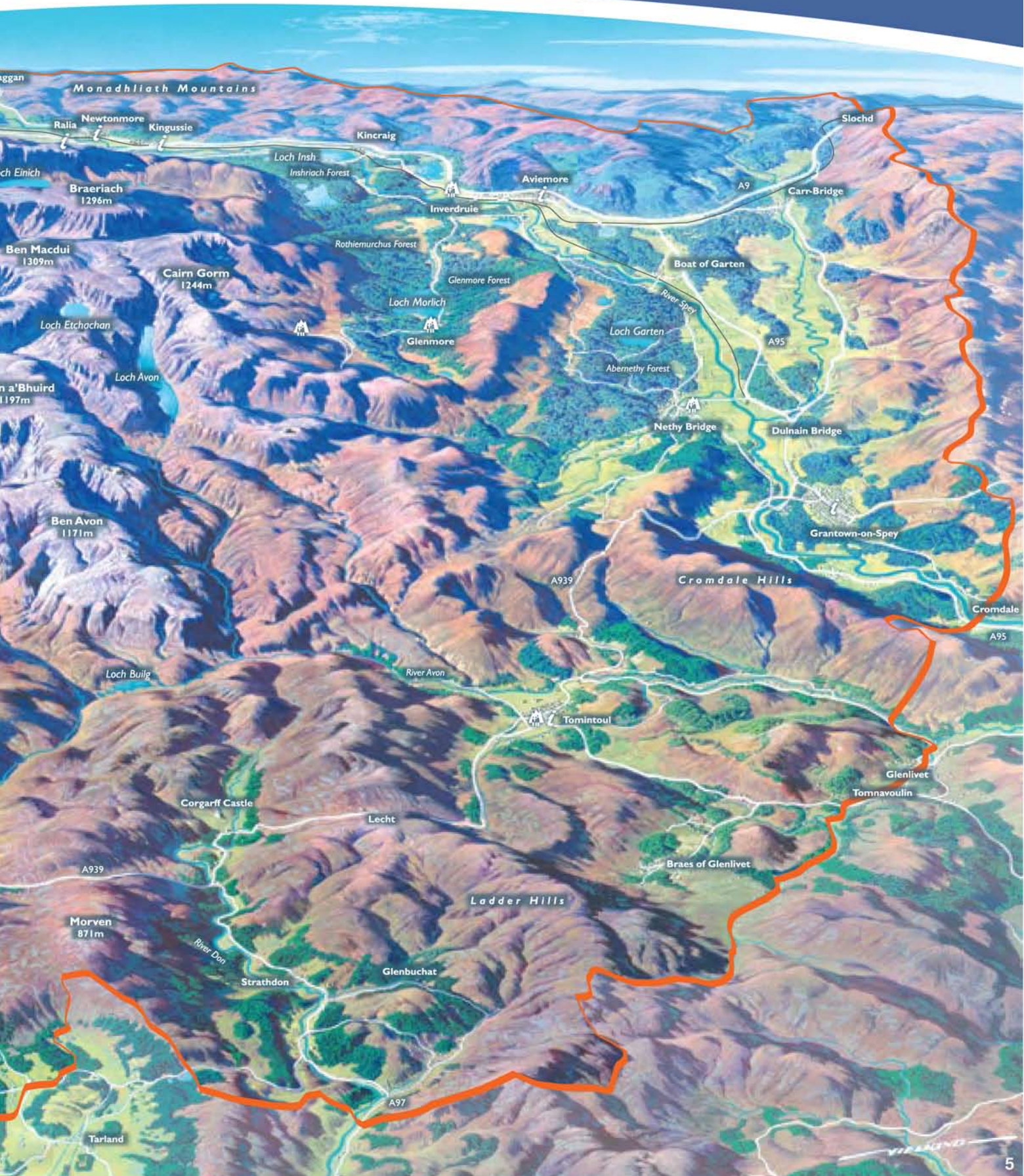
University of Idaho

USA

1. More than a line on a map



Telling stories about a place shapes its identity, and gives your listeners a chance to make their own connections with it.



More than a line on a map

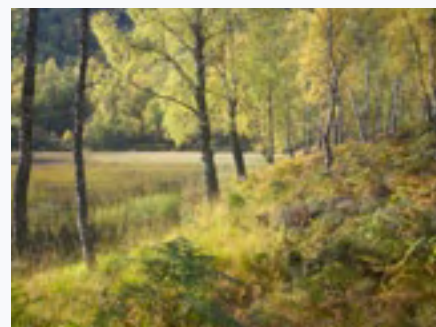
This document is for anyone who interprets the places that make up the Cairngorms National Park; for anyone who communicates with people so that they enjoy, understand and value this vast, unique landscape and its communities. It describes four key themes that make the Cairngorms National Park unlike anywhere else in Britain, and it will help you use those themes to link your stories to the outstanding reputation of the Park as a whole.

A Coherent Vision

The guide presents four key themes that define the Park's coherent character, and that can structure the way we present this vast, varied, magical place. You can think of these key themes as the big ideas that hold the Park together, or as 'take home messages' – the impressions that will shape what people tell their friends about when they get back home.

In each section you'll find examples of how the key themes might be used in different situations. In section 6 you'll find more about how making links to these Park-wide themes can help you.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority and its partners will support you as you work with the ideas in this guide – through advice and professional guidance, and through grant aid. But the people who will actually make the National Park mean something are the people who can present these themes through their daily contact with visitors. You, in other words.



The designation 'National Park' has international status. It's a badge for a nation's outstanding landscapes, and it brings with it real opportunities to conserve and enhance them – to make sure they stay exceptional and unique. It also recognises that this huge, diverse area has a distinctive character and a coherent identity – qualities held in common by all the varied places and communities that make up the whole. The designation can also make people think positively about how the area should be managed, and how they should behave.

The qualities and stories that define the Park are shared by lots of different people – landowners, managers, agencies and communities. A map of the Park could show a maze of lines marking out territory, defining ownership and responsibility. But the stories that make the National Park cross those boundaries. The boundaries are invisible to wildlife, as well as to the people who come here, hoping to share in what makes this place so special.

The way people understand the Park, and how they feel about its conservation, will be shaped by the experiences they have here. Their contact with interpreters and interpretation is a vital part of those experiences. In the Cairngorms National Park, all the work of delivering the Park's aims is the result of cooperation, with organisations, businesses and individuals working to shared goals. That applies just as much to interpretation as to more practical goals such as conservation, or promoting sustainable development.

So for the Cairngorms National Park to exist as more than just another line on the map, for visitors and residents to appreciate how exceptional it really is, for it to *work* as a mechanism for maintaining and enhancing the place for the future, we need to share a sense of the stories that define it. We also need to use those stories as themes that unite and provide a setting for individual places. If we don't, the area will just be a collection of parts, many of them important and interesting, but not exceptional or unique, not part of a shared character, not a National Park.

Interpretation is...

This guide is for anyone who sees interpretation – the art of helping people explore, understand and appreciate the places they visit – as a core part of their business. Interpretation can take many forms, from a guided walk on a hill top to a museum exhibition; from a roadside panel at an historic site to an inspiring site-specific sculpture. What they all have in common is that they are opportunities to give people something of the essence of a place, and to encourage them to explore and find their own connection with it.

That's what this guide is about. But if your work involves any direct contact with visitors, perhaps through running a guest house or a restaurant, you may well find ideas in here that will be useful.



More than a line on a map

You are the Park

The Cairngorms National Park Authority is there to coordinate delivery of the Park's key aims. But it isn't going to present the Park to visitors, or tell the stories that make the Park greater than the sum of its parts. It's not set up to do that: it doesn't own any land, run any visitor centres, or directly employ any Rangers who can talk about the Park. And anyway, it's not really the best organisation to do this important work. For the Cairngorms National Park to have real meaning, its stories need to be told by the people and places that own them, the people and places that are the Park.

All the individuals that live and work here, all the organisations and businesses that operate here, are the Park. The way you communicate with people, the stories you tell them about the place, will shape what they think of it and whether they see it as somewhere so valuable that it deserves the high status of being a National Park.

This doesn't mean losing individual identity, or that everyone has to say the same things. It means using the shared stories described in the four key themes of this document to heft your interpretation to the National Park. And as you find ways to tell the stories of your site or your community in the context of the National Park's identity, it will give your stories more weight and impact.

A Park for the future

The qualities that define the Cairngorms National Park are a good match for emerging trends in tourism. Research shows that future visitors to Scotland will be:

- looking for a greater sense of authenticity in the experiences they have
- keenly aware of environmental issues
- eager to try new experiences and exciting sports.

The Park is well placed to meet these expectations. In a 2004 survey, 75 per cent of visitors said they would like a better understanding of the Park's character, and of what makes it special. Among tourism businesses in the Park, 71 per cent reckon that encouraging visitors to conserve the area's landscape and wildlife is very important to their future success. Good interpretation that's linked to the Park's key themes is central to these trends.

For more about future trends in tourism, see *Scottish tourism in the future*, available from www.tourism-intelligence.co.uk





Personal View

Alan Rankin, Tourism Chief Executive

Making a link to being in the Cairngorms National Park helps to differentiate this area from anywhere else in Scotland. Visitors see National Parks as beautiful, exceptional places, so putting ourselves in the context of the Park means that any message we put out has a head start on anywhere else.

The qualities of the Park that we emphasise are its dramatic hills, the wildlife, and the amazing array of things to do and see, along with its unique culture. Once people are here, on site interpretation needs to give them some continuity with the impressions they've got as they plan their trip, but it can do far more than that. Good interpretation can be the 'wow' factor in their journey, and take them beyond what they expected.

That helps build loyalty, and a loyal customer is easier to bring back – and more likely to influence others to come and visit. They're also much more likely to see the Park as somewhere that needs looking after. So interpretation that builds a consistent sense of the Cairngorms National Park benefits businesses – and it benefits the Park.

Making the Park work



If people are to get a sense of being in the Cairngorms National Park, of what makes it tick and of what makes it special:

- The people and places within the Park must see themselves as part of it. They must represent and use the Park as something that adds value to their particular place or interest.
- The audience for interpretation – visitors or local people – must get a sense of the key themes that define the Park's character, and that are described in this guide.
- Tourism-based organisations and businesses must be clear that the Park is a powerful and over-arching *destination*, and present themselves within it. If you're working with publications, displays or web sites, experience has shown that using at least two of the following elements is key in making a link to the Cairngorms National Park:
 - use of the words 'Cairngorms National Park' in text
 - use of the Cairngorms National Park brand
 - use of a map or outline map of the Park.

This doesn't mean that the existence of the National Park is just another layer you have to add to your interpretation; something you have to *tell* people. It means using the themes in this guide as an inspiration for the way you communicate; finding ways in which your site or your work is uniquely part of the Cairngorms National Park rather than anywhere else in the world.

2. At the heart of the Park



'...a mountain horizon without, it seemed, any northern limit, a winter school of white whales...'

Jim Crumley, *A High and Lonely Place*





At the heart of the Park

Key theme 1

The huge granite mountains of the Cairngorms National Park are unique. Their influence has shaped the natural heritage, people, landscapes and culture around them.

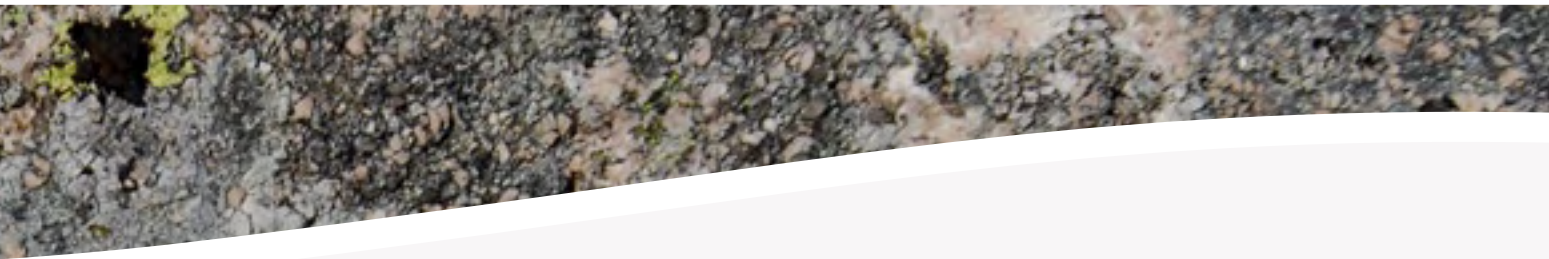
Scotland has other great forests, open moorland and famous rivers, but nowhere else is there anything like the huge expanse of high ground that forms the core of the Park. The rock types, size, shape and climate of these mountains make them the unique feature of the Cairngorms National Park.

The vast plateau is split into two sections: the main massif centred around Loch A'an, and the outlying flank centred on Lochnagar and Glas Mhol. Together they form the largest area of ground over 900 metres (about 3,000 feet) in Britain, a broad dome with a fringe of moorland, straths and glens spreading out from the central core. You can think of the shape of the National Park as being rather like a fried egg with a deceptively high yolk: an image to contemplate over breakfast perhaps!

Remote, or the source of it all?

In Strathdon, or in the depths of the forest around Carr-Bridge, the mountains might seem far away. But the straths where the forests grow and the rivers that water the farmland are there because of the glaciers that once flowed from the mountains. The mountains do more than define the skyline: they have shaped everything around them.

The mountains also mould what people do in the Park, and the way its history has unfolded. They are a barrier, separating places only a few miles apart, but the shared concerns of a lifestyle governed by the mountains mean that Glen Clova has more in common with Tomintoul than either have with the soft plains beyond the hills. Prehistoric settlers moved from hillside to valley with the rhythm of the seasons; the pattern of later settlements reflects the opportunities and challenges of the landscape. The crops people can grow and the way they tend their animals are all shaped by the hills, by their geology, their shape, and by the weather they create.



The size of a small country

The sheer size of the Park shows just how wide the influence of the mountains is. The largest National Park in the UK, it covers an area nearly half as big again as the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.



The geologist's tale

It's hard to escape the influence of granite in the Park. The rock is a strong link between different areas, and one that's easy to find evidence for anywhere in the Park. 'Granite really defines the landscape's character', says Rachel Wignall, a geologist working with Scottish Natural Heritage. 'If you look up you'll see granite hills; you're often walking on the stuff, and you can pick up granite stones washed down from the central mountains from any of the rivers. In many places you're surrounded by granite buildings, and the drystane dykes in the fields are a good connection to the hills too.'



The Cairngorms National Park actually offers some of the best examples in the world of how mountains are sculpted by ice. The high tors, worn granite boulder fields and glacier-carved cliffs are part of a rich collection of features left behind by millions of years of climate change. They could well hold clues to the way our present day environment will evolve. It's an exceptional combination of features – comparable with far more remote places like Baffin Island in Canada – and is another reason the Park is internationally important.

At the heart of the Park

Case Study – CairnGorm Mountain

A train ride to the core

For CairnGorm Mountain, giving visitors a sense of the National Park's mountain heartland is central to their work. 400,000 visitors a year visit the site, and the aim is for them all to get a feeling for the plateau, even if they cannot physically get there.

'We want to make the special qualities of the mountains accessible to everybody', says Jim Cornfoot, Interpretive Coordinator, 'and for their visit here to be more than just a train journey. I think a feeling for what the mountain core means is central to an experience of the Park.'

The company is developing a 'mountain garden' next to the Coire Cas car park as a place that will duplicate as far as possible the plants and environments of the high tops. The cultural aspect of the mountains is important too. The Cairngorm Art Project has produced large panels that decorate the base station with evocations of the summit's rocks and cold, together with the names of famous climbing routes. The Project is also building a rampart viewpoint where people can sit and listen to short stories about the mountains.



Case Study – Steve Willis

A constant backdrop

Steve leads hill walking and wildlife watching groups for several companies in the National Park. For him, the vastness of the landscape sets it apart. 'You just don't get the same sense of scale anywhere else in Scotland', he says.

The people he leads are looking for local knowledge, and for someone who can interpret the landscape, as much as for someone who will lead them through what can be an alien environment. Steve uses the size of the hills as a talking point on his tours: 'We'll look at a map and I'll show them how we've only crossed one shoulder of a mountain on what's been a reasonably long walk. People can be quite awe-struck by that!'

Wildlife trips may not involve the mountains directly, but they're always there as a backdrop. 'Even from Abernethy Forest people are asking about the hills they can see. I'll tell folk the story of their names, and point out just how far away they are – they're often amazed to realise how big they must be.' The mountains' human stories are important for Steve too. 'It's easy to look at the hills and think they're just empty wilderness, but they have rich stories to tell of the people who live and work amongst them – today as well as in the past.'





Personal View

Cameron McNeish, writer & broadcaster

Having lived in the shadow of the Cairngorms for over thirty years, and climbed them for even longer, I'm aware that these are hills that keep their best secrets for those who make the effort to climb them. Up on the summits, on the roof of Scotland, I've always been thrilled by looking down on the sensational rather than gazing up from below. I love the sense of the boulder strewn slopes falling away from my feet, still lochans appearing on shining levels and broad chasms splitting the mountainsides to reveal dizzying depths.

It's the climate that makes the Cairngorms so special to me – the sights and sounds are of the Arctic, and in winter the wind screams and blasts like the Arctic.

There's nothing else like the Cairngorms in Scotland. It's not the height of the Cairngorm summits that leaves such a lasting impression on me: it's the spaciousness and the vast, open skies. It took me many years to simply grasp the sheer scale of the place.

Starting Points



Here are some ideas about how you can start linking your interpretation to this theme:

- Get hold of a copy of *Cairngorms – A Landscape Fashioned by Geology* (Scottish Natural Heritage 2006). It's a short, easy to read introduction to the story of the Park's rocks and landforms.
- Find out what's in your area that could help people appreciate how the mountains and glaciers shaped the land, and the influence the mountains have on life around them.
- Spectacular landscape features, such as the Burn o' Vat near Dinnet on Deeside, are a great opportunity to impress people with the Park's geology and the way ice and water have worked on it. Think about how your interpretation could make a link, however fleeting, with the mountains. It will give visitors a grander sense of scale, and help them link individual sites to the Park's unique character.
- Anyone who takes people outdoors for a living, such as mountain bike guides, Rangers on an evening walk, or keepers stalking deer, will be working in the shadow of the mountains. How could you get people to notice the hills now and then, and to think about the influence they've had on everything around them?
- The textures and shapes of the hills are powerful icons of the Park. Guest houses and restaurants could use river-worn rocks as ornaments, or use images of the high tops to decorate their rooms.

3. Special places for wildlife



'...that wild snow-splashed country of the high hills and dark lochans, the home of the mists and the four winds, and where the foot of man rarely treads.'

Seton Gordon, *Wanderings of a Naturalist*



Special places for wildlife

Key theme 2

The Cairngorms National Park is made up of a unique mosaic of habitats of very high quality, and exceptional size and scale. It is a stronghold for British wildlife, including many of the UK's rare and endangered species, and those at the limit of their range.

Scientists classify animals and plants in danger of becoming extinct as 'endangered'. These are the species that need most help if they're to survive; often they are charismatic icons too, like golden eagles. And one in four of the UK's endangered species lives in the Cairngorms National Park.

Ninety-five per cent of the goldeneye ducks that breed in Britain do it in the Park. It contains one quarter of Scotland's native forest; one third of UK land above 600 metres; more breeding farmland waders than the whole of Wales; the largest population of twinflower in Scotland...

Any one of these things would make an area special. That they all come together in the Cairngorms National Park makes it remarkable.

The size and value of the habitats in the Park is something that already draws many visitors – they are the features that make it such a rich area for wildlife tourism. If the list of facts above sounds like a marketing brochure, that's because it is – for the businesses that bring people here to enjoy the Park's spectacular wildlife. Interpretation that gives people a real appreciation of their surroundings, and that impresses them with the quality of the Park as a whole, will make them more satisfied customers and therefore more likely to return.



A priceless legacy

This theme is vital for conservation too. The Park's varied environments are of such high quality because of the way they've been managed in the past – it's an amazing inheritance, and the land is in good shape. But it needs looking after to stay that way. The Cairngorms National Park is cared for collectively, through cooperation between all the different people, businesses and agencies that have an interest in this place. Good interpretation, which encourages people to feel how the site they are visiting is part of a greater whole, can really help to get the messages of care and cooperation across.



Mountain

The mountains are unique to the Park – and they're the place with the rarest habitats too. The high plateaux are more like parts of Greenland than anywhere else in Scotland. With so much land above 600 metres, the Park is an important place for species that need such a cold place to live. It's the most southerly site in Europe for snow buntings, and for many other species the Cairngorms National Park is a last outpost.

Forest

Magical places of dappled sunlight and the scent of heather, imposing cathedrals of silent pines, or thin scrub on the mountainside, the great forests of the Park have evolved from woodland that's been here for thousands of years. Together, they make up the largest area of native woodland in Britain and are a key part of the Park's character. They're also home to core populations of wildlife that's scarce in the rest of Britain, like red squirrels, crossbills and capercaillie.



Moorland

From the kaleidoscope of landscapes that turns outside the window of a visitor's car, moors are probably the one that makes the biggest impression. They also provoke what may be visitors' commonest question: 'What are those funny patterns in the heather?' Understanding muirburn, and how moorland is managed for red grouse, can be a key to understanding many other aspects of the Park.

Farmland

If there had been better roads to the hungry towns and cities, the farmland in the Park might look very different today. But the straths were too far away from the markets, and the soil was too poor, for them ever to be farmed intensively. That makes them rare survivors, and vital places for birds such as waders.



Water

Water, frozen and liquid, has moulded the Park. Thinking of it as one habitat doesn't do it justice: it is many. World famous fishing rivers so clean and natural they are used as benchmarks for UK water quality standards, internationally important wetlands, high arctic lochans and popular places to paddle – the Park has them all.

Special places for wildlife

Case Study – Glenlivet Wildlife

Getting away from it all

David Newland runs Land Rover safaris in Glenlivet, together with a group of self-catering cottages. 'Being part of the National Park adds value to what we do here,' he says. 'Most visitors appreciate that they won't find everything the Cairngorms has to offer without travelling to other parts of the Park: if you want to see ptarmigan or osprey there are better places than Glenlivet.'

But it's easy to make links between what they can see in Glenlivet and the wider stories of the Park's wildlife. 'We'll sometimes get quite close to mountain hares here. Visitors are fascinated about how the hares' behaviour gives clues to the presence of golden eagles in the Park.'

David also finds that visitors appreciate the special qualities Glenlivet offers, while using it as a base to explore the rest of the Park. 'This is somewhere for people who want to get away from it all, to take their time about things. But they'll see the whole of the National Park as "their place" while they're here, and are quite happy to drive for an hour and a half to see other parts of it. We all need to work together to help people get the best experience of the Park.'

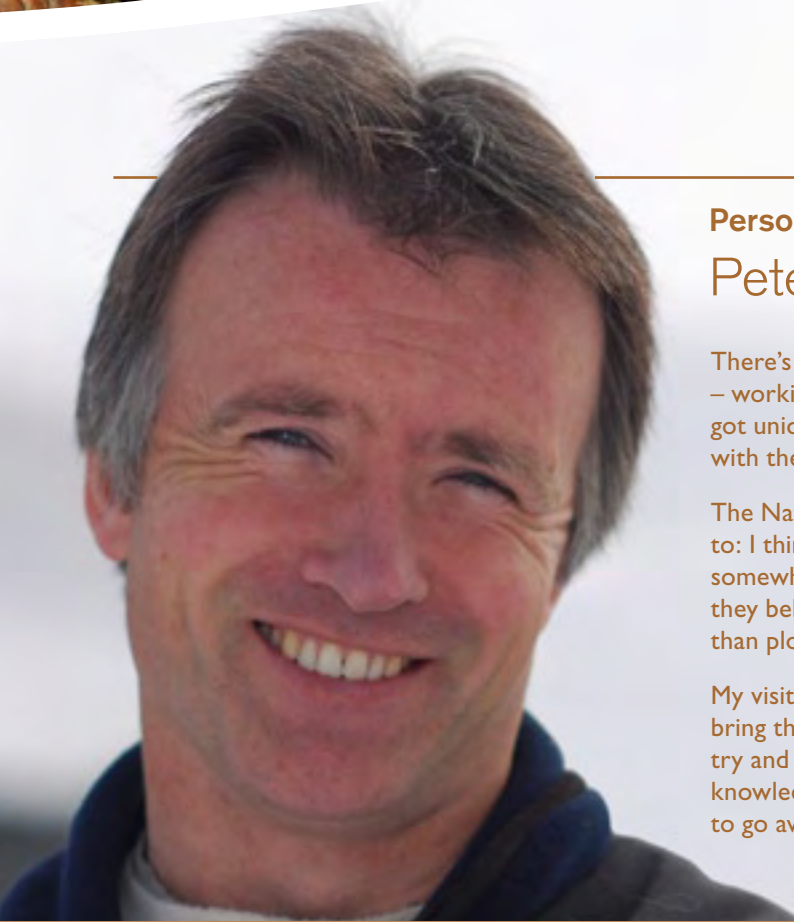


Case Study – RSPB Abernethy

A jewel in the crown

Loch Garten is famous for its breeding ospreys, and 35,000 people flock to the RSPB Osprey Centre each year to watch the birds on their nest. Richard Thaxton, Site Manager, sees the Park as an important context for work here. 'I think people see National Parks as "the jewels in the crown" of the country they're visiting. I know that a lot of our visitors are here because they've come to visit the Cairngorms National Park, not just to see ospreys.'

Staff at the Centre learn something about the National Park at the beginning of the season so they can put Loch Garten's birds in the context of the Park as a whole. Being part of the National Park has also helped the RSPB to explain how they manage the site. 'A few years ago people thought that some of the conservation land management here was being done in isolation, and perhaps saw it as something rather eccentric,' says Richard. 'Now it's something we have in common with other big estates, and we can present it as part of a collective effort to enhance the native pine forests that stretch across the Park.'



Personal View

Peter Cairns, nature photographer

There's really only one place to go in Britain for a business like mine – working as a nature photographer and running photo tours. You've got unique wildlife species, a unique mosaic of habitats associated with them, and for most of my visitors this is real 'Big Sky Country'.

The National Park gives them an international brand they can relate to: I think it suggests an image of somewhere pristine, of wildness, somewhere nature predominates. People working here need to feel they belong to that: the wider goals of the Park serve us all better than ploughing our own furrows.

My visitors are looking for animals to photograph, but in trying to bring the qualities of the Park alive I think I've got an obligation to try and get across something of what I feel about the place, and my knowledge of the species that live here. I'd much prefer our visitors to go away as better naturalists rather than better photographers!

Starting Points



Here are some ideas about how this theme might link to places and activities throughout the Park:

- Anywhere that visitors come to watch wildlife, there's usually an opportunity to link their experience to the habitats that range across the Park. Think about how the species they might see are related to the Park's environment: you'll soon find links between what's on your site and the wider context of the Park.
- The animals and plants you may take for granted if you live here can be rare and fascinating to visitors. Setting up simple bird feeding stations outside the window can give visitors an experience they'll really appreciate, as well as chances to talk about where the birds come from.
- Find out how the habitats in your area are linked to human activity. Stories about how people have made the Park can help get across the idea that it needs good management to keep it in good shape.
- Sometimes visitors expect the National Park to be rather like the Serengeti: they think wildlife is going to be everywhere, and easy to see. In reality they'll probably be glad of some help. Make sure you know where they can find guides, or specially managed sites, and be prepared to suggest other places to visit within the Park.

4. People of the Park



'Culture is everything we don't have to do.'

Brian Eno, *artist and musician*



Key theme 3

The Park is a rich cultural landscape. Separated by the great bulk of the mountains, different areas have their own distinct identity and cultural traditions, but they share deep connections to the same environments. The Park is a place of 'Mountain folk' and 'Forest folk'.

The Park might be world famous for its mountains and wildlife, but the people who live here, and their communities and history, are just as important in defining its character and special qualities.

The boulder fields of the high plateaux are the product of just rock, wind, water and ice. But nearly everywhere else in the Park is the result of a relationship between human beings and the land, sometimes over thousands of years. The environment dictates what people can do here – the way they farm, the houses they built in the past, the way they play. Those activities in turn have shaped the land, as people settled in towns, cleared trees to make ever bigger grouse moors, or planted them to feed the demand for timber in far-away cities.

What happened here?

These relationships between people and the Park are rich ground for interpretation. People relate well to stories about people, and to the common human concerns they illustrate. As they travel around the Park, most visitors will be struck by its distinctive buildings, some of them dramatic landmarks that beg questions such as, 'What's that?', 'Why did they build that here?', or 'What happened here?'. These are ideal starting points to set the stories of an individual place in the wider context of the Park as a whole.





The droving trails and military roads that cross the Park were once busy thoroughfares, linking communities far more closely than today's tarmac roads. This network of ancient routes, some of which are shown here, helps to establish the Park as an area with its own unique history. Many sites could make links to this story.

A rugged environment breeds rugged people. Sports like the Highland Games and shinty have their roots in old battles between fractious clans: they're a less destructive form of competition! If you know there's a game on, why not suggest it to visitors: they're guaranteed a real insight into Cairngorms life.



Field sports have been a major part of the Park's culture since they became fashionable in Victorian times. Not all visitors are comfortable with this aspect of the Park, but sensitive interpretation can help them appreciate how deeply it has shaped both landscape and communities.



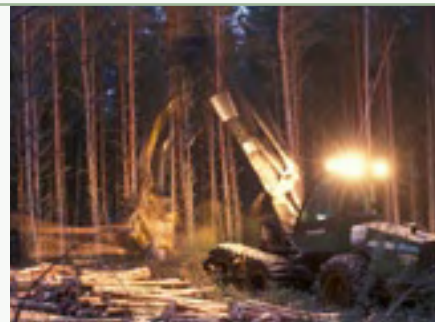
Case Study – Ballater Historic Forestry Project

The green tide

The ebb and flow of forests up and down the valleys of the Park, a green tide driven by the forces of climate change and economics, is one of the clearest illustrations of this theme. Forests define the Park just as much as mountains or moorland, and they act as a barometer of human activity.

The Ballater Historic Forestry Project is working to tell the story of the Newfoundland loggers who worked Deeside's forests during the Second World War. The story has echoes through time, and across the Park as a whole: Newfoundland lumberjacks worked on Speyside as well, floating rafts of timber down the river as had been done centuries before. Today timber and forests are still key parts of the Park's economy. It's as if one great woodland extends around the whole of the Park, and the Park's communities are connected to forestry in ways more typical of Scandinavia, Russia or Canada than the rest of Britain.

Linking the Newfoundland loggers to this great expanse of trees, and to the timber lorries visitors might see parked outside their hotel, can give their history a deeper context, as well as helping people appreciate what makes the Park tick today.



Case Study – Historic Scotland

Ruthven Barracks; Corgarff Castle

Ruthven Barracks, perched above Strathspey near Kingussie, is one of the Park's iconic buildings. Built by the government in 1719 to control one of the routes through the area, the Barracks is close to the site of an Iron Age fort that probably had exactly the same purpose. Interpretation here tells the story of the Barracks as part of the Jacobite risings, but it can also put the building into the context of the network of passes through what is now the Park. This helps visitors to understand its strategic location, and roots its story in the surrounding landscape.

There are other benefits from putting Ruthven in the context of the Park. Speyside, Deeside and Strathdon were strongholds of particularly powerful clan chiefs, so they needed special efforts to control them – something that adds both to Ruthven's story and to visitors' appreciation of the Park. There are even stories that Jacobites hid out in Strathdon following Culloden – a detail that adds drama and intrigue, and encourages visitors to see the landscape in a different light.

There is a direct connection between Ruthven Barracks and Corgarff Castle in Strathdon, the site of another Government garrison: making this link could encourage more visits at Corgarff.



Personal View

Bill Marshall, Secretary, Braemar Community Ltd.

Through Braemar Community Limited we're restoring Braemar Castle so it can be a real resource for the local economy. It was built back in 1628 by John Erskine, the Earl of Mar, and his family links us to places like Balmoral, Corgarff, Glenbuchat, and Kildrummy. Braemar's a real gateway to the National Park from the south, and a visit here can give people a great idea of what else the place has to offer.

The military roads are one of my passions too. We've got letters from a soldier who wrote to his father in 1826 about how they did this 'short walk' to Braemar from Paisley. The roads give us links throughout the Park, and we should really make something of that.

There's a great whisky smuggling story to tell too, with routes linking Braemar to Kirriemuir. I'd love to get a whisky still back in the castle, but that might be a bit of a struggle!

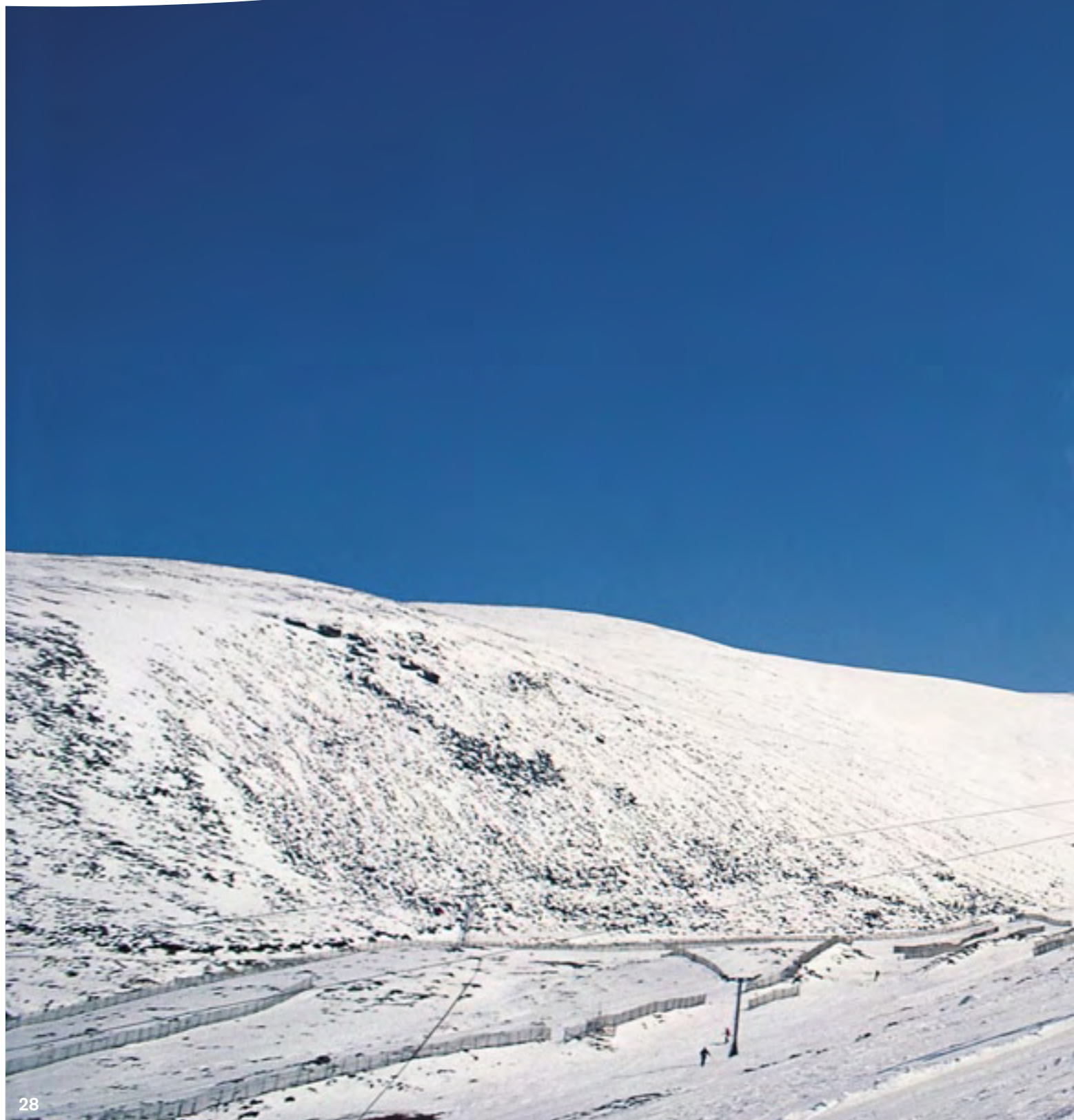
Starting Points



Other topics and places that might link with this theme, and give you a chance to set your work in the grand scheme of the Park as a whole, include:

- Victorian hunting lodges and hotels – a legacy of nineteenth century fashions that still serves today's tourists.
- Planned villages and towns. The Park has some particularly good examples, established by landowners eager to modernise their estates. They give the Park's settlements fascinating individual stories, and link them strongly to its landscape and resources.
- The food and drink served in restaurants and cafés – local produce and cooking traditions are based on the mountains, moorlands and rivers.
- Everyday shops and businesses. High streets in the Park are very different from the ones that visitors are familiar with. Gunsmiths, fishing tackle shops, sawmills and agricultural merchants are all part of the Park's character, and can give fascinating insights to how life here depends on the environment.

5. A passion for the place



'... the snowbanks rose from the side of the road, sun kissed the tops of the hills and the pair of us couldn't keep the smiles off our faces or stop bouncing up and down in our seats.'

Ben Thorburn, skier, on *Adventure Blog Scotland*





A passion for the place

Key theme 4

The Park is a place with a sense of wildness and space at its heart, and it inspires passion both in those who live here and those who visit.

Everyone has their own ideas about what makes the Cairngorms National Park special. But what they all have in common is that this is a place they feel passionately about; somewhere they value. For many that value is more than its importance as a refuge for wildlife, or its spectacular scenery – it is a place to find yourself, to be in touch with something deeper and more lasting than the tinsel world of everyday life.

For some people the wildness of the mountains, moors and forests is a retreat; others find themselves in the buzz of outdoor sports, or the simple pleasure of sitting by a lily-covered loch.

Working with this idea in interpretation needs careful handling, whether you're leading a guided tour, putting together an exhibition, or chatting to a passenger in a taxi. Because it's so personal, everyone needs to find their own passion for the hills: you can't tell them how to feel.

What you can do is to share your own passion, and trust that your audience will be moved to find their own love for the Park. Heather Morning, a member of the Cairngorm Mountain Rescue Team, and Eoin Smith, Head Keeper at Glen Tanar, describe their feelings about the hills on the next few pages. Their deeply personal love for the mountains, and commitment to looking after them, will come through in the way they speak to visitors and in the stories they tell them about the hills. But these are their words, their passions: other interpreters must find their own way of expressing their love for this place – and of helping their audience discover how they might love it too.

'Stand by the summit cairn on a clear day and gaze down the long, empty miles of Glen Dee ... and you'll be overwhelmed by a sensation of space and distance, an emotion that wills you to fly.'

Cameron McNeish



Personal View

Heather Morning, Cairngorm Mountain Rescue Team

The social history of the mountain is as important to me as the plants and flowers: I'm fascinated by the history of all the bothies and the mountain rescue services. I go to the Shelter Stone in Glen Avon a couple of times a year to carry out any rubbish that's been left there because I think it's such a fantastic place and I want other people to experience that.

On an expedition in the mountains your priorities in life become a lot clearer. Everything's reduced to the basics of staying warm and dry; eating and drinking. I really enjoy that simplicity, and getting away from all the modern crap we deal with, like mobile phones and work and cars and pollution!

If I'm asked if I'm a religious person I say my church is the mountains. I don't have a god or a religion – the spiritual place for me is to be out in the mountains.

Inspiration

The landscapes and life of the Park have inspired many people, and had an influence far beyond its boundaries. Sir Edwin Landseer visited often, and defined an image of Scotland that persists to this day with paintings like *Monarch of the Glen*. Physicist Peter Higgs developed his theories about elementary particles while walking in the Cairngorms; Patrick Geddes, a pioneer of community and environmental philosophy, grew up in Ballater.

Some of Scotland's greatest writing about places comes from the National Park, from Byron's Romantic visions to the pioneer natural history of Seton Gordon; from the meditations of Nan Shepherd and Jim Crumley to comic descriptions of bothy life by Dave Brown and Ian Mitchell. Any of these could be starting points for a talk or an exhibition, and their books would all be good to leave for guests to browse in a guest house or café.

'England, thy beauties are tame and domestic
To one who has roamed over mountains afar
O! for the crags that are wild and majestic,
The steep frowning glories of dark Lochnagar.'

Lord Byron

A passion for the place



Case Study – John Muir Award

Beauty as well as bread

Many education programmes take people to the outdoors so they can learn about it: by studying the ecology of butterflies, perhaps, or peat bogs. The John Muir Award is rather different. It's a flexible programme that starts with where people are. It allows people to make their own meaning or sense of a place through their experiences, rather than through teaching or learning.

'The Award gives people a chance to go into wild places with no other motive than just to be there', explains Alan Smith, Award Manager at the Cairngorms National Park Authority. 'It's not about studying the place, or testing yourself against it – it's about realising what the place really means to you.'

The scheme is run by the John Muir Trust, and is open to all ages. Participants have to meet four challenges: to Discover a wild place, Explore, Conserve, and Share it. The Award can include finding out what makes the place special in ecological terms; doing something practical is also an important part of the approach. But at the heart of the scheme is the simple power of awakening people to nature, and to their connection with it.

People living in the National Park who take the Award are often surprised to find out just what's around them. 'In many places you've got some of the best pine forest in the country almost on the doorstep,' says Alan. 'One lady of 80 was really inspired by the whole thing, and said she hadn't realised how much she'd taken the place for granted. It's a good demonstration of John Muir's philosophy that "everybody needs beauty as well as bread."'



'To sit in silence amongst the ancient pines is to enter one of nature's cathedrals.'

Jim Gillies



Personal View

Eoin Smith, Head Keeper, Glen Tanar Estate

It's difficult to put into words why I feel passionate about this place. Just getting up in the morning can be one of my greatest pleasures: being out at daybreak in summer above the forest line you get a powerful feeling of solitude, of being at one with nature.

I think newcomers are often in awe when they first come, and it's important to make them feel welcome. You can do that easily when you're deer stalking: it's quite an intimate business, and you can give people an understanding of the place they might not get otherwise. If I'm honest though, I get most satisfaction from being just by myself, out in the forest, on the river or up on the hill. All my life I've been very much an outdoors person: I think nature's somehow more friendly when you're just yourself.

Starting Points



Here are some more ideas about how you might work with this theme:

- Remember that interpretation isn't just about telling people something. Think about the response you'd like your audience to have, and then look for images, music, textures that might help to evoke that.
- Dozens of artists and photographers are inspired by the Park's textures and light: simply displaying their work can help to build a sense of its unique qualities. Have a look at the websites of the Creative Cairngorms group www.creativecairngorms.co.uk and of North East Open Studios www.northeastopenstudios.co.uk for some examples.
- Books in which people have written about their love of the Park. Try these books for some inspiration:
Dave Brown and Ian Mitchell: *Mountain Days and Bothy Nights* (Luath Press 1987)
Jim Crumley: *A High and Lonely Place* (Whittles Publishing 2000)
Syd Scroggie: *The Cairngorms Seen and Unseen* (Scottish Mountaineering Trust 1989)
Nan Shepherd: *The Living Mountain* (Aberdeen University Press 1977)

6. Working with this guidance



'The art of interpretation is not to play what is written'

Pablo Casals, *cellist*



Working with this guidance

Each section in this guide has been inspired by one of the four key themes that define the Cairngorms National Park. If you plan your interpretation with the National Park and the themes that describe it in mind, you'll give visitors a more satisfying experience and give them a starting point for finding their own sense of what makes the Park special. You'll also be helping your organisation or business meet its aims.

More and more people are coming here looking for the qualities that make the Park unique. The themes in this document make the idea of the Cairngorms National Park a reality, and all the places within the Park can find stories that illustrate them. You may only need to make small changes to the way you plan and deliver your interpretation to put your site, your story, the experience you offer, in the context of the Park.



Do it your way

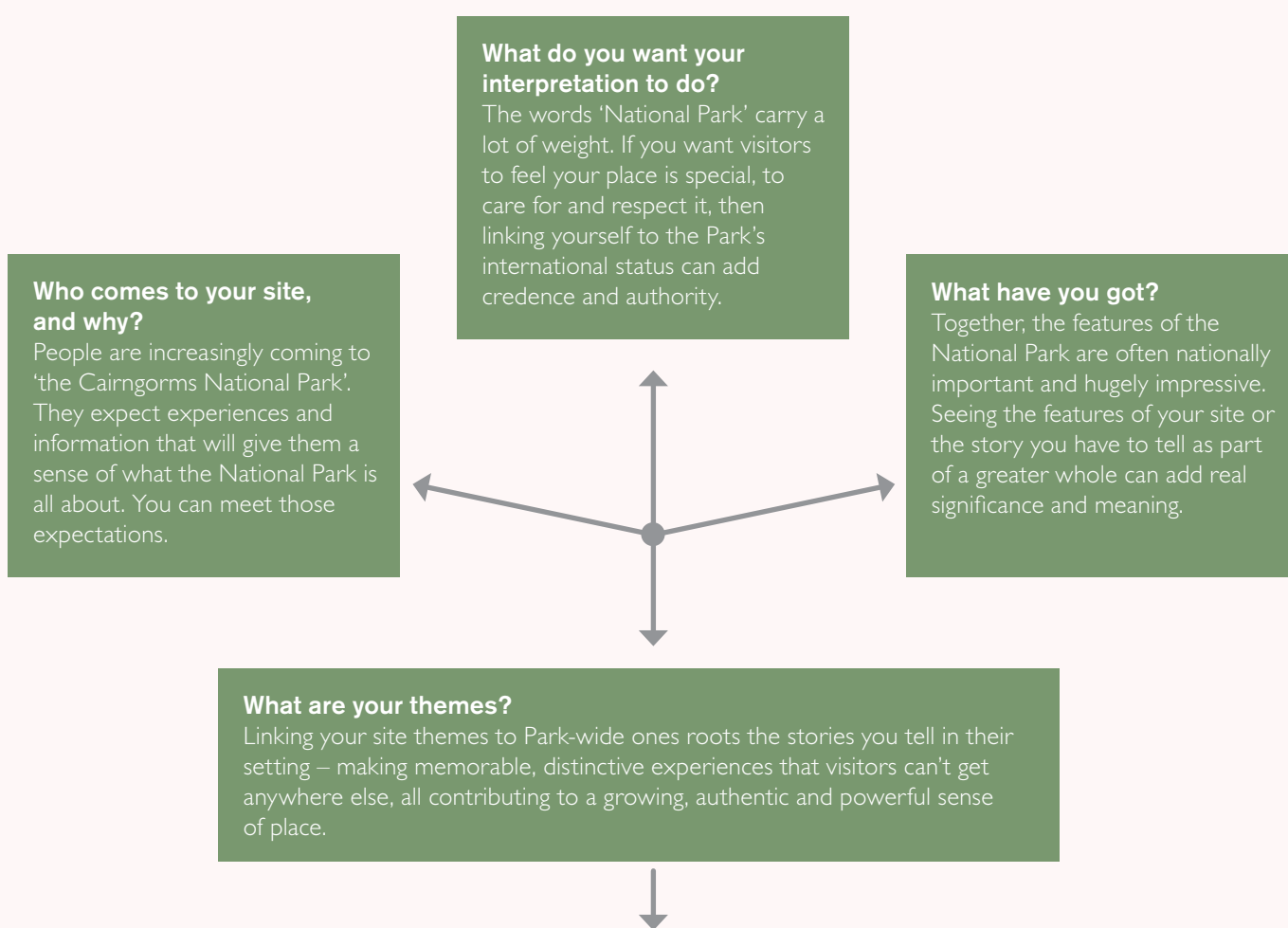
This document is intended as guidance, not a rigid set of rules and regulations. It does not set out any single method for planning and delivering interpretation in the Park. The point of working with Park-wide themes is not to have a uniform approach across the Park: that would work against the very qualities of authenticity that so many visitors are looking for. This approach to collectively revealing the special qualities of the Park relies on you going through your own planning process, coming up with your own site themes and presenting them in your own style, with your enthusiasm.

What it does ask of you is that you consider how being part of a National Park might affect your audience, how it can add value and significance to your story and how you can illuminate the bigger picture of the Park through the themes you use and the stories you tell.

Planning your interpretation

Different people think about things in different ways. And different issues or aims require different approaches. There is no perfectly logical sequence of steps for planning your interpretation scheme, but there are a few common starting points.

This flowchart – adapted from *A Sense of Place, an Interpretive Planning Handbook* (James Carter, ed., 2001) – illustrates some of the things you may want to consider when thinking about those starting points in the context of the Park.



What are you going to do?

No flow chart or diagram can give you the 'right' answer, either to good interpretation or to interpretation that highlights the National Park. Good interpretation always needs creativity, based on the thinking you've done about the questions above. As you create your interpretation, ask yourself the following questions:

- Will this help people appreciate what makes the National Park so special?
- Will this help people see this site or story as part of an area with a distinct character and coherent identity?
- Is this a story that couldn't be told anywhere else?

If you can answer 'Yes' to these three questions, you've got the makings of a great project!

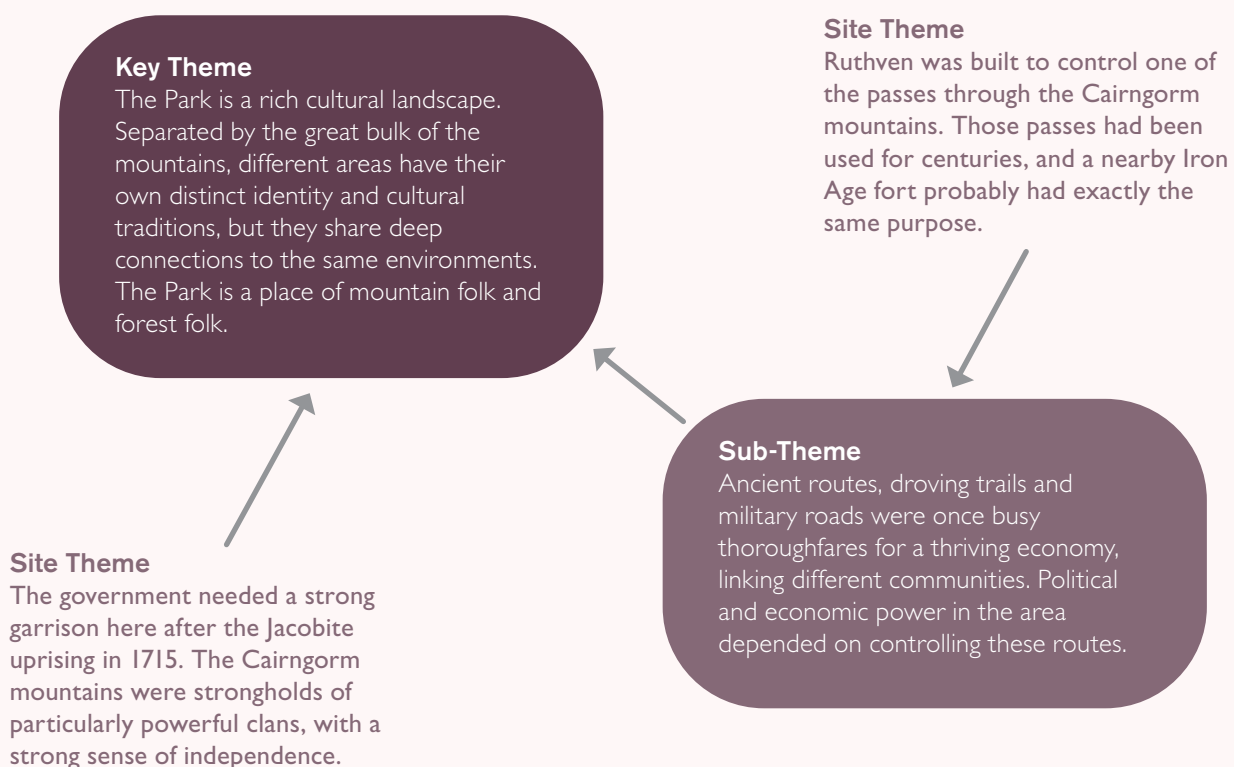
Working with this guidance

Linking to Park-wide themes

The four key themes in this document are the big ideas or concepts that describe the character of the whole of the Park. The key themes have been built up through, and are supported by, a number of sub-themes: smaller, more discrete components of the Park's character and identity.

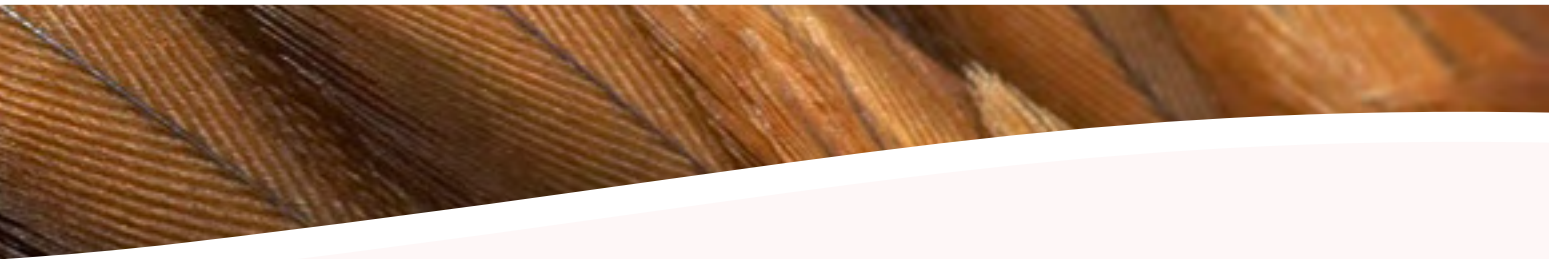
Many different people who work on interpretation in the Park helped to develop this guide. They described the common heritage of the area in lots of different ways, some relating to particular periods in history, others to particular habitats and species. Each of these can stand in their own right as sub-themes. They are still Park-wide themes because they describe shared characteristics of the whole Park, and you can use them in the same way as a key theme. Because they have a narrower focus it may sometimes be easier to think of how your site themes can illustrate or link to them.

You can link your site theme to either a key theme or a sub-theme, whichever is most appropriate for your site, and your visitor. Not all of your site themes need to link to the Park, but you'll probably find that most of them can. For instance, using the example of Ruthven Barracks on page 25, here are some ways the site themes could link to Park-wide ones:



Site Theme (site specific only)

Ruthven saw both heroic deeds and tragic despair during the Jacobite campaign.



Variations on a theme

Here are some of the Park-wide concepts that emerged during the development of the guide, and that formed the building blocks of the four key themes. Of course these aren't the end of the tale. You may well be able to come up with other sub-themes, other ideas that link the Park together, which you can use to support the four key themes and paint the bigger picture of the Park in people's minds.

- The high mountain tops are more like the Arctic than the rest of Scotland. They create the largest such area in the UK, home to plants and animals at the limit of their range in Europe, and therefore vulnerable.
- The geology and geomorphology of the National Park is world class. The combination of the broad rolling plateaux, largely untouched during the last Ice Age, and more recent glacial features is unique in Britain. Together they comprise an outstanding collection of landforms.
- The great forests of the Cairngorms National Park are as essential to the Park's character as the mountains. They have ebbed and flowed around the mountains with changing political and economic tides; and now form the largest area of native woodland in Britain.
- The mountains and forests create an environment (including both landscape and human elements) that has as much in common with Scandinavia, Russia and Canada as with the rest of the UK.
- Ancient routes, droving trails and military roads were once busy thoroughfares for a thriving economy, linking different communities. Political and economic power in the area depended on controlling these routes.
- There is a strong tradition of people enjoying the National Park. The variety of landscapes and breadth of leisure choice they offer has long attracted visitors to the Cairngorms. Now the Park is an inspiring home to modern adventure sports like mountaineering, skiing and mountain biking.
- Landowners, trying to modernise the economy of their estates, changed the way people lived and the landscapes they lived in during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some built planned villages as experiments in 'model' settlements; others evicted their tenants with little care for their future.
- The Victorians' love of the Highlands and of field sports changed the face of the National Park. They left a living legacy of distinctive buildings and vast areas of heather moorland.

Working with this guidance

Put it into practice

Here are a few examples of how the Park's key themes might influence interpretation.



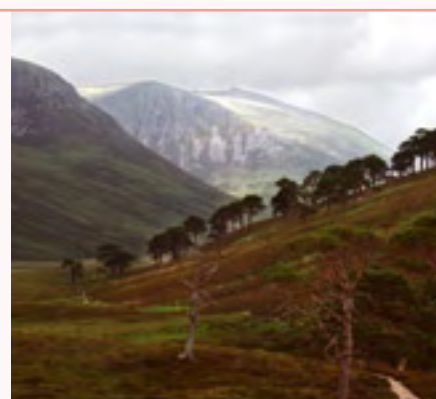
Bringing the mountains home

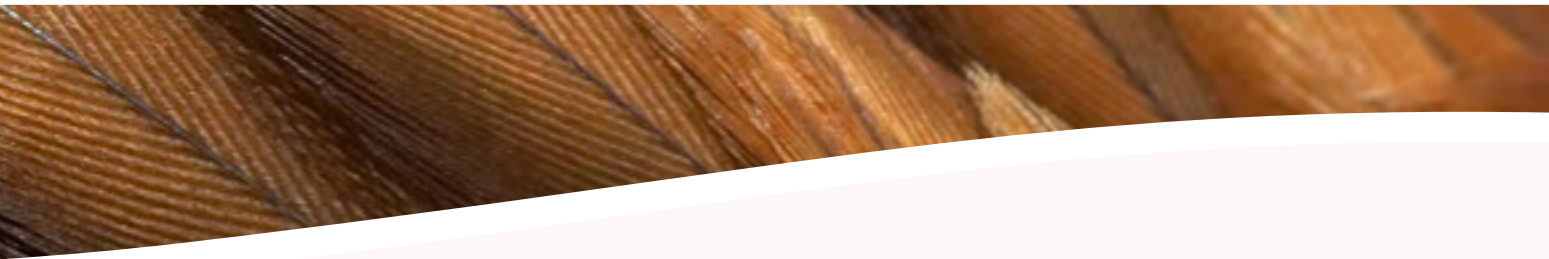
The theme 'the Park's mountains are unique, and have influenced everything around them' (Key theme 1) could be the central focus of an evening talk by a Ranger to a coach party staying in a hotel. The Ranger might show dramatic images of the different landscape features in the Park, talk about how the mountains' great bulk and height influences everything around them, and tell some personal stories about their own favourite mountain trips.

Or... a restaurant owner could use the theme as a starting point for the way they decorate their dining room. They might put stunning photographs or paintings on the walls, and design a menu with graphic elements that reflect the mountain shapes. They might even name some dishes after well-known mountain tops.

The story of the trees

Visitors to the Mar Lodge estate often remark on the beauty of the native pine woods, but they're also interested in the story of how the National Trust for Scotland is encouraging more natural re-growth. Key theme 2, about how the Park's habitats and wildlife are exceptional, is relevant here. There's an opportunity to mention how the estate's forests are just part of the largest area of native woodland in Britain. You could also suggest a visit to other places where they'll get a sense of the Park's woodland, like Nethy Bridge or Glen Tanar.





Follow that carriage

Rothiemurchus Estate's new interpretation strategy suggests a low key approach that complements visitors' enjoyment of the place: people coming to Loch an Eilein aren't expecting to *learn* anything, they just want a picnic or a walk in one of the Park's most famous beauty spots. Just like the Duchess of Bedford in fact. In the nineteenth century, she built the path that today's visitors follow round the loch, although she drove round in a carriage. And the loch was just as romantic then as it is now: the Duchess's lover, the famous painter Sir Edwin Landseer, was often a guest on her picnics. This is a great story of this particular place that can add to visitors' experience, and it's a wonderful way to illustrate key themes 3 and 4: about the Park's cultural history, and the passion for the place that's been a common thread for centuries.

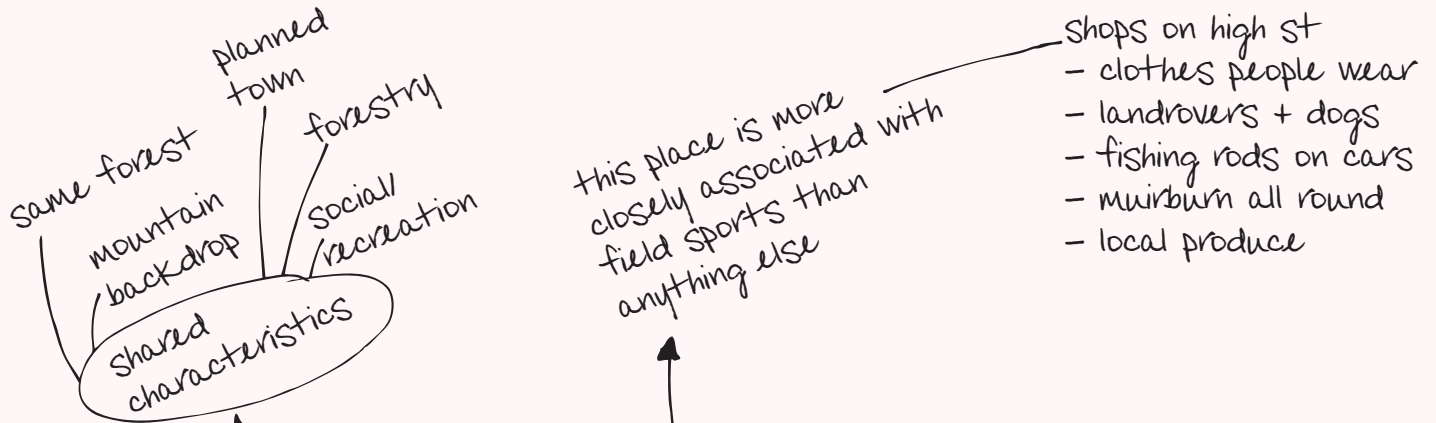
Get inspired



The best way to use the themes in this guide is as inspiration. Try this, and look at the example on the next two pages:

- Look through sections 2 to 5 of this guide.
- Write down each of the key themes on a separate piece of paper, in the centre of the page.
- Go through each sheet, and jot down around each key theme the features of your work or site that can link to that theme. Some themes will be more relevant than others – that's fine.
- Think about how you could use these features in the stories you tell so that they illustrate the most relevant themes, and add value to visitors' experience. What aspects of your place, or your stories, mean that they couldn't be anywhere else but in the Cairngorms National Park?
- If you're having difficulty doing this at a desk, go for a walk round your site with the theme that appeals most to you in your mind. Notice which features remind you of the theme, or could be used to reinforce it in visitors' minds.
- Find your own way to express the themes: don't just copy them word for word and reproduce them in your publications, exhibitions, or conversations. Each section in this guide takes a theme as a starting point, and uses facts, carefully chosen images, and other materials to bring it to life – you need to do the same.

Working with this guidance

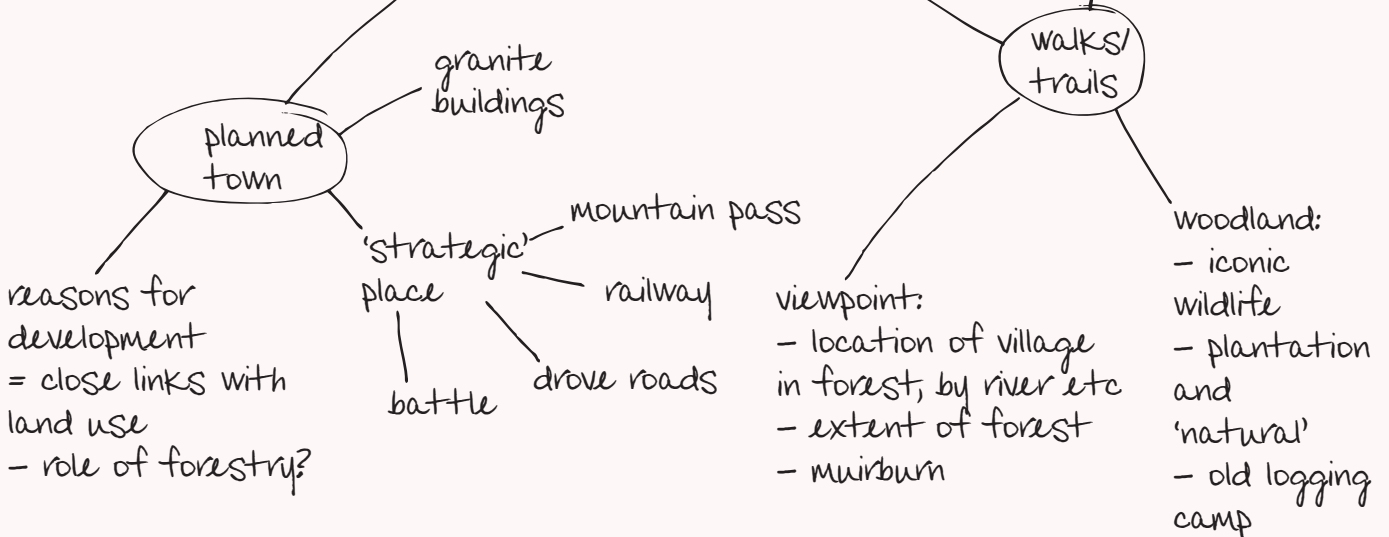


- Shops on high st
- clothes people wear
- landrovers + dogs
- fishing rods on cars
- muirburn all round
- local produce

The Park is a rich cultural landscape. Separated by the great bulk of the mountains, different areas have their own distinct identity and cultural traditions, but they share deep connections to the same environments. The Park is a place of 'Mountain folk' and 'Forest folk'.

- not sure about this?
- skiing in winter
 - transhumance/ bothies?
 - 'outdoor' pursuits?

this place is closely connected to forest, hills and river



INFORMATION BOARD

map of CNP with village highlighted
map showing drove roads, railways etc.

EVENTS PROGRAMME

- A day in the life of (with?) a gamekeeper/ghillie
- staking/shooting opportunities? fishing
- storytelling at old logging camp
- celebration of village's 'birthday' (costumed/themed event)

TOWN TRAIL

- blue plaques on significant buildings
- 1/2hr - 1hr for coach party audience
- audio tour + leaflet
- tour led by village's founder?
- include viewpoint

Sculpture bench (es)



- at viewpoint overlooking Muirburn or in village?

- other benches: fisherman by river
cattle at bothy

NB + get people to touch granite + at viewpoint "if you were a squirrel how far do you think you could get before touching the ground"

'kitted out' fishing hut (might not be able to leave open, maybe windows to peer in? Bothy as well?)



metal fish in pavement leading to river heights board

Working with this guidance

Next steps

If you're thinking about an interpretation project, there are lots of places to go for more ideas and for help to develop your thinking.

Cairngorms National Park Brand

The Cairngorms National Park Brand represents the landscape, its people and the experiences it offers. It is designed to create a strong identity for the National Park, helping to foster a sense of common identity and present one of Scotland's most special places consistently. It is not the logo of the Park Authority. It is an emblem for a place, not for an organisation. Therefore it is yours to use, because you are the Park.



National Parks are an internationally recognised family of world class destinations, associated with outstanding landscapes and high quality, environmentally sustainable visitor experiences. The Cairngorms National Park is building itself such a reputation: using the brand is a simple and effective way of letting your customers and visitors know that you are part of it.

The Park Authority encourages businesses, organisations and associations who meet the values associated with the brand to use it whenever it is practical and appropriate, subject to meeting eligibility criteria. You can find out more at: www.cairngorms.co.uk

Cairngorms Connections

An online training course designed for anyone working with visitors to the Park. It covers essential knowledge about the Park's heritage, as well as information on tourism businesses and opportunities. The course is run by Tourist Board Training, and you can find more details through the VisitScotland website at: www.scotexchange.net

The Cairngorms National Park Authority

The CNPA will do everything it can to encourage interpretation that builds a sense of the Park as a whole. The Authority's Interpretation Officer can help you develop your project; there's also a small grants programme that may be able to give financial support. www.cairngorms.co.uk



Guidance on interpretation

These free, web-based sources have a lot of good material giving more detail about interpretation, and about specific skills like writing text for exhibitions.

Scottish Natural Heritage: Introducing interpretation

A series of well-planned web pages.

www.snh.org.uk

A Sense of Place

A handbook on interpretive planning that explains the process clearly and simply.

www.greentourism.org.uk/publications.html

Museums Galleries Scotland

MGS produce a series of factsheets about interpretation designed for small museums, but relevant to many other situations.

www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk

Interpret Scotland

An informal grouping of Scottish organisations with an interest in interpretation. IS publishes an email-based journal, and back copies are available from its website.

www.interpretscotland.org.uk

The Association for Heritage Interpretation

The United Kingdom's membership and networking organisation for interpreters. AHI runs events, including an annual conference, and publishes a regular magazine.

www.ahi.org.uk

Feedback

We'd love to hear your feedback on this approach to interpreting the Cairngorms National Park. Please send your thoughts, ideas and suggestions to:

Cairngorms National Park Authority

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Morayshire, PH26 3HG

T: 01479 873 535

E: enquiries@cairngorms.co.uk

Acknowledgements & Credits

Further reading

If you'd like more details about the National Park and the themes described in this guidance, these suggestions should get you started.

At the heart of the Park

Desmond Nethersole-Thompson and Adam Watson: *The Cairngorms – Their Natural History and Scenery* (1974)

Adam Watson: *The Cairngorms - Scottish Mountaineering Club District Guide* (Scottish Mountaineering Trust 1992)

Scottish Natural Heritage: *Cairngorms, A Landscape Fashioned by Geology* (Scottish Natural Heritage 2006)

DVD/Video: Hamish MacInnes, director: *Where Eagles Fly – The Roof of Scotland*.

Special places for wildlife

Seton Gordon: *The Cairngorm Hills of Scotland* (Cassell 1925)

Mark Hamblin and Peter Cairns: *Wild Land: A Photographic Journey Through the Cairngorms* (Birlinn 2008)

Philip Shaw and D B A Thompson (eds): *The Nature of the Cairngorms* (The Stationery Office 2006)

People of the Park

David Duff (ed): *Queen Victoria's Highland Journals* (Hamlyn 1997)

William Forsyth: *In the Shadow of Cairngorm: Chronicles of the United Parishes of Abernethy and Kincardine* (1900) (Kessinger Publishing 2008)

Ann Glen: *The Cairngorm Gateway* (Scottish Cultural Press 2000)

Affleck Gray: *Legends of the Cairngorms* (Mainstream Publishing 1988)

Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus: *Memoirs of a Highland Lady* (Canongate 1988)

A R B Haldane: *The Drove Roads of Scotland* (1952) and *New Ways through the Glens* (1962)

Historic Scotland: *A Selection of the Cairngorms National Park's Architectural Heritage* (Historic Scotland 2007)

Ian Murray: *In the Shadow of Lochnagar* (1992)

T.C. Smout & R.A. Lambert: *Rothiemurchus: Nature and People on a Highland Estate, 1500 – 2000* (Scottish Cultural Press 1999)

A passion for the place

Dave Brown and Ian R Mitchell: *Mountain Days and Bothy Nights* (Luath Press 2008)

Jim Crumley: *A High and Lonely Place – The Sanctuary and Plight of the Cairngorms* (Whittles Publishing 2000)

J I Hall: *Fishing a Highland Stream – A Love Affair with a River* (1987)

M M Marshall: *Glen Feshie The History and Archaeology of a Highland Glen* (2005)

Syd Scroggie: *The Cairngorms Seen and Unseen* (Scottish Mountaineering Trust 1989)

Nan Shepherd: *The Living Mountain* (Aberdeen University Press 1977)

A large print version of this document is available on request. Telephone: 01479 873 535

This document has been produced by the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) on behalf of, and with support from, the people that make up the Cairngorms National Park.

Aberdeenshire Council
Angus Council
Aviemore and the Cairngorms Destination Management Organisation
CairnGorm Mountain Ltd
Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce
The Crown Estate
Forestry Commission Scotland
Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Glen Tanar Charitable Trust
The Highland Council
Historic Scotland
The Moray Council
National Trust for Scotland
Rothiemurchus Estate
Royal Deeside and the Cairngorms Destination Management Organisation
Royal Society for the Protection Birds
Scottish Natural Heritage
Wild Scotland
VisitScotland

With particular thanks to the steering group for the project:
Murray Ferguson, CNPA. Andy Ford, CNPA. Julie Forrest, Scottish Natural Heritage
Fred Gordon, Aberdeenshire Council. Bob Jones, Forestry Commission Scotland. Bill Taylor

Text: James Carter, interpretation consultant www.jamescarter.cc

Content development: James Carter and Andy Ford, CNPA

Design: StudioLR

Thank you to all those who helped to develop this document through workshops and interviews, and especially to the people featured in the Personal Views: Peter Cairns, Bill Marshall, Cameron McNeish, Heather Morning, Alan Rankin and Eoin Smith.

Photographs: Ballater Historic Forestry Project, Saranne Bish, CairnGorm Mountain, CNPA/Stewart Grant, Peter Cairns, James Carter, Glenlivet Estate, D. Habron, Mark Hickens, Highland Folk Museum, Jimmy Mitchell, David Newland, RSPB, Peter Scott, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Viewpoint, Paul Tomkins, Rachel Wignall, Kenny Williamson, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, VisitScotland.

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ISBN: 978-1-906071-02-8

Published by Cairngorms National Park Authority 2008