

# MOUNTAIN RESCUE!



## COAT leads the path to recovery

**T**he Cairngorms Outdoors Access Trust (COAT) has launched the Mountain Path Appeal, to help safeguard the mountain heritage throughout the Cairngorms.

Managed by COAT, the Cairngorms Mountain Heritage Project aims to improve and enhance 17 footpaths in the National Park's mountains, totalling just over 58 miles (94km). The unique landscape of the Cairngorms National Park attracts more than 1.4 million visitors per year, with even the most remote paths clocking up 12,000 users annually. This continuous wear and tear, along with the harsh climate and fragile habitat, has caused a great deal of erosion.

As well as significantly improving prioritised mountain paths, and helping to protect the fragile environment around them, the project is also delivering an SVQ training programme. This provides a direct gateway into this specialised field, where skills in mountain safety, team working and environmental sensitivity are even more important than technical path skills. Cairngorms Wilderness Contracts, the contract team on Braeriach, was formed out of graduates from the scheme in 2011 and now employs people to do this work.

The Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded the project £720,000 and funding has also come from the European Regional

Development Fund (£722,000) and other agencies, including the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA), Scottish Natural Heritage, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Scottish Mountaineering Trust. CNPA Planning Convener Eleanor Mackintosh said: "The Mountain Heritage Project is of key importance to the National Park in terms of achieving a world-class destination that is well looked after and creates opportunities for training and jobs."

While the funding from the partnership has enabled work to put right decades of damage, keeping the hills in pristine condition will require a long term commitment. Annual maintenance is fundamental, and yet, once the large grant-funded project ceases, it can be the most difficult work to find resources for. Dougie Baird, COAT Chief Executive, said: "Launching the public appeal is really about consolidating the gains made, and we hope people will sign up to the appeal and give a little back to ensure that future generations can enjoy some of Scotland's most prized heritage assets."

Small amounts will make a massive difference for maintenance once the heavy work has been done, and just giving £10 per month will provide maintenance for 60 metres of path per year.



Top: Work Dynamic

Above: Remote 'top on'