

# A STORMY ROAD

## The rebuilding process

In August 2014 Hurricane Bertha caused major damage in Strathspey, followed hardly more than a year later by Storm Frank in December 2015 which devastated Deeside. Bridges will need to be rebuilt, paths have been destroyed, and in some cases the very land they were on has been lost.

Major investment will be required to regain the path networks that have been broken and discussions are ongoing between key partners. There would perhaps be real merit in building an endowment fund over the long term with new income needed from a range of sources.



Ballater Golf Course path after the storms and (inset) before Storm Frank

Over the years a huge amount of work has been achieved by the COAT Team within the field of Outdoors Access. We are essentially a development charity with a high focus of attention on construction of new path infrastructure. We have developed new strands of associated work in parallel, including Walking To Health, Adopt A Path, Volunteering and SVQ accredited training for people to gain employment in our field.

This has been a highly significant contribution to the Cairngorms National Park and surrounding area, and will generate Social, Economic and Environmental benefits for the area far into the future in what has been designed to be a model for Sustainable Development that can be rolled out elsewhere.

These are gains we should all take pride in.

**COAT STATS**  
*Between 2008-2015 we have constructed:*

- 47km community paths
- 29km mountain paths
- 21km strategic routes
- 24 bridges

They do present a legacy challenge to all of the stakeholders however. How do we look after all of this in the long term?

We currently have a maintenance programme in place which looks after the paths, and sustaining the funding for this into the future will be a key priority in the next few years.

Sometimes though, maintenance alone is simply not enough as the images of Bertha and Frank will demonstrate.

We have now embarked on The Mountains and The People 2015-20 project across both of Scotland's National Parks, an initiative featuring Mountain Path work, Training and Volunteering. We hope this provides a stepping stone to take our skill set out to the wider nation. Ensuring the legacy of this and other initiatives far into the future will be a major challenge, but one we must all pull together to meet head on.



Cairngorms  
Outdoor  
Access Trust

Annual Report 2015 - 2016

### INSIDE.....

**Chairman's report** New Chairman Ian Moffet gives his first review.

**A year of completed projects** Speyside Way, Tarland Way and more....

**The Mountains and the People** Path upgrades, our people, training and education....

# A VIEW FROM THE TOP

## *A Foreword From The Chairman*

I am delighted to provide this, my first foreword as newly appointed chairman of COAT.

Firstly, on behalf of the Board, I would like to thank Peter Ord, who retired as the Chairman of COAT in March 2016. Peter has tirelessly contributed to the COAT 'cogs' for many years and I am delighted to advise he will continue to be an intrinsic part of the COAT Board. I also wish to thank Gregor Hutcheon, who has stepped down as a director, for his great assistance and advice

To say this last year has been exciting would indeed be an understatement. We have witnessed the strength and professionalism of all those involved with COAT and I would therefore like to pass on my sincere appreciation to the COAT Board, all our project partners and affiliates, our grant awarding bodies, our volunteers, and last but not most certainly not least, the COAT staff. A special mention of thanks must be given to the COAT CEO, Dougie Baird, who has worked tirelessly throughout these past few months to bring about the largest project we have ever owned.

*“ in July 2015, we were awarded The Mountains and The People, a £6.4m collaborative project over 5 years ”*

I am delighted to announce that in July 2015, we were awarded The Mountains and The People, a £6.4m collaborative project over 5 years, working with both of Scotland's National Parks - Loch Lomond and The Trossachs and the Cairngorms. The Mountains and The People represents a step change for COAT, enabling us to expand beyond the Cairngorms National Park and work in partnership with other landowners and project partners.

The Mountains and The People is more than building paths. It is all encompassing in outdoors access with a full and varied training programme, already hosting trainees in both National Parks, volunteering opportunities, an educational agenda and an overarching theme of working with the public – all of which you will read about in the next few pages.

The next year is undoubtedly going to be busier, more exciting and have even more opportunities coming our way.

We look forward to embracing the future of COAT with unbound enthusiasm and once again thank all those who have contributed towards the success of the organisation.

**IAN MOFFETT,**  
*September 2016*



# 2015-2016.....

## The Speyside Way



## The Tarland Way



## Maintenance



# A YEAR OF PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES



On behalf of Cairngorms National Park Authority, 2015-16 saw the completion of sections of the Speyside Way between Aviemore and Kincaig culminating in a six mile, 2m width, waymarked stretch of aggregate path linking the two communities. The funding came from Sustrans and Sportscotland Commonwealth Games Legacy Fund 2014.

No sooner had the above been completed than the development of the next sections between Kincaig and Ruthven, Kingussie began; here surveys and reports were completed before the end of the financial year and were jointly funded by CNPA and Sustrans.

The Speyside Way has long been promoted north of Aviemore and therefore CNPA asked COAT to conduct a thorough assessment of its condition between Cromdale and Boat of Garten producing a report with recommendations for its upgrade.

Over the last four years COAT have completed many phases of the Tarland Way. The first three phases involved bridge and path work to create a six mile waymarked route between Tarland and Aboyne.

A two mile section between Tarland and Coull bridge involved walking on a quiet back road however in 2015-16 an opportunity arose via the Dee Catchment 'Pearl's in Peril' Project to create a 3km grass path along a 10m fenced off corridor adjacent to the Tarland Burn.

The path element of the project was initiated on behalf of the Tarland community by The MacRobert Trust who installed the fencing and a bridge to complete the link and who cut the grass along the 3km section; COAT for our part received planning approval and then installed a short section of revetment to support a path adjacent to the Coull bridge linking the earlier phase of work onto the 3km section. There is now a safe off road route all the way from Tarland to Aboyne.

**Our unsung heroes.** Starting in Spring when the snow has melted, until around October, COAT manages a team of contractors in the maintenance of both lowland and upland paths across the Cairngorms. Covering a considerable area each year with a total of 131km upland paths in the Cairngorms stretching from Ben MacDui in the north west to Jocks Road in the Angus Glens in the south east - areas are patched and resurfaced, cross drains and water bars are cleaned and new drainage facilities are installed.

The lowground paths also required drains to be cleared but the biggest activity of all is cutting the grass. The core path network involves cutting the grass on 14km of paths with a further 12km on the Speyside Way on behalf of CNPA – three times each summer, every year!



## Activity Report

This year has seen the launch of The Mountains and The People project, a £6.4M programme making it the largest and most ambitious scope of work we have managed to date. Spanning both of Scotland's National Parks we have successfully secured funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and the two National Park Authorities as well as contributing into the pot from our own finances.

The Mountains and The People project aims to conserve our fragile mountain habitats by a combination of path upgrades and repairs, training the future conservation workforce and engaging with the public of all ages in volunteering and educational programmes, enabling all of us to take responsibility for our natural heritage. A dedicated project team has now been recruited and the work has begun in earnest.

## Training

Delivery of SVQ training in Environmental conservation is a core element of the 5 year The Mountains and The People project with 36 young people being offered a 6 month paid training placement at either the Balloch or Aboyne training centres. As expected, interest in these opportunities was high with over 300 applications for the 14 available spaces in year one. 50 candidates were invited to interview which included a full day assessment during which they ascended Conic Hill, with 8 lucky candidates receiving a place on the Balloch course which started in April 2016. Interviews for the Cairngorms trainees are to take place in May with a slightly later start date planned for their course.

COAT's training courses are unique within the conservation industry and provide trainees with real life experience as well as transferrable qualifications in conservation, habitat management, path construction and health and safety as well as other areas. Trainees will work throughout their respective national parks, learning from professionals in the field and honing their skills to become part of the conservation workforce of the future.



Some of the Balloch trainees taking a breather

## Adopt a path

Already delivered through COAT in the Cairngorms, this programme will be expanded to include paths improved across both National Parks under the The Mountains and The People project. Resources will be invested in the project to ensure all volunteers receive the support and recognition they require to continue in this vital role they play.

As well as training and volunteering, the development of curriculum linked educational resources and a wide range of public engagement activities also form part of the The Mountains and The People project activity plan.

Now approaching the end of our first year, there is already a strong following from a host of different groups and individuals and we very much look forward to reaching out to more people over the remaining four years of the project.



A group of volunteers admiring the view

Get involved by emailing  
[contact@themountainsandthepeople.org.uk](mailto:contact@themountainsandthepeople.org.uk)

# Stepping Up For Scotland's National Parks

## Project Report

### Ben A'an Path Upgrade and Repair

One of the most popular hills in the Trossachs, Forestry Commission owned Ben A'an is easily accessible from anywhere in the central belt and at 454m, offers a range of walking and climbing experiences suitable for most including families with young children.

Identified as requiring urgent repairs having suffered badly from drainage and erosion issues over the years, COAT commenced with a detailed survey after which the decision was taken to build a 'high and dry' type path which effectively 'lifts' users out of the boggy sections. Using on site as dug materials and following the old path line, the path was to incorporate any suitable existing built features where possible.

Work started in October with an Easter 2016 deadline for completion of the three pronged construction phases. The path building took place by machines and by hand with one of the sections being fully hand built due to the topography and access constraints – limited on site materials meant 120 tonnes of stone had to be imported from a local FCS quarry.

A replacement bridge was constructed, cross drains and water bars were built and a double side ditch was constructed to manage water discharge – all of which ensured a 'mountain path' appearance.



The completed path and (inset) how it used to look

#### Quirky bits:

As we all know, goats have an exuberant appetite for pretty much anything - someone should have told the guys working on site who regularly found their lunch had been stolen!

A helicopter was used to deliver 120 tonnes of working stone – with the help of local man Wullie and his tractor!

### Path Upgrades and Repairs - A Collection

*The following are a selection of completed upgrades that form part of the 125KM path upgrade programme*

**Cobbler return** – a site that presented significant challenges with difficult topography, high levels of precipitation, walkers and midgies, all of which made the work very challenging. The existing path and features have been reworked and there are already signs of local area habitat recovery.

**Glittering Skellies** – a site where part of it had significant flood damage caused by Storm Frank. With the help of the Queens guard, heavy duty revetment and rock armour was constructed along the burn edge to protect the path and the lower bridge from any possible future flood events.

**Jock's Road** – another difficult site, this time due to the time of year with the approaching winter. Notably, where the original existing path had terminated, a number of visible trods going off in all directions was apparent. Now with the introduction of one single user line, the general area is benefitting in less erosion and footfall and is now beginning to show signs of recovery.

**Allt Gargh Buidhe** – a particularly interesting project with the contractor being one of the trainees on the first ever COAT training course. A light touch solution was applied to the growing issue of path spread and erosion with the Atholl Rangers recently confirming the path is now in good condition.

**Cairngorm Plateau** – again a light touch solution was applied to prevent further spread and erosion. With the aid of Glyn Jones from Balmoral and his invaluable experience of the hill, the works have created a single, usable and visible route which most users now stick to.

**Dubh Loch** – a tough old site with plenty of water to contend with and heavy usage during the stalking season. During the project, those working on the hill experienced a grade 5 midge attack with the video shot by one of the guys becoming an internet sensation and the story making it into the P&J.

# CONSULTANCY SERVICES

A person wearing a high-visibility yellow and black jacket is using a pickaxe on a rocky, uneven path. The person is seen from the side, with their arms raised as they work. The background shows a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The overall scene suggests outdoor work or maintenance in a natural setting.

Through our trading arm, COAT Trading Ltd, we provide a range of consultation services:

Path Condition Surveys  
Path Specification  
Path Feasibility Studies  
Route Planning  
Contract Management  
CDM (2007) Ltd  
Expert Witness

## Dava Way

Previously on behalf of the Dava way Association, COAT completed a 2.6km section of path work along the Dava Way; the old 35km railway line between Forres and Grantown - on -Spey.

In 2015 COAT were approached again by the Association to develop a new 2m width 1.3km section of path between Lynmore and Grantown, a section that was an agreed re-routing away from the old railway.

COAT surveyed and specified the path and were awarded planning permission in time to start the tree felling; avoiding the potential to disturb nesting birds.

## Pentland Hills upland Path Audit

COAT was commissioned by Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust, on behalf of City Of Edinburgh Council, to carry out path condition surveys across 30 routes identified in the Pentland Hills Regional Park. The report recommends a major Capital Programme, alongside Volunteering, Training and Education, and has been warmly welcomed. The project has huge potential to provide a major uplift to infrastructure in the Pentland Hills Regional Park, and to engage a huge amount of people with Scotland's Capital on the doorstep.



# Ireland

COAT was commissioned by South Kerry Development Company on behalf of the Reeks Access Forum to carry out 3 distinct pieces of work in MacGillycuddy's Reeks, Ireland's most iconic and challenging mountain range.

1. Upland Path Audit – COAT carried out a full path audit of path condition and outline costings on the Upland Network across the Reeks. The survey recommended 4 of the routes for a Capital Project, and to include Training for local people to gain employment with the programme.
2. Upland Path Programme Development – COAT developed a detailed project proposal including
  - Path Report – detailed designs, specifications, standards and method statement for the 4 prioritised paths
  - Natura Impact Statement – to mitigate any disturbance to the area, which is entirely within the SAC
  - Archaeological Statement – to mitigate any potential disturbance to Archaeological features within the area
3. A Training Course was developed focussing on a mixture of self-employed and unemployed people. Expert Scottish contractors were taken over to deliver short training units in Hand Build and Machine techniques, and the training group were supervised on the development of 3 path sites. It was a very interesting and unique opportunity to develop a local work force, including landowners, and has great potential for delivery of this type of work in South West Ireland.

# WALKING TO HEALTH Cairngorms Walking to Health Project

The Walking to Health initiative has been a resounding success with COAT playing a significant part in this achievement. Responsible for the Walking to Health Programme for eight years from 2008 to early 2016, COAT have developed 33 health walk groups, all managed by COAT's Health Walks Co-ordinator Alan Melrose. Each group has one or more Health Walk volunteers recruited and trained to lead the groups on their weekly Health Walks

It was clear from the positive feedback from each group that the initiative was highly popular with everyone greatly benefiting from the walks. Nevertheless, funding options to continue the programme and sustain the groups became difficult and the resulting dilemma focused minds to bring in greater involvement and funding from the NHS.

We are delighted to report that Walking to Health found a new home under the CNPA Active Cairngorms Programme with a formal hand over being made from COAT to CNPA in March 2016.

COAT would like to thank the support of all the Health Walks Volunteers, the Health Walk Co-ordinator Alan Melrose and the funding Partners who supported the project over the last eight years; namely Aberdeenshire and Cairngorm LEADER; SNH; Paths for All; CNPA and more recently the NHS.



Pictured: David Clyne (Recreation & Access Manager; CNPA); Alan Melrose (Walking to Health Co-ordinator; COAT); Patsy Reynolds (Volunteer Health Walks Leader COAT; Ballater Group); Dr Aileen McLeod MSP (Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform); Murray Swapp (Senior Access Projects Manager; COAT )

## And Finally..... An enlightenment on some of those outdoor access terms we read but don't dare ask about!!

**Anchor bar:** *A pub in the docks area of Aberdeen*

Outdoor Access definition: *Stone structure built across the path to stabilise aggregate surfaces on slopes; deters down-hill slippage*

**Blockers:** *Medication to manage cardiac arrhythmias*

Outdoor Access definition: *Boulder, turf or mounds positioned around the path to discourage walkers from taking short-cuts or leaving the path.*

**Pigeon-holing:** *Assigning someone/something to a particular category*

Outdoor Access definition: *Early sign of sheet erosion and gullyng on steep slopes; walkers use same foot placements, causing concentrated vegetation and soil loss, appearing as series of "pigeon-holes" down the slope.*

**Batter:** *Pancake Mix*

Outdoor Access definition: *The backward leaning slope on the face of a retaining wall, or dies of a ditch; prevents wall from falling forward, ditch edges from collapsing.*

**Hags:** *A wizened old woman*

Outdoor Access definition: *Small islands or banks of peat; formed by the surrounding ground eroding away by water, feet or grazing.*

### Thank You To All Who Support Our Work:

COAT would be unable to carry out the level or standard of work we do without financial support from a wide range of bodies. The work within this business plan has been supported by wide range of public bodies, NGOs, private companies and private individuals.

Balmoral Estate not only supports us with a donation but the arrangement with Balmoral Estate for Spittal Of Glenmuick Car Park is of the highest importance to COAT, providing income that we can use to leverage grants for projects.

### Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust

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COAT is a company limited by guarantee, Company No. SC186301 and is a recognised Scottish charity SC028028.  
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