

## SUBMISSION FROM MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL OF SCOTLAND

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland [MCofS] represents the interests of its associated Clubs and individual members, amounting to almost ten thousand hillgoers. The Council's work is carried out by several committees, and this evidence has been produced on behalf of the Access and Conservation Committee. The delivery of our Access and Conservation work programme is financed by grants from Scottish Natural Heritage, the British Mountaineering Council and the Scottish Mountaineering Trust. The MCofS has an office in Perth where our four paid officers and two administrative staff are based; additionally approximately sixty active volunteers from all areas of Scotland contribute to the work and activities of the Council.

### **Statement of Evidence**

The MCofS supports the points made in the Private Member's Bill to amend the boundary of the Cairngorm National Park. We responded positively to the public consultation on the proposed Bill of November 2005. We agree that parts of northern Perthshire should be included within the Park, which would necessitate extending the current boundary of the Park.

Our reasons for this are outlined below.

The many summits loosely referred to as the Cairngorms contribute to a coherent mountain massif, the main landform characteristic of which is high plateaux, dissected by long and often interconnecting glens. The Cairngorms extend east to west from Lochnagar to the Drumochter hills, and south to include the Angus Glens, Glas Tulaichean, Beinn a' Ghlo, Beinn Dearg and their foothills. The glens have traditionally been used as through routes; indeed, the A9 and A93 are trunk roads which follow old routes. Other through routes follow the Gaick/Tromie pass, the Minigaig/Bruar pass and the Lairig Ghru/Glen Tilt pass with the latter two converging on the hub of Blair Atholl. These mountain passes are important for recreation and access.

The coherence of the landscape can be appreciated, at least in good visibility, equally well whether standing on the summit of Cairngorm or Ben Macdui or one of the Beinn a' Ghlo tops. In these locations one is in an upland area which is quite unique in Britain and one which resembles and has the feel and ambience of the hills of northern Iceland, or parts of northern Norway and other arctic areas. The landform, climate, flora and fauna all contribute to the integrity of the natural heritage of the wider area. All these hills and glens should logically contribute to the National Park; it is artificial to base the threshold of the park on a Local Authority boundary.

The plateaux of the Cairngorms, with their impressive and characteristic corries are appreciated not only nationally but also on an international scale. From a mountaineering and recreational perspective these are, indeed, very special places. Despite the often harsh surroundings of the high tops, especially in the winter months, the vulnerability and fragility of the natural heritage must be recognised. The ecosystems of the highest part of the central core of mountains including Cairngorm itself, Braeriach, Cairn Toul and Ben

Macdui, are particularly vulnerable. They require to be protected for posterity from inappropriate development, over-intrusion and the pressures of human artefacts. This can be done by extending protection to their surrounding hills, and giving them all National Park status. To neglect to include the north Perthshire hills is to make the core more vulnerable. At the moment, we can only rely on the goodwill of, for example, the Atholl estates, for their protection.

Blair Atholl and the Spittal of Glenshee are natural gateways when entering the Cairngorm highland area from the south. Just north of Blair Atholl, the visitor emerges from farmland, settlements and low-lying countryside into an upland area as the road ascends to Drumochter. Blair Atholl is well-placed to provide visitor services and facilities at the entrance to the Park. Similarly, the visitor to the eastern Cairngorms travels from Blairgowrie through the villages, hamlets and farmland of south Glen Shee, only to abruptly enter a different landscape after the Spittal. Again, there are visitor facilities to hand with the potential for some expansion. These transition points offer very suitable gateways to the Park. In addition, extending the boundary into northern Perth and Kinross would help to support the economy of this area, and enhance the sustainability of its rural communities.

Finally, we would make the point that in the original deliberations on the Park boundary, SNH recommended to Scottish Ministers, that on consideration of natural heritage, social factors and recreational value, that northern Glen Shee, Gleann Fearnach and the Atholl area should be included within the National Park. We feel strongly that SNH's advice should be re-examined and accepted. The proposed boundary amendments should be made.