Viscount James Bryce (1838-1922)

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Viscount James Bryce of Dechmont (1838-1922)

Born 10 May 1838 to a notable Ulster Scottish family, James Bryce was educated at Glasgow and Oxford. He played a major role in British public life as a hugely polymathic lawyer, as MP for South Aberdeen and latterly as Ambassador to the United States. He became Lord (Viscount) Bryce of Dechmont.

He was an inexhaustible traveller and mountaineer, a copious writer, and became first President of the Cairngorm Club when it was set up in 1887. Bryce was a passionate early campaigner for a wide range of conservation and access issues, closely involved with the founders of the National Trust in England, the Commons Preservation Society and the National Footpath Preservation Society. (Both the latter merged and are now the Open Spaces Society).

For us, his claim to fame is his dogged campaign for a right of access to open moorland and mountain in Scotland. He presented a series of Bills to Parliament, Access to the Mountains (Scotland) Bill (initially 1884) in the 1880s and 90s with the support of the then Scottish Rights of Way and Recreation Society. But he never succeeded in winning Parliamentary support. Although this was his most famous access Bill, it wasn't the only one he was involved with - in 1889 and 1890 he sponsored the equally unsuccessful Footpaths and Roadside Wastes Bill for the better protection of footpaths and roadside wastes. However, his Mountains Bill inspired others including his brother who brought it before parliament a further three times and "Bryce's Bill" remained in people's thoughts until its spirit was finally enacted in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

What was his connection to ScotWays? He was a Director of the Scottish Rights of Way and Recreation Society from its earliest days and was part of the Society's short-lived London Committee formed in 1888.