

# On the way to better access

By CLIVE DENNIER

**SIGNIFICANT** amounts of new path work and the Walking to Health Project were highlighted at the annual meeting of the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT) at Boat of Garten Community Hall.

The event gave the independent charitable trust the opportunity to inform many of its members about achievements over the past year.

COAT chairman Peter Ord congratulated trust manager Dougie Baird on his work over the last year in raising more than £2 million for a West Cairngorms Mountain Heritage Project.

Funds have come from the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA); Scottish Natural Heritage; Aberdeenshire Council; Balmoral Estate; the Heritage Lottery Fund; the European Regional Development Fund; RSPB; Scottish Mountaineering Trust and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Meanwhile, around £250,000 of low ground path work has been completed in the Cairngorms National Park and West Aberdeenshire over the past year.

Mr Ewan Thain, COAT's West Cairngorms Access Projects Officer, highlighted projects now finished, including the Heron Trail at Boat of Garten; the Riverside Path at Dulnain Bridge, and the Insh to Inshriach Forest paths. Responsibility for the maintenance of the Speyside Way has just been contracted to COAT.

Mr Boyd Henderson, COAT's mountain heritage project officer for the West Cairngorms Mountain Heritage Project, discussed the first year's work of a four-year upland path repair programme. To date, work has been carried out at Lairig Ghru, Windy Ridge, Lairig an Laoigh, Bynack More and the Miadian.

An important part of the scheme is a footpath construction skills training course being run by Gordon MacDonald, COAT's project training officer.

Mr MacDonald said that eight trainees from



The opening of the new path in Dulnain Bridge in March this year.

230 applicants were taking part in an eight-month-long course, each working towards an SVQ in environmental conservation as well as an

industry recognised certificate in path skills.

COAT's work also involves the 'Walking to Health' project managed by Alan Melrose,

whose aim is to promote and encourage fitness in a safe, social way, and get people walking more to increase their activity levels.

Last year the programme extended across the national park to 23 walking groups, supported by 40 volunteer walk leaders.

## Homecoming gig for Celtic big band

CARRBRIDGE guitarist and singer Ewan Robertson and his pals in Celtic big band, the Unusual Suspects, are set to raise the roof of Eden Court in Inverness tomorrow night (Thursday).

The concert by the line-up of the Scotland's most outstanding traditional and folk musicians will feature the power of their massed fiddles, bagpipes, accordions, whistles, vocals, harp, piano, powerhouse rhythm squad and a blistering brass section.

The Unusual Suspects are returning to the venue in which they recorded their first album, 'Live in Scotland', back in 2004.

They made their debut at Celtic Connections in 2003 to major critical acclaim, and within a year they had been nominated for Best Live Act in the Scots Trad Music Awards, and were receiving invitations to perform at festivals across Europe.

Since then, they have wowed audiences across

the continent - including performing to a crowd of 300,000 at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate as part of Eurofest - and at the Celtic Colours festival in Canada.

The show is the first of three UK dates they will be playing this October to celebrate the launch of their acclaimed second album, 'Big Like This'.

Tickets are available from Eden Court at [www.eden-court.co.uk](http://www.eden-court.co.uk) (Tel: 01463 234234).

## Festival date for teenagers

A TEENAGE band from the strath have been confirmed to play at the Big Stooshie Music Festival in May next year alongside The Damned, The Boomtown Rats, The Dykeemans and The Complete Stone Roses.

The Lost - guitarists Connor Traill (17) and David Birtles (18), both from Nethy Bridge; 18-year-old lead vocalist Daniel King from Grantown; guitarist Ross Elder (18), from Dulnain; drummer Calum Forwood, and bass player Callum Woolsey, both 18 and from Boat of Garten - have been together for just over a year.

They kick-started this year's Thunder in the Glens Rally in Aviemore and played a number of well received gigs in the Highlands over the summer.

For more information about the Big Stooshie, visit the website at [www.bigstooshie.com](http://www.bigstooshie.com)

