

## 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

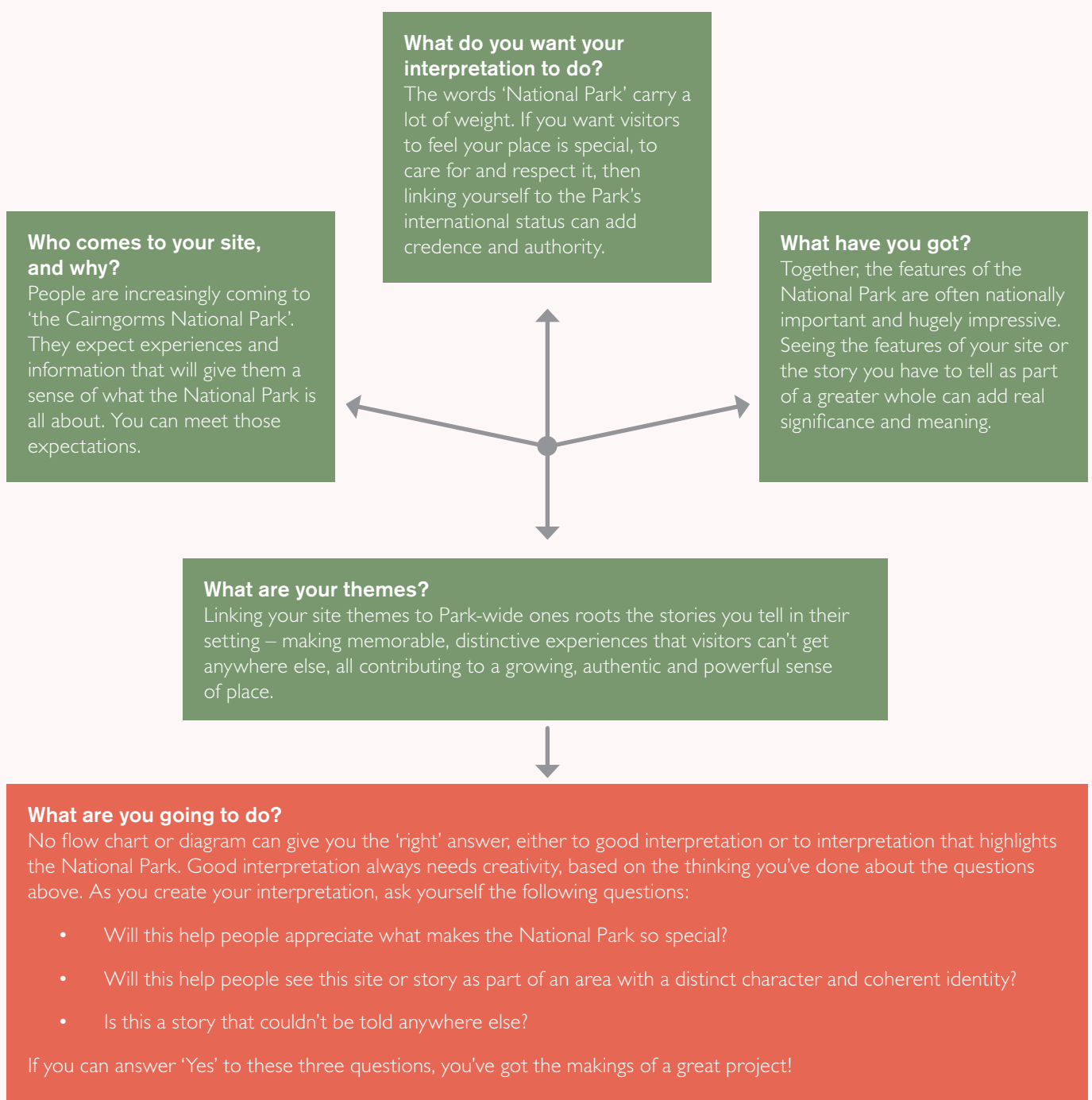
This document is intended as guidance, not a rigid set of rules and regulations. It does not set out any single method for planning and delivering interpretation in the Park. The point of working with Park-wide themes is not to have a uniform approach across the Park: that would work against the very 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.

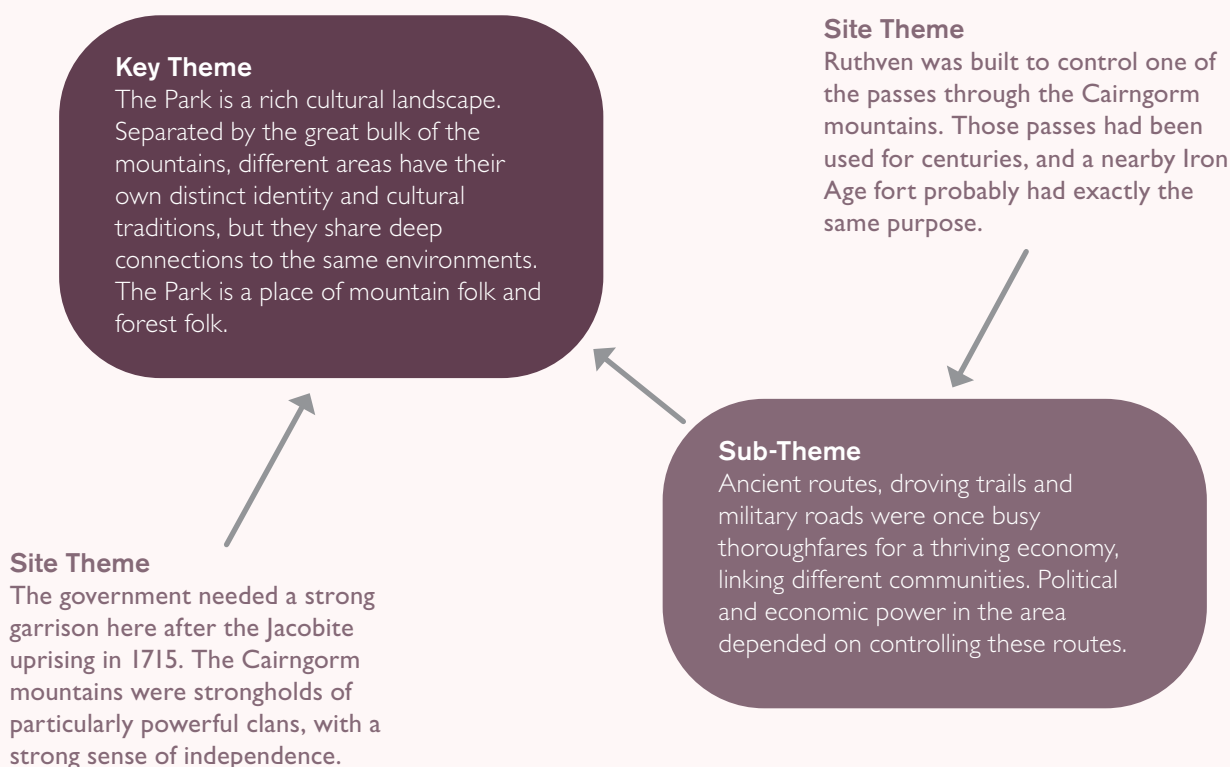


## Linking to Park-wide themes

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.

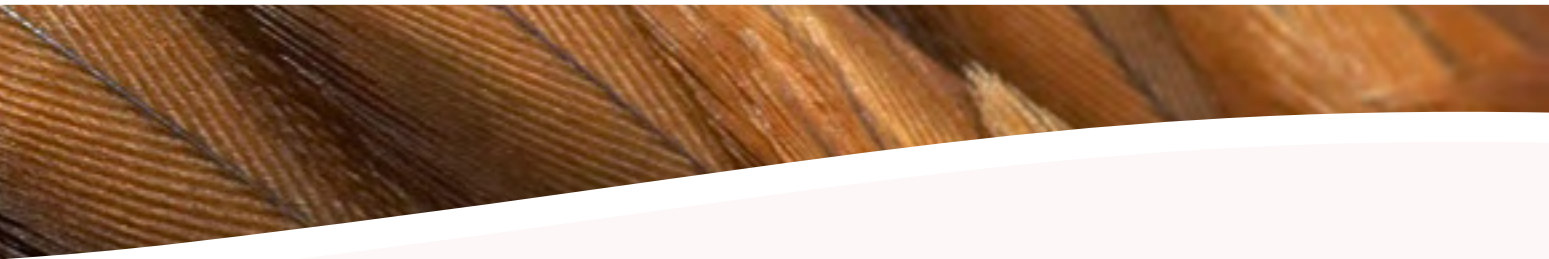
Many different people who work on interpretation in the Park helped to develop this guide. They described the common heritage of the area in lots of different ways, some relating to particular periods in history, others to particular habitats and species. Each of these can stand in their own right as 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

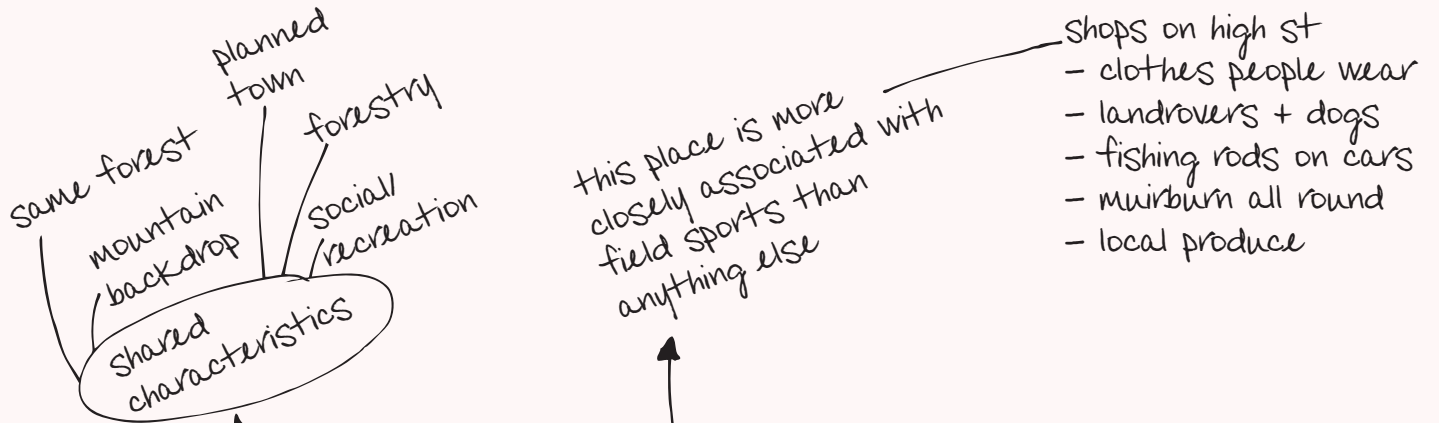


The best way to use the themes in this guide is as inspiration. Try this, and look at the example on the next two pages:

- 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



this place is more closely associated with field sports than anything else

- 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
- stalking/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](http://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](http://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](http://www.cairngorms.co.uk)



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## 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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.ahi.org.uk)

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## 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:

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