

Derry Lodge and wild land

Description



Glen Derry

I have been meaning for a couple of weeks to refer readers to the excellent piece from Neil Reid, the Cairngorm Wanderer on the National Trust for Scotland's latest proposals to renovate Derry Lodge

[Plans announced for Derry Lodge development](#)

I remember discussing the future of Derry Lodge at the Mountaineering Council of Scotland twenty years ago with the main options being to knock it down and restore this as an area of wild land or to turn Derry Lodge into an Alpine-style hut. The lack of action since then is all about money, about the the National Trust for Scotland operating under a model in which it is expected to fund the vast majority of its activities despite being a national resource and struggling to do so. It has consequently lurched

from one financial crisis to another and is undergoing yet another internal restructuring at present driven by the need to balance its books. With large historic buildings to maintain, the consequence is that Derry Lodge is a low priority and I fear that despite the good intentions of the staff who are behind these proposals, nothing may happen. The wider financial issue is really about how do we get financial investment in rural areas. There are lessons here from Alpine Associations on the continent and how they manage to raise funds to renovate mountain huts in locations which from a construction viewpoints are far more challenging than Derry Lodge.

The other big question is how the proposals to renovate Derry Lodge sit within the need to protect and enhance wild land – the central Cairngorms are after all one of the largest areas of wild land in the country. Why not just knock it down? And what is the difference, if any, between renovating Derry Lodge and installing a new run of river Hydro scheme in Glen Derry?

The arguments about the importance of wild land led the NTS to remove the bulldozed track from Glen Derry above the old lodge building and, along with nature conservation, helped drive the reduction in deer numbers which is allowing the pinewoods in Glen Derry and Glen Lui to regenerate. So, keeping wild land values and concepts of rewilding to the forefront of thinking about Derry Lodge seems to me very important.

In this large area of wild land, the existence of Derry Lodge and a few bothies, has very little impact. The Lodge is well screened by trees and sits at one of the main entry points for walkers and climbers to the central Cairngorms. NTS’s proposal to include public toilet facilities would address the main human impacts on the area. Its worth contrasting Glen Lui with Glenmore, where the road intrudes well into the mountain core and new development high up on Cairngorm is continuing. There are far bigger issues affecting wild land and landscape in the Cairngorms National Park.

In addition, Derry Lodge is regarded by most people as an attractive building. NTS would have significant issues getting agreement to demolish it because it is bound to protect and conserve the historic buildings it owns. From a cultural viewpoint too, the area has a well known history, including use by mountaineers. All of this seems to me to be a reason to support the proposals. This is not about new development as such but restoring an existing building in a way that should help conserve the landscape and enable people to enjoy it.



Lower Glen Lui â?? few signs of rewilding

While supporting the proposals in principle, I do think there is a strong case that the renovation of Derry Lodge should be considered alongside what could be done to re-wild lower Glen Lui. This is still dominated by the track and forestry plantations and walking or cycling along it is far from a wild land experience. The main reason the track has been kept is again one of money, the cost of culling deer without NTS vehicles being able to transport stalkers to Derry Lodge would be considerable. It would be good though if the NTS vision included the case for converting the track into a footpath and outlining the public financial assistance it would then require to continue effective deer culls. Together with plantation restructuring this would make the approach to Derry Lodge a far wilder experience. Part of this vision could be that one day Derry Lodge provides a refuge for people uncomfortable with the idea of camping in places where wolves or lynx roam, that it part of the core wild land area and not on the edge of it.

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1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. conservation
2. hill tracks
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