





Sharing the stories of the Cairngorms National Park

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

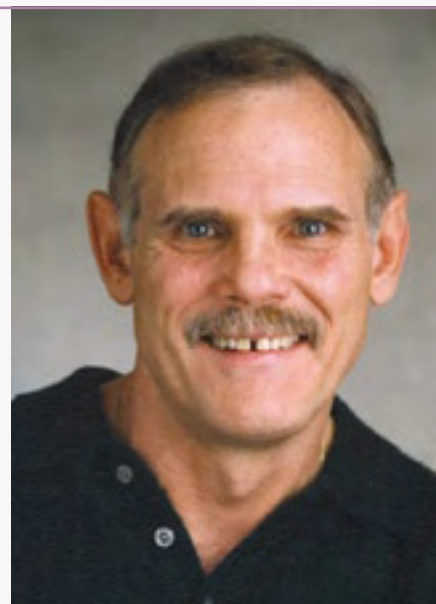
...a fresh and original approach...

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.

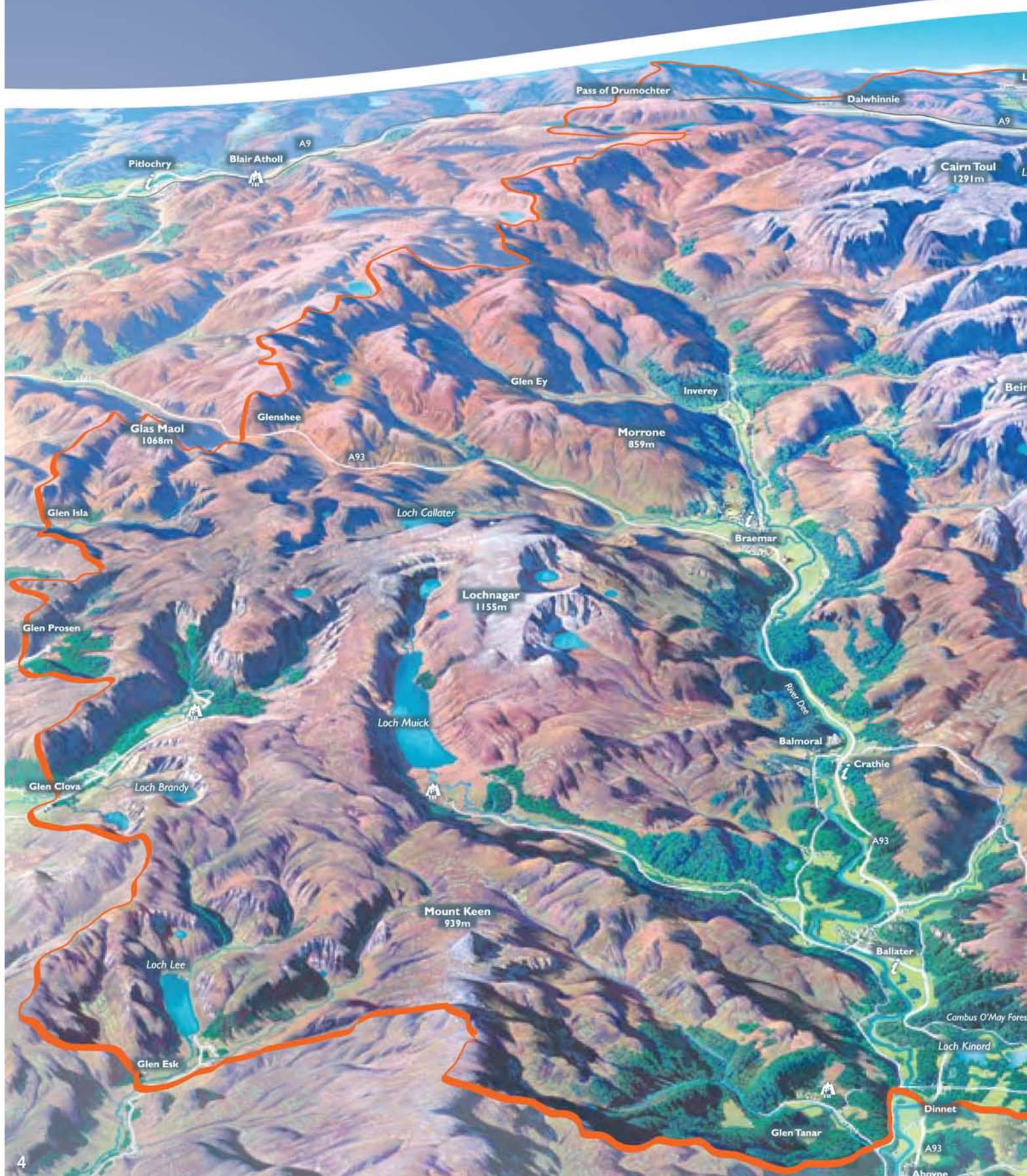
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam H. Ham". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'S' and 'H'.

Professor Sam H. Ham

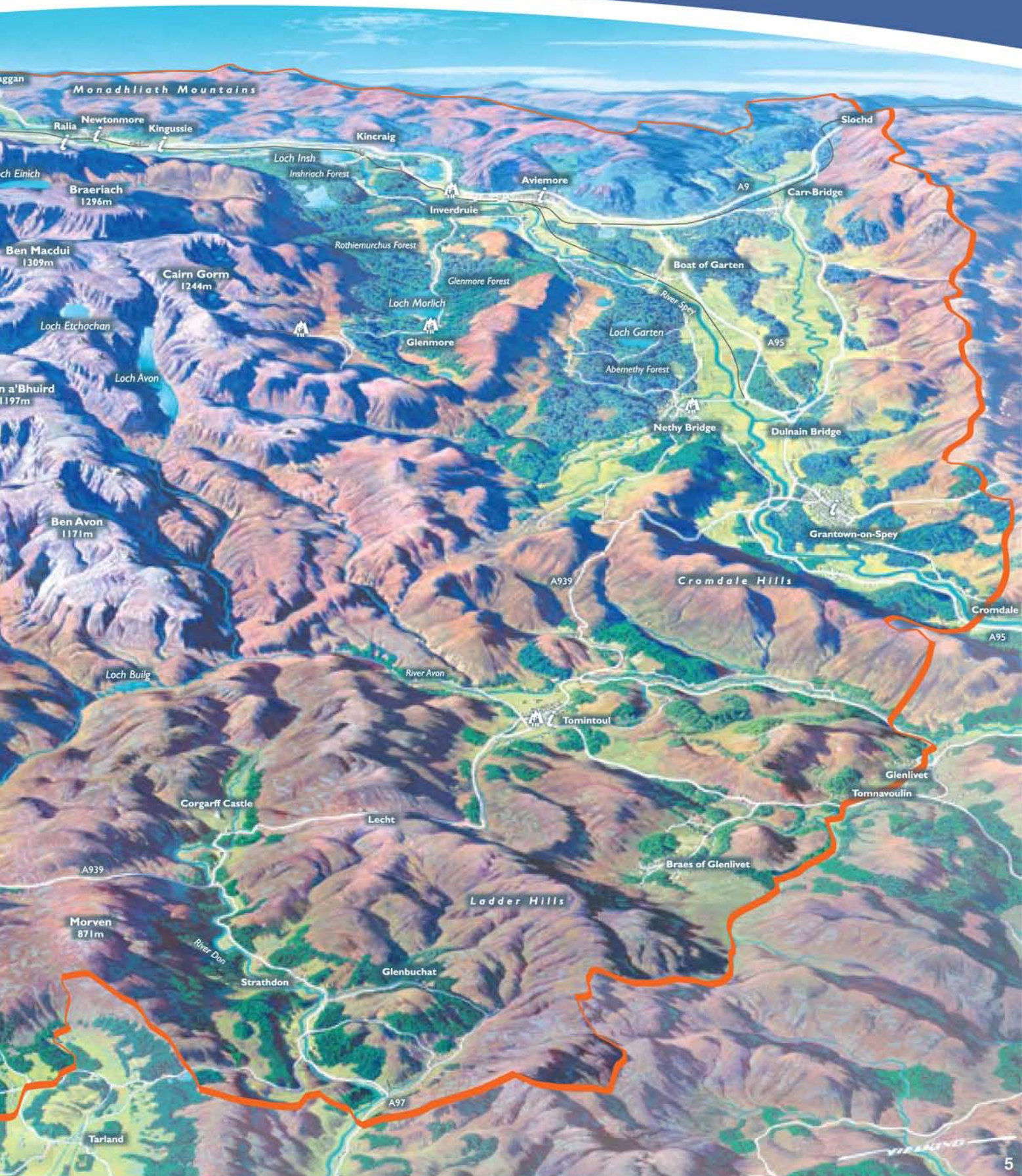
University of Idaho

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

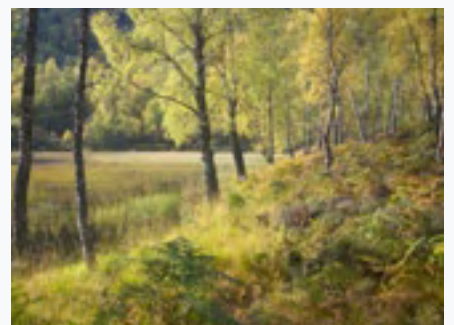
This document is for anyone who interprets the places that make up the Cairngorms National Park; for anyone who communicates with people so that they enjoy, understand and value this vast, unique landscape and its communities. It describes four key themes that make the Cairngorms National Park unlike 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.

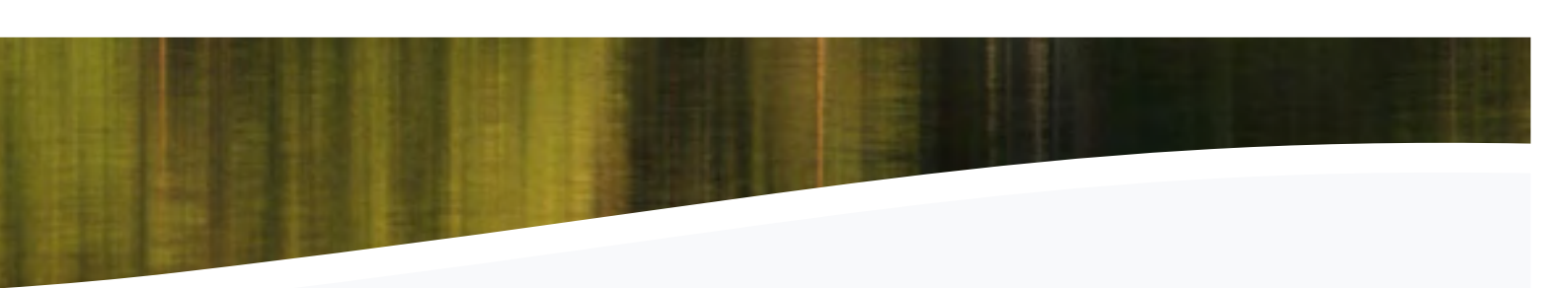
A Coherent Vision

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.

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

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