

## Grandmother's footsteps?

Andy Ford, Visitor Services Officer for the Cairngorms National Park Authority, one of the UK's newest National Parks, and Daniel Boys, Interpretation Officer for Peak Experience and Moor Care Project Officer for Moors for the Future, of the Peak District, Britain's oldest National Park, discuss what they can learn from each other.

AF: I think the main difference between the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) and other NPA's is that we don't really have any direct contact with visitors. We don't run any visitor centres or ranger services, don't lead any guided walks or events programmes, and produce relatively few publications. Our whole way of thinking is that the Cairngorms National Park (CNP), as a piece of ground, already has lots of visitor centres, rangers etc - they're just being run by lots of different organisations.

DB: We have a different approach at the Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA). The first national park warden service was inaugurated on Good Friday 1954, outside a local pub in Edale from where volunteers would advise ramblers of walking routes. In that same decade the first official National Park centre was opened in Edale. Over time, further visitor centres have been built, ranger-led walks and events were introduced and now we've applied digital media to our portfolio: websites, downloadable pdf trails and MP3 audio trails.

Today, the PDNPA works in partnership with many public and private organisations, charities and community groups. We visit local schools and communities, provide volunteer opportunities from practical conservation to office-based work, and produce newsletters and publications. A key element has been linking with businesses, for example providing free business listings in ten themed 'Peak Experience' guides which provide information on places to visit. We also run a number of 'local product' and 'green' accreditations.

AF: Yes, working with others is the crux of what we do. It's not the National Park Authority's National Park. We put a lot of effort into making the distinction between the National Park and the National Park Authority - to the point of sounding like a broken record! Local authorities, national agencies, private estates, visitor attractions and communities all make up the National Park; and, one way or another, they are all presenting the place to visitors. Together they make up something of national and international significance. We think there's value in recognising and representing themselves as part of a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts.

DB: Like you we have the organisations such as the National Trust, Wildlife Trusts and water companies who also operate visitor centres to one degree or another. Each organisation has its core aims, which it obviously needs to promote. I would say none of them has the same over-arching view of the 'Peak District'. While they are interested in what occurs outside of their boundaries their primary concerns are

what happens within them (although I think this is changing). So I think the PDNPA has the widest remit and tries to promote, discuss, facilitate, or interpret all of the issues that cover this vast area.

It comes down to resources. If the organisations I mention had more staff they might well be able to spread their wings more and look at all the issues in the Peak District holistically. But primarily they need to achieve their organisational goals first and foremost, and then tackle wider issues.

Here at the PDNPA I think we need more National Park Authority staff on the ground engaging with people. But economics govern the number of staff we can have and each year the Authority's budget gets tighter. To overcome this we have tried to implement innovative ways of engaging with the 10 million visitors we have by providing things like audio trails that can be accessed via the internet. We have used oral history for some of the audio trails - stories from people in the community, to give an insight into life in the Park. As you say, they are the National Park.

AF: CNPA doesn't have its own ranger service, but the National Park has plenty of rangers. And we don't think this approach to representing the Park as well as the local piece of ground they work on necessarily means extra work. It's all about the presentation. By choosing slightly different information and presenting it in a slightly different way, what rangers are currently doing can help build up a picture of the Park in a visitor's mind. Putting what is already happening in the context of the National Park, hefting these stories to the area, will help visitors get a real sense of place and appreciate what makes CNP special. I think it's a bit like linking your local event to a wider week-long celebration in the area - just a bit bigger and for a bit longer!

We are producing a guidance document that aims to capture what makes CNP what it is in themes and stories. We hope it will inspire others to see themselves as part of the National Park picture, and so help visitors to see it too. It's still in development now, so whether or not it can be achieved remains to be seen. But the point is, if it is achieved it will be down to the people and places that make up the National Park, not the Park Authority.

Well, while we have very similar goals, our approaches are very different - but that's probably because we started from very different places. In the 1950s when the Peak District National Park was set up promoting public access to the countryside was in its infancy, and there were very few facilities to help people get the most of their visits to the Park. By the time the Cairngorms National Park was born a wide range of visitor facilities was already in place, questioning the need for us to set up our own. It will be fascinating to see how each service evolves over the next 50 years - will the PDNPA still have its own visitor facilities, or will cuts mean other organisations take on part of that role? Or will CNPA find it needs its own facilities after all? As they always say - only time will tell!

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You can find more information at:

[www.cairngorms.co.uk](http://www.cairngorms.co.uk)

[www.peak-experience.org.uk](http://www.peak-experience.org.uk)

[www.moorsforthefuture.org.uk](http://www.moorsforthefuture.org.uk)

[www.peakdistrict.org](http://www.peakdistrict.org)

**'If everyone is thinking alike, someone isn't thinking.'**  
*General George Patten*