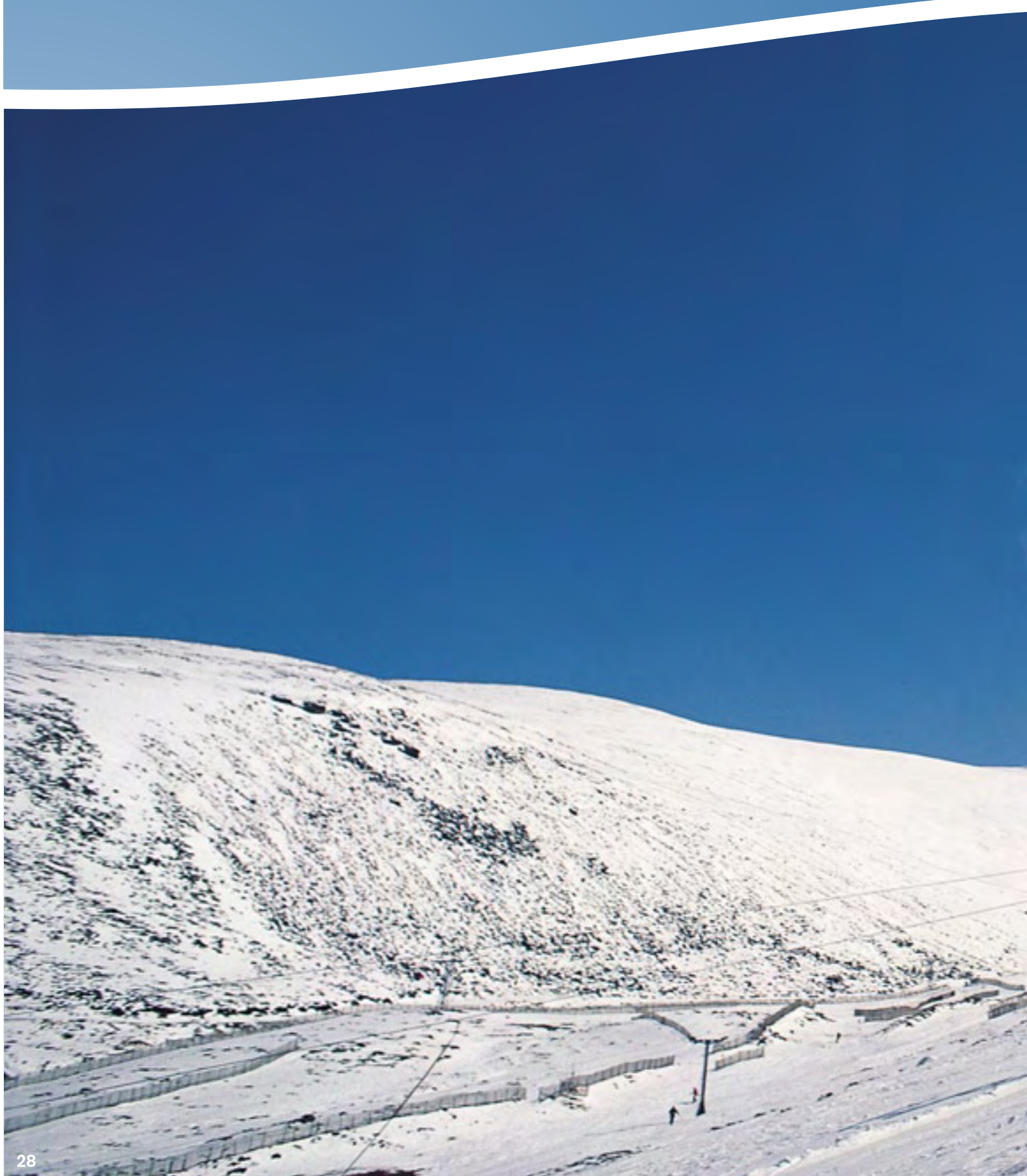


## 5. A passion for the place



'... 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](http://www.creativecairngorms.co.uk) and of North East Open Studios [www.northeastopenstudios.co.uk](http://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)