

THE CAIRNGORMS CAMPAIGN

Submission to the Environment & Rural Development Committee of the Scottish Parliament regarding the Cairngorms National Park Boundary Bill*

This submission acknowledges the three specific conditions for National Park status as set out in the *National Park (Scotland) Act, 2000*. These are:

1. That the area is of outstanding national importance because of its natural heritage or the combination of its natural and cultural heritage.
2. That the area has a distinctive character and a coherent identity.
3. That designating the area as a National Park would meet the special needs of the area and would be the best means of ensuring that the National Park aims are collectively achieved in relation to the area in a co-ordinated way.

The characteristics which define the Cairngorms National Park (CNP) as presently constituted and which, it is submitted, apply with equal force to the areas proposed for inclusion under the *Cairngorms National Park Boundary Bill* are set out below.

In terms of landform, the proposed south-western boundary as approximately defined by valleys of the rivers Truim and Garry is a very obvious demarcation between the loch-dominated landscape of North Perthshire and the dissected plateaux of Gaick, Atholl and beyond. This contrasts very favourably with the present watershed boundary which cuts arbitrarily through country which is indistinguishable for miles on either side. Further east the upper sections of Angus glens such as Clova and Esk where they reach into the high country stretching south from Deeside *are* included in the CNP. But there seems little logic to *omit* the lower sections of glens Shee, Fearnach, Girnaig, Tilt and Bruar which are equally significant portals to the high country stretching north to the Feshie and the Dee.

The word “wilderness” is often used in the context of national parks and designating wilderness areas as national parks is seen as a means of preserving the said wilderness. In terms of North America or Siberia, Scotland has no wilderness area apart perhaps from the very highest ground in the Cairngorm massif. Elsewhere human activity in the form of deforestation and the extinction

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of native carnivores disqualify accurate use of the word. What Scotland can offer, however, is extensive areas where human intrusion has been minimal so that the sense of isolation and challenge may be enjoyed. This can be heightened when combined with activities such hill-walking, cross-country skiing or rock climbing. Given the limited area of the Scottish Highlands relative to the European demand for access to undeveloped areas, the CNP should fully utilise its potential by ceasing arbitrarily to hive off areas of wild land (e.g. Atholl, Gaick) which are quite comparable to areas included in the Park as currently defined.

While the challenge of taking off into trackless country attracts many people, the car-borne tourist represents an enormously larger group. It seems reasonable to assume that, to the ordinary citizen, the concept of a national park implies something with which he or she may identify; it is there for him or her to enjoy as they see fit. It follows that a national park should be as visible and accessible as possible to this type of interested party. As things stand, as one comes south from Drumochter the CNP is not visible, "it's somewhere up there on the left". If in the longer term the management of the CNP leads to visual and other improvements in terms of the reinstatement of flora and perhaps fauna, why should these not be visible from much more of the A9 with perhaps designated parking areas with explanatory displays - bring the Park to the people! The accessibility argument has even more force when applied to the inclusion of communities such as Blair Atholl.

In terms of climate, the entire area of the CNP and the proposed additions lie just to the east of the boundary which divides the Scotland's western oceanic zone from the drier eastern "continental" zone. This is visually apparent in that the flora is different in the drier areas, for example the distinctive heather moorlands which are among the finest remaining examples of an increasingly rare type of country. It is of course the case that the "continental" zone extends well beyond the CNP whatever its boundaries. The point, however, is that high moorland of Gaick and Atholl are very obviously on the periphery of the drier zone and thus are, climatically speaking, at one with the rest of the CNP.

The CNP is not just a national and international resource, it is of particular significance to those who live within or adjacent to its boundaries. Economic benefits are perhaps the most obvious, for "national park" is a brand name with undoubted pull in the tourist industry. Moving on from the purely economic however, it can be argued being part of or adjacent to a national park is likely to enhance the sense of community and identification with the hinterland to the benefit of the communities concerned. It can be further argued that in historical terms the break-down of the clan system and the establishment of large sporting estates caused a feeling of alienation in many Highland communities, especially

those outwith the Crofting Counties. Anything which reverses this trend can be regarded as desirable. The question thus arises, why communities such as Blair Atholl should be denied the undoubted benefits which would follow from an extension of the Park boundary which, although they wished for it, was denied them by an arbitrary and unexplained decision about the location of the boundary.

Turning to the particular, the concern of this submission is the area running east from Drumochter as covered by maps 6–10 in the information accompanying the Bill. The historical district of Gaick now consists of the forests of Gaick, Dalnacardoch and Dalnamein. The current CNP boundary follows the Perth & Kinross/Highland boundary which is the watershed. Watersheds may be appropriate to council boundaries, but they make no sense in this instance for a national park which seeks a “coherent identity”. The inappropriateness of this boundary should be apparent from what has been said above.

Dalnaspidal Forest lies to the west of the A9 and so does not immediately stand out as an obvious component of an extended CNP. On reflection it is apparent that the mountains themselves – for it is an entirely mountainous area – are really an extension of those to the east of the A9 and, moreover, it is an extension consisting of mountains of character.

The Forest of Atholl, in contradistinction to Gaick, contains some of Scotland’s finest ridges. The Beinn a’Ghlo range is a magnificent group of three Munros which, on a clear day, dominates the view south from the main Cairngorm massif. To omit this area from the CNP is to deny the concept of a national park as a means of preserving what is finest in our natural heritage.

Gleann Fearnach is not the best known portal to the southern Cairngorms, but with the estate road running all the way in to Fealar Lodge it is a well known route for the discerning walker or cyclist who wishes to explore the group of Munros lying east of Glen Tilt and round the head of Glen Ey. Glen Lochsie and Gleann Taitneach, which run north from the Spittal of Glenshee, are alternative portals to this area. While lacking the drama of the ridges of Beinn a’Ghlo, this mountainous area has much to offer those who seek the remoteness of the mountains. But the obvious cohesion of the area has been arbitrarily split by the current CNP boundary, raising again the question of the criteria used to arrive at these illogical divisions.

The purpose of this submission is to demonstrate that the conditions set out in the *National Park (Scotland) Act, 2000* are not being sufficiently met and, as a consequence, the CNP is being denied its full potential as a Scottish resource of international significance.

The first condition is concerned with the extent to which the area is of outstanding national importance in terms of its natural and cultural heritage. It is submitted that none of the omitted areas fall short of these criteria and if they were included the CNP would be enhanced.

The second condition seeks “a distinctive character and coherent identity”. The argument about the distinctive character of the omitted areas has been made above. Coherence must be integral to the development of any national park, not least the CNP. It may be argued with considerable weight that during the long years when the creation of a national park in the Cairngorms was being promoted, the most widely accepted definition of the southern boundary was the one being suggested in the Bill. In other words, those who took the trouble to debate these matters, long and hard, were undoubtedly in favour of coherence and had no difficulty in concluding what coherence meant in terms of the southern boundary. The formation of PARC and the many organisations which subscribe to it is testament to the almost universal amazement at the incoherence of the current situation.

The third condition refers to meeting the special needs of the area and collective achievement in a co-ordinated way of the Park’s aims. What “special needs” amount to is undefined, but it may be assumed that the Park Authority is addressing these. Again, for reasons which are rehearsed above, it is argued that what is being currently achieved is not as collective and co-ordinated as it should be because the CNP is seriously hampered by being ill-defined.

The Cairngorms Campaign is in favour of the *Cairngorms National Park Boundary Bill*.

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