

4. People of the Park



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

Brian Eno, artist and musician



People of the Park

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'.

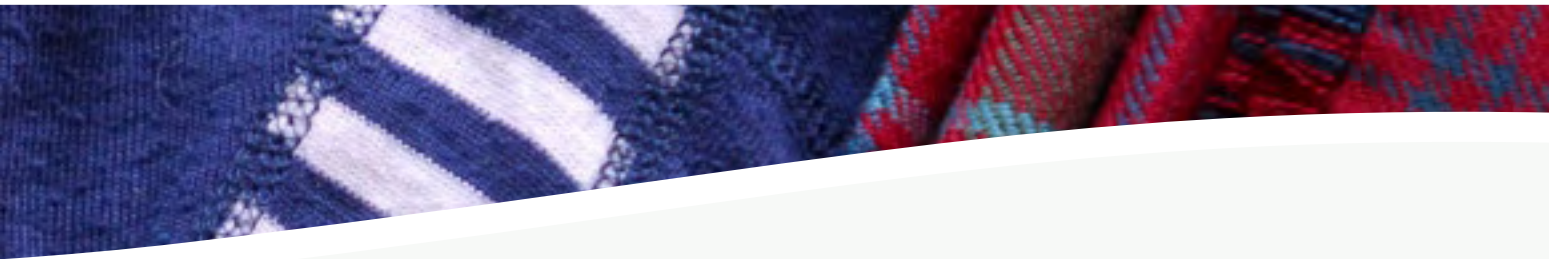
The Park might be world famous for its mountains and wildlife, but the people who live here, and their communities and history, are just as important in defining its character and special qualities.

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.