

CAIRNGORM, ROTHIEMURCHUS AND GLENMORE

An integrated management strategy – Audits of Assets and Activities

INTRODUCTION

The Group of papers that follow comprise a broadly based audit of the present state of the area lying between Aviemore and the summit of Cairngorm. They have been prepared by the Cairngorm, Rothiemurchus and Glenmore Group (CRAGG) and aim to summarise current knowledge of the natural assets and human activities in this area. They are intended to be the basis for developing a long term management strategy for this important part of the Cairngorms.

The audits are being made available to all those who are interested in this area and its future. Given the complexity of the area, no such audits can be completely accurate and so comments on the Audits, especially relating to issues or information that may have been missed, or errors of fact, are welcome. These should be supported by verifiable sources wherever possible and should be addressed to the CRAGG Project Officer:

**Glenmore Lodge,
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The Cairngorm, Rothiemurchus and Glenmore Group (CRAGG) brings together a wide range of people who are concerned with the management and care of this outstanding landscape and major access route into the Cairngorms. Its membership seeks to balance local and national interests and represents the wide range of stakeholders which operates in the area.

CRAGG was formed in 2000 with the specific intention of developing an integrated management strategy for the area, and to provide an agreed context for future management actions. All concerned in CRAGG believe that the best way of doing this must be to work together through a process which is based on consensus rather than confrontation.

This is not by any means an easy option; it involves seeking out and presenting information, understanding differing points of view and allowing the space for them to be heard, and developing trust between Group members. It has also required a significant commitment of time, both for those who take part in a voluntary capacity, and those who work for public agencies.

CRAGG has no official or legal status; it only exists because the members want it to. However the range of interests represented on CRAGG, and the way in which the Group was set up give it a particular legitimacy. It includes the local community and businesses, the main landowners and land managers, national and local recreation and conservation interests, and the main public agencies working in the area. It was set up by The Highland Council on the recommendation of the Cairngorms Partnership, who are members, and receives significant support, financially and in kind from the Highland Council, SNH, MBSE and SportScotland,. Much of the Group's early work has been to gather information about the area, so as to increase and share members understanding about the area and to establish a baseline from which to

identify strategic management issues. This has resulted in five audit papers on the key topics which seemed to the Group to reflect the range of issues involved. They are:

- Biodiversity and Landscape
- Business Housing and Jobs
- Culture and History
- Land Use
- Recreation and Access

In some cases there has been much existing information to draw on, while in others, notably Business, Housing and Jobs, new survey work has been undertaken by CRAGG. The audit papers all follow a broadly similar format, but they were written by different groups of people and the style of each one reflects this.

CRAGG - a short history

In November 1996, a sub-committee of the Cairngorms Partnership recommended that various interests be brought together to determine the best way forward for the Rothiemurchus and Glenmore area. This led to the formation in August 1997, of the **Rothiemurchus and Glenmore Working Group**, under the convenership of Highland Council consisting of the landowners from the area, together with relevant public sector agencies and the Scottish Executive.

Over the next two years this Group worked towards an Integrated Management Strategy based in the context of the Cairngorms Partnership's Management Strategy '*Managing the Cairngorms*'. New research was commissioned, such as the *Rothiemurchus and Glenmore Recreation Survey* and *Village Plans for Inverdrue, Coylumbridge and Glenmore*.

In 1999, '*Towards a Management Strategy*', a consultation paper on visitor management options was published. This was accompanied by an extensive public consultation process including a series of well-attended public meetings.

The increasing involvement and interest of the local community in these issues led to the formation of the **Rothiemurchus and Glenmore Community Association** which was established as a democratically elected organisation that could provide local people with a means of engaging in discussions about the future of their community. At the same time, it became clear to the Working Group that it would not be able to achieve its objectives unless the stakeholder base was widened to include groups such as the local community and businesses, and representatives of recreation and conservation interests.

The results of the consultation process were incorporated into a draft Management Strategy which was completed in the summer of 2000. A Support Officer was appointed in April 2000 to assist the development of this document and take forward the process of evolving the Working Group so that participation became more broadly based and representative. This resulted in the formation of the **Cairngorm, Rothiemurchus and Glenmore Group (CRAGG)** in September 2000.

The membership of the new Group was the subject of considerable discussion and negotiation, since a balance had to be achieved between, on the one hand, enabling the wide range of interested parties, both national and local, to be represented, and, on the other, the need to keep meetings to a manageable size.

The membership finally agreed reflects CRAGG's aim to be as inclusive as possible. Members are present in two capacities, first of all as individuals in their own right, with responsibility to engage in debate and discussion and contribute their skills and experience to the ongoing work of the Group. At the same time, each member also represents a particular set of stakeholders, and has the responsibility of communicating the current work in progress and the strategic thinking of the Group to them. This is relatively simple to arrange in the case of local representatives, but it was also recognised that recreation and conservation interests needed to be represented at both a local and national level. For the latter interest, "umbrella" groups, namely Scottish Environment Link, and the Scottish Outdoor Recreation Network were asked to nominate people to represent their broad field of interest.

The membership of CRAGG is set out at Appendix 1.

Next steps

CRAGG is now intends to use the material in the Audits to develop a management strategy that will reflect local and national interests and achieve a balance between the four aims that have been set out for Scottish National Parks.

The incoming Cairngorms National Park Authority will have the duty to develop a National Park Plan; CRAGG members believe that a local area strategy, developed through consensus, should be of interest and of help to the Authority, and possibly form a model for other local strategies around the Park area. CRAGG therefore intends to provide the Authority, as soon as possible after its establishment, with a paper setting out its strategy for managing this important part of the National Park area. CRAGG's role thereafter will depend to some extent on the wishes of the Authority, but members believe that there will continue to be a role in the National Park for groups such as CRAGG to work on local issues, develop solutions, and to implement and co-ordinate the resulting actions and projects.

*Cairngorms Rothiemurchus and Glenmore Group
December 2002.*

BIODIVERSITY AUDIT SUMMARY

This is a special place. For thousands of years the CRAGG area has been in the hands of local people who have managed the land in ways which allowed wildlife to survive. External funding from private and public sources has regularly flowed into the area. Subsistence farming, timber production and from the mid 19th century, field sports have all brought income to the area. The 20th century saw the beginning of public sector interest in the land for recreation and conservation. Glenmore was purchased by the Forestry Commission for tree planting in 1923 and became a Forest park in 1948, with the hill ground including the ski area sold to the HIDB in 1970. The recent conversion to mainly native species commenced in 1990. Agriculture subsidies increased post war, much of the area was designated as a National Nature Reserve in 1954 and tourism developments dominated the 1960s. The area has become increasingly known world wide as a place for recreation as well as for its outstanding wildlife. The Cairngorm funicular railway was opened in December 2001. A Cairngorms National Park is likely to be set up within two years.

The natural environment, with its views and accessibility, is undoubtedly the key attraction of the area. Landscapes, wildlife and land use combine to form biodiversity. So what is biodiversity? Biodiversity includes all living things from the smallest ant to the oldest pine tree, from the snow patch mosses in Braeriach's Coire an Lochan to the salmon in the River Spey. Scotland is home to more than 90,000 known species living in our sea or on our land; biodiversity is everywhere. Where species combine we get habitats. We are part of biodiversity and depend on it for our quality of life. At a basic level it supplies the essentials of life – oxygen, clean water, food, building materials. Over and above the basics, biodiversity provides the setting for relaxation, spiritual uplift, recreation and for businesses in the CRAGG area, an economic return.

This is no pristine wilderness. Superimpose human activity and you have an even more complex situation. Long term private ownership and recent public sector involvement combined with physical factors of terrain, soils and climate along side distance to the market place have resulted in the protection of biodiversity from wide ranging unsustainable practices. In addition to the commitment from local people, others from throughout the world have enjoyed the area in different ways over the decades. Many of them cherish the area and wish to have a say in its future.

In summary

- *No-where in the UK, and on few sites in Europe, have historical and natural factors resulted in so much wildlife and so many wild systems remaining relatively undisturbed.*
- *There are 11 habitats and 11 species of European level importance in the CRAGG area. 14% of the UK total in a small part of Scotland.*
- *These 22 habitats and species are protected by EU and UK laws, within 3 International 'wildlife' designated areas and 5 National 'wildlife and landscape' designated areas; covering every hectare of the CRAGG area. The boundaries of several designated areas stretch over the edge of the CRAGG area into the wider Cairngorms. A National Park with wildlife related aims will probably be put in place in the near future. World Heritage Site recognition is possible but less certain.*
- *Communities¹ and most visitors² highly value the area's attractive environment. But they appear to have little detailed knowledge of why the area is deemed special in scientific terms. Local businesses acknowledge the importance of the natural environment but few actively engage the environment in their everyday business activities.*
- *Approximately 30% of visitors to the CRAGG area are specifically interested in the environment but most consider the area 'special' in nature and landscape terms.³*

¹ Rothiemurchus and Glenmore Community Survey 2001

² & ³ 1998-9 Mather AS Arkleton Centre and University of Aberdeen Rothiemurchus and Glenmore Recreation Survey

- *Challenges for the management of wildlife exist. Some species have been displaced or may, like capercaillie, disappear, others like golden eye, and osprey have returned. There are some signs that widespread achievements in the conservation of biodiversity are taking place, in pinewoods for example.*
- *Other local challenges to biodiversity are small scale but cumulative in effect. Algal blooms in lochs, fragmentation of the Caledonian Forest landscape, some roads and buildings designed and located in the 1960s and 70s are examples of issues gradually being addressed.*
- *The greatest challenges lie in dealing with the effects of climate change and acidification. Solutions are being sought at international level. Local mitigating measures may be necessary.*
- *In the CRAGG area annual expenditure on biodiversity and management of recreation to conserve biodiversity exceeds £1 million and has been growing over the last 3 years. Annually, the public sector contributes in excess of £750k of the expenditure. Biodiversity and associated recreation management supports the equivalent of up to 100 jobs within the CRAGG area.*

LAND USE AUDIT SUMMARY

Land-use in the CRAGG area has developed from that of a pre-bronze age hunter-gatherer to that of an affluent post-industrial era where non-market values of landscape and nature conservation have become a greater economic force. The nature of the soil, climate and the natural habitats have influenced man's activities through the centuries, and these along with social forces within and outwith the area led to the pattern of land use now practised in the area. In comparison with much of Scotland, due to short growing seasons, mainly infertile soils and distance from markets, the area is not the most productive or profitable for either farming or forestry.

The audit therefore presents information on the recent land-use history of the main land holdings in the CRAGG area. Farming and forestry decisions can have a long term effect and cannot be easily changed much of the biodiversity and landscape quality depends upon the farms with their traditional buildings in clearings in the forest. The lower ground is particularly important for its well developed ecotones (the transitional areas between trees and farmland, few long straight lines and a wide edge which result from previous grazing management practices).

A feature of much of the current and past land management has been its relatively low impact on the surviving native flora and fauna. There have, however, been some periods of more intensive exploitation of the forests such as during the late 18th / early 19th centuries and during the First World War. The area has some outstanding biodiversity that has received both national and international recognition and designation. In recent times this has led to a greater integration of management for primary produce and for other objectives, nature conservation and outdoor recreation, but provision for such measures remains difficult without financial support when primary products are sold into an internationally competitive market.

It is only recently that this is starting to be properly valued by government and due recognition is being given to the importance of biodiversity enhancement, landscape, and recreation together with food and timber production in public policy and action. New land management schemes are being explored by the Scottish Executive for use in the proposed Cairngorms National Park which are likely to have a direct effect on the CRAGG area.

- *Historical differences in land ownership led to divergence in land use practices, but in recent years these have come together and include biodiversity enhancement, recreation, landscape and primary production as their aims. The historical differences, however, can still be seen through careful interpretation of land use and the condition of certain habitats.*
- *The CRAGG area remains a primary producer of food, fish, wool, timber, game, water and minerals.*
- *The total turnover of the traditional land use activities is estimated at just over £0.5 million pa.*
- *Much of the produce from the CRAGG area is of high quality and sold through quality assurance schemes.*
- *The majority of the customers for the produce from in the CRAGG area are local or in the Highlands of Scotland, although most of the eventual consumer markets are based in centres of higher population outwith the Highlands.*
- *Land Use activities are estimated to provide around 21 jobs, although the boundary between land-use and other activities such as outdoor recreation and biodiversity are blurred and this figure requires confirmation following surveys of employment in these sectors.*
- *A range of drivers for change exist, with some featuring only in certain land uses, while others such as market prices and conservation designations are common to most land uses.*

A wide range of perceptions exist of the varying contributions provided by and the factors influencing the land uses in the CRAGG area.

HISTORY AND CULTURE AUDIT SUMMARY

The sub-group is aware that this document does not represent a complete or comprehensive audit. It is also accepted that there is much overlap between individual categories of information and that in many cases subdivisions are subjective.

It is their main recommendation that a full and comprehensive auditing process in the history and culture of the area should be established, lead body/s and funding identified, local ownership and location of the resulting material clarified, efforts made to incorporate history and culture in the fundamental tourism marketing process and a structure created to enable a continuous process to be set in motion. This is undoubtedly the issue of most significance to the future management of the area and will need to be addressed in the strategy.

OUTDOOR RECREATION AUDIT SUMMARY

The area is uniquely provided with recreational and accommodation facilities and an ideal environment for a wide range of recreational activities. It is also of the highest environmental value.

The area had been heavily marketed and is well served by transport links, resulting in a rising local population, a large number of visitors and an all year round season.

This has led to the accumulation of a very wide range of outdoor recreation activities taking place in the area his includes a variety of activities in the areas of walking, cycling, snow sports, horse riding, watersports, airsports, fieldsports, events and a list of more informal and specialist activities. These are both formally organised and completely informal, both commercial and non commercial.

There has also developed a wide range of recreation facilities and provisions as a response to the demand. These include an extensive access network of paths and tracks, facilities for orienteering, a range of formal facilities for tennis, shooting, watersports and off-road cycling

In addition the infrastructure of roads and car park and public toilets and the provision of information and interpretation has been developed to provide for the needs of recreation users.

In summary, the most potential significant issues in relation to the requirement for management effort are:

- **Walking**, both on the low and High ground and for residents, and visitors
- **Cycling**, including family recreation, off-road mountain biking and specialist
- **Snow Sports**, all varieties
- **Orienteering**
- **Camping and Caravanning**
- **Picnicing/BBQing** – (informal non facility dependant outdoor recreation activities)
- **Events**
- **Roadside Recreation**
- **Wildlife watching**

A wide range of factors are causing changes in the pattern of recreation, including changes which influence total demand, changes which effect expectations, changes in public/local policy priorities and changes in public behaviour.

It is concluded that there is a range of challenges facing management, including strategies for walking, cycling, orienteering, and other formal and informal activities especially large scale events.

There is a need for ongoing research and monitoring in a number of areas including path maintenance, changes in accommodation provision, and particularly special needs provision.

BUSINESS, HOUSING & JOBS AUDIT SUMMARY

While for many people the CRAGG area comprises one of Scotland's largest playgrounds, for important communities of local people it is the place where they live, run businesses and work. In recent years a great deal of research has been carried out in the CRAGG area regarding its recreational use and its environmental assets, but it remains the case that relatively little is known about its indigenous economy and society. This audit seeks to rectify this by exploring in some detail certain key aspects of local business activity, housing and employment, and extrapolating from these to draw important strategic conclusions for the future.

The CRAGG area does not contain one distinct or isolated community. It is a matter of debate, indeed, whether it contains one, two, or several communities, or whether it is merely part of a wider community. What is certain, however, is that from a social and economic perspective the CRAGG area forms part of, and is highly integrated into, a much larger community centred (socially and economically speaking) on Aviemore. The analysis in the audit therefore seeks to recognise this, and to see the CRAGG area within this broader context. While the focus is undoubtedly on Cairngorm, Rothiemurchus and Glenmore, many of the conclusions have a substantially wider resonance.

For anyone who knows the CRAGG area well there will be no major surprises in the results of this audit. The data confirms much that local people already feel to be true about their area, and while it would be unwise to assume a high level of statistical significance in the absolute figures, the trends and underlying indications are pretty unambiguous. The figures indicate an economy that is generally buoyant and optimistic, but constrained by a number of factors the most serious of which appear to be labour related (availability, skills, turnover). Many people who want to live and work in the CRAGG area cannot do so. Many businesses that could expand in the CRAGG area cannot realise their full potential. The challenge for CRAGG and other policy makers is to consider whether this really needs to be so.

A useful starting point in this deliberation is to look beyond the raw data and to interpret the results within a more qualitative context. Why is affordable housing in such short supply, and what are the realistic ways of resolving this? Why do so few young people with families choose to live in the CRAGG area, and how might this be resolved? Why is labour turnover so high, and are there realistic and practical ways of reducing this? Why does the business survey produce a significant number of adverse comments about the policies of various public agencies, and is there something that can be done to reduce this? The immediate purpose of this audit is to help inform strategic planning in the lead up to establishment of a National Park, and if it is to do so then it is in interpretation of the data, as much as in their analysis, that the answers will be found.