

## **From birth to renaissance – a brief history of rangering in Scotland**

Let me take you back 35 years. Scotland had a brand new agency, the Countryside Commission for Scotland (CCS), to promote understanding and enjoyment of Scotland's beautiful landscapes. But how could it achieve this when it did not itself manage any land? It was going to be a persuasion job with those who did manage land for recreation, the Local Authorities, conservation bodies and even farsighted private landowners. And who would carry out the task of raising awareness and enjoyment among the public? Rangers, of course! The idea was borrowed from the US National Parks Service and adapted to the very different circumstances of Scotland.

A carrot was dangled - 75% grant-aid to those who would employ a ranger. But could this alone deliver the vision of CCS? The risk was that the plethora of possible employers would go their own way in what their rangers did day-to-day. So things were put in place to promote cohesion and create a sort of national ranger service.

First a person was appointed to promote rangering – some of you will remember Malcolm Payne (and if you don't you may have his "Rangers' Prayer on your office wall). Guidance was produced and promoted widely to potential employers by Malcolm. A national identity was agreed and all ranger services (except East Lothian!) adopted the Scottish national ranger badge, designed by another member of CCS staff, Bill Forbes. It is the badge still used by most services, and by SCRA, today. Rangers and their employers were brought together once a year to discuss the development of the embryo service.

In early 1974, 14 out of the 20 or so rangers then in post, came together for the first national in-service ranger training course run by a team of CCS staff under Don Aldridge's inspiring leadership. Covering communication skills, visitor safety, understanding the local area, and practical countryside management skills, the course drew on the expertise of rangers themselves, as well as others at the forefront of the new profession of countryside management. And on the last night of that first course SCRA was born.

For many people involved in ranger services this training was the key to the achievement of the vision of a coherent service across Scotland. The involvement of employers, external advisers like Jim Lockie, Tom Masterton and John Smyth, as well as rangers themselves, was critical in ensuring the relevance and quality of the courses. They ran until 1989, when changes in priorities and diminishing resources (yes, even back then) led to delivery training being handed over to other providers. In 15 years over 250 rangers completed the CCS course, including Danes, Icelanders and Americans.

Rangering has lived through the demise of the CCS advisory service and training course, and then the demise of CCS itself in 1992; the birth pangs of SNH in the mid '90's, when there was arguably a lack of understanding among the Area staff who took over responsibility for liaison with employers and grant aid decisions; policy reviews, resulting in reduction - and even

withdrawal - of grant aid. Rangering has survived to see a renaissance with the advent of National Parks, the new outdoor access legislation, and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. Weren't the Scottish Executive and SNH lucky that they had a mature service ready to deliver these initiatives on the ground?

If the first half of Scotland's national ranger service had this strong leadership and coherence, what of now? Well, I can still see the results of that solid foundation - a confident, professional, well-known and highly respected band of people, who still proudly wear the national badge, and still have a representative body - SCRA - with the ambition, confidence and credibility to invite rangers from all over the world to share in what they have achieved.

Ruth Grant

Former Director of CCS's (Countryside Commission for Scotland) National In-Service Ranger Training Course and proud Honorary Life Member of SCRA