

New Year, New You - Walking To Health Information

Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust

Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT) is an innovative environmental charity created to promote sustainable access to the Cairngorms area. One aspect of our work is a 'Walking to Health' project, supporting health improvement and community development. The project is supported by grants from Paths to Health, (national voluntary sector organisation supporting local health walk schemes) and NHS Grampian. The programme is a central part of COAT's strategy of integrating development of path infrastructure with facilitation of its use.

The project started as the Deeside Walking to Health project and has expanded to include Donside walks and is being developed to include a suite of walks throughout Badenoch and Strathspey. COAT are now supporting two walks in the Strathspey area that were originally set up by Step It Up Highland – Grantown and Aviemore – and are starting up more in the area.

Project Aims

The aim of the health walk project is to promote and encourage physical activity in a safe, social way, and get people walking more as a step to increasing their activity levels. A health walk is a short, safe, local, led walk targeted at people who would benefit from increasing their physical activity. The weekly walks last 30-60 minutes and are led by trained volunteers from the local community. Walks are adapted to suit the pace of the walkers, and are followed by a drink and chat in a local café.

Participants

Generic health walk groups are open to anyone who would benefit from coming on a short local walk with other people. They meet weekly at the same time and place so you can just turn up.

Health specific walks are targeted at people with specific health issues and the project has worked with Alzheimer Scotland and CLAN Cancer group to provide walks for people with these illnesses and their carers. We are starting a weekly walk in Aviemore in conjunction with Healthy Minds Group to promote positive mental health. We are also planning to start walks for weight management and smoking cessation groups.

Volunteers

Volunteers are the cornerstone of the project as they lead the walks and encourage a welcoming, safe and supportive environment for the walkers. Walk Leaders attend an initial Walk Leader Training day and then receive ongoing training and support including a first aid course and walk leader walk meetings.

New volunteers are required for Grantown, Carrbridge, Kingussie, Newtonmore, Laggan.

Benefits

There are a myriad of public benefits to increased walking by a wider spread of the population, including improvements in public health, reduction in carbon emissions, improvement to social infrastructure and promotion of the Park as an inspiration for the development of outdoors access.

Walking is an ideal way to start or increase physical activity because it is:

- easier to start and sustain than other activities

- free
- accessible
- provides opportunity for social contact and support
- can be enjoyed safely with low risk of injury
- can be easily incorporated into daily lives

In terms of individual benefits, physical activity has plenty of both physical and mental benefits:

- disease prevention or reduction (coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer, diabetes, osteoporosis, dementia)
- weight management
- improvement in overall wellbeing and reduction of anxiety
- reduction in symptoms of depression

Current weekly walks

Grantown – Tuesdays 10.30 meet at Anagach Woods (car park by curling rink)

Nethybridge – Tuesdays 1.30 meet at community centre

Aviemore – Thursdays 2.00 restart in spring

Health specific walks:

Smoking Cessation & NHS referrals – Grantown Thursdays 2.00 meet at Health Centre

Healthy Minds – Aviemore Tuesdays 1.30 meet at Rothiemurchus car park

Coming soon:

Carrbridge

Kingussie

Newtonmore

Laggan

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If you are interested in finding out more about the health walks, attending a walk, becoming a volunteer or you work with a group who would be interested in starting weekly healthy walks please contact Mandy Way Health Walk Coordinator mandy@cairngormsoutdooraccess.org.uk or phone the COAT office on 01339887777

Quotes

Benefits of joining a Walking To Health group according to participants:

“I find I am getting to know people better because we talk such a lot while we walk and there are lots of laughs”

“It is great to enjoy the fresh air and exercise in such good company. I enjoy the chance to socialise further over our cup of tea.”

“In comparison to how I felt before my operation – when I was quite breathless and easily tired – I feel quite fit and cheerful”.

“I was virtually housebound because I lived in a hilly part of Aberdeen and could not walk too far. I tired easily. I can now walk further, faster and gentle inclines don't bother me at all. I am less easily tired.”

“I was lazy; couldn't be bothered doing anything. I suffered extreme back pain – had to retire early because of it. I had no energy and was overweight. I can now walk uphill effortlessly- when I joined the Walking To Health group I dreaded if a route took us up a slope. Now I walk to the village every day.”

“Now I walk or cycle to the village every day. I can easily manage walking uphill. I have high blood pressure but am on less medication than before.”