

Hillwalkers to be urged to adopt a path

NEW funding has been announced to improve the footpath network in Badenoch and Strathspey and to get more people and into the Great Outdoors to use them.

Scottish Natural Heritage yesterday (Tuesday) confirmed £171,000 which will go towards the Cairngorm Mountain Heritage Project - a four-year, £2.1 million path construction scheme.

The latest funds will be used to repair the remaining high priority eroded mountain paths in the Cairngorms and run a path skills training course for eight trainees.

SNH's involvement will also help with a novel approach to get keen hillwalkers involved in looking after paths in the Cairngorms via an adopt-a-path scheme.

That will see volunteers from local walking and mountaineering clubs receiving training to carry out basic maintenance work and repairs on paths.

Another initiative forming part of the Cairngorm Mountain Heritage Project is to upgrade key path links around towns and villages in the national park including in Newtonmore, Strathdon and Ballater.

Fixing these key 'missing' links will ensure the path networks are more accessible for local people and visitors.

Funding is also being used to expand the successful Healthwalks scheme in Badenoch and Strathspey and the rest of the national park.

These are local volunteer-led walking groups designed to improve participants' health.

The next part of the Cairn-

By GAVIN MUSGROVE

gorm Mountain Heritage Project will be to introduce a community path monitoring and maintenance scheme to cover tracks in and around Kingussie and Grantown.

Up to 12 volunteers will be recruited to look after footpaths surrounding the two towns by March, 2013.

The projects will be overseen by Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT).

SNH spokeswoman Debbie Greene said: "It is clear that providing improved links in the path network within the Cairngorms National Park and the construction of new paths will have major community benefits.

"Not least among them is a new path which will greatly improve access from Aviemore to Craigellachie National Nature Reserve (NNR).

"We are delighted to be helping more locals and visitors enjoy these beautiful woods just a few minutes from the village centre.

"These projects will help us deliver our commitment to increasing the number of people visiting the outdoors and becoming actively involved in and engaged with Scotland's nature and landscapes in a responsible way.

"This work allows our paths

network locally to be refreshed and completed to a high standard and by providing local jobs in the area.

"In both cases the work will be channelled into projects which will deliver priorities for action in the Cairngorms National Park Plan, and we are delighted to be working with COAT and the Cairngorms National Park Authority on them."

She added: "The path regeneration work is necessary to tackle continued deterioration of some paths - particularly with the predicted change to warmer, wetter winters with less snow cover.

COAT manager Dougie Baird said he was delighted to welcome the SNH contribution to these projects.

"These schemes also contribute strongly to Scotland's health and well-being and providing local employment," he said. "In one project we will see an expansion from supporting 23 weekly walks and 40 volunteer walk leaders to a target total of 74 volunteer walk leaders running 37 weekly health walks across the Cairngorms by March 2013.

"It is also encouraging to have seen the inception of 'health condition specific' walks over 2009 to 2011 comprising smoking cessation; Alzheimers disease, and diabetes, and their success will be

built upon by establishing new groups as advised by community health practitioners.

"And we are committed to expanding the geographic scope of the scheme to cover more of the Cairngorms and west Aberdeenshire communities.

"We will, with this SNH and partner funding, have two part-time project officers to co-ordinate the project, organise volunteer walk leader training, and support walk leaders, and the costs of the volunteers' protective equipment and externally-provided training."

Mr David Green, CNPA Convener added: "The Cairngorms Mountain Heritage Project and the many other areas of work being delivered by COAT are making a massive difference to people living in the park and visitors to the area with real opportunities for improving health through recreation on the on the Cairngorms path network.

"None of this would be possible without an effective partnership approach."

COAT has also attracted funds in the form of £722,000 from the European Structural Fund Programmes for the Highlands and Islands 2007-2013 (HIPP Ltd); £720,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund with the remainder of the funding coming from Highlands and Islands Enterprise; RSPB Scotland; the Scottish Mountaineering Trust; Cairngorms LEADER; Aberdeenshire LEADER and the Browne Forbes Memorial Trust.

COAT came into existence on April 1, 2008, after it evolved from the former Upper Deeside Access Trust to improve footpath access in the whole of the national park.

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Debbie Greene

