

PATH TRAINEES GO THE DISTANCE

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Eight trainees today (Friday 16th December 2011) completed the eight month footpath construction skills training course run by the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT).

They spent the morning giving a presentation on survey work they've been doing between Dulnain Bridge and Grantown-on-Spey and were joined at St John's Church Hall, Inverdrurie, by supporters of the project and author and broadcaster **Cameron McNeish** who presented the certificates. He said: "I am really delighted to present these certificates today and my congratulations go to all eight trainees to have worked so hard to complete the course. Footpath construction and maintenance work is not easy work by any means and on behalf of all those who will appreciate walking on good surfaces within the National Park I'd like to thank the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust and wish all the trainees the very best of luck in their future careers. I have walked on footpaths in mountains throughout the world and I am convinced that Scotland is at the very forefront of the highly skilled art that is mountain footpath construction." The course is part of the Cairngorms Mountain Heritage Project and the trainees have been working at various locations within the park including Carn Ban Mhor, Craeg Baeg, Kingussie golf course circular, Windy Ridge, Glenbanchor, Speyside Way and the path at Strathlynn.

In April **Gordon McDonald**, who runs training for the Mountain Heritage Project, had the difficult job of whittling the candidates down from over 200 to just eight. "It has been incredibly rewarding to have worked with the trainees and see them eight months on producing a very high standard of work. They've had to take on board a huge amount of information, learn many new skills and it's been physical work which I'm sure they will say they've loved every minute of.

"The project aims to ensure people are able to benefit from employment opportunities generated by projects such as the Mountain Heritage and Community Networks projects. Three of the trainees have set up their own contract company to carry out access work, and another two have received job offers already. "

As well as their industry recognised certificate in path skills, the trainees have been working towards an SVQ level 2 in Environmental Conservation and will hand in their Portfolios with final assessments expected to be completed by March 2012.

Also present today: COAT Chairman Peter Ord, COAT Manager Dougie Baird, Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) Convenor David Green and CNPA Senior Outdoor Access Officer, Bob Grant.

COAT Manager, Dougie Baird, said: "It is great to see the guys do so well, and I know a number of them have already arranged related work to go on to in the New Year. The initiative is all about training people in the skills to gain employment in sustaining the special qualities of the Cairngorms National Park."

CNPA Convenor, David Green, said: "This has been an excellent project, well led and delivering real and significant economic, social and environmental benefits. The trainees have learned valuable skills, making them more employable and they should be proud in the way they have contributed to paths that assist opportunities for outdoor access by a wide range of users." COAT is an innovative company dedicated to the development and delivery of outdoor access projects within the Cairngorms National Park and surrounding area. The training project receives funding from the CNPA, Scottish Natural Heritage, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and The Scottish Mountaineering Trust. For more information on COAT and the progress of the budding path-builders, please go to: www.cairngormsoutdooraccess.org.uk

The eight trainees are: Peter Dickson (20) from Kingussie, Phillip Blasé (36) from Newtonmore, Stuart Taggart (22) from Inverness, Rory Thain (24) from Aviemore, Julian Digby (36) from Bradford lives in Dulnain Bridge, Alan Wright (28) from North Berwick, David Allsop (38) from Kilsyth, Nicholas McCallie (19) from Glenrothes.