

HIE's silence about their responsibility for the destruction at Cairngorm

Description



Ground works November 2015
Bratney

Photo Credit Alan

On Monday, the lead letter in the Herald was about the destruction going on at Cairngorm under the aegis of Highlands and Islands Enterprise and calling for the Scottish Government to remove ownership of the ski area from HIE.

Cairngorms on downslope to looking like a derelict quarry

JAMES Fraser, chairman of Friends of Loch Lomond and Trossachs, is correct to highlight the inefficiencies and inconsistencies in litter collection and management in our first national park (Letters, August 1). The park authority should spend more effort in coordinating the various public bodies and private-sector interests with their diverse and conflicting approaches to litter removal.

Instead board members dodge the issue and waste everybody's time and energy pursuing camping bylaws and thereby trying to criminalise innocent citizens.

Equally important, however, is the degenerate state of our other national park. Recent visits to the northern Cairngorms have revealed a landscape more like an abandoned quarry than a so-called premier ski resort. Why are there piles of construction debris, old chairlifts, cables and derelict buildings lying about? Some of it has been there for at least 10 years beside the Coire na Ciste car park.

Why have recent massive earth-moving operations been undertaken in Coire Cas, leaving large areas of bare ground, with sand and gravel ready to wash downhill with the first rainstorm?

Add to this the increasing doubts over the ability of this mountain to deliver its essential winter product and big questions need to be asked. It is obvious today to any Central Belt skier that the facilities and opportunities available at the other resorts offer better value for money and the prospect of a far more rewarding day than a return to the cesspit that Cairn Gorm has become.

These mountain slopes are in the ownership of the Scottish Government, through its two agencies, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and the Forestry Commission (FC). HIE owns the upper slopes, following a 1971 decision by a previous government to remove the land from FC. That was a



WASTELAND: Construction debris lies scattered on Coire Cas. The landscape can resemble an abandoned quarry.

disastrous land transfer, leaving the upper slopes under the control of a body which had no expertise in mountain management, no local staff to supervise activities and no skills in the forward planning of ski slope development. That is why today's construction activities appear to bear little relationship to the planning

conditions that are supposed to guide these developments. Under HIE continuing degeneration is guaranteed for a few more decades.

The present Scottish Government is telling us that it is serious about land reform. If so, its top priority needs to be the removal of HIE from the northern Cairngorms, and to

re-establish a framework of public ownership that properly involves national and local stakeholders. This national park, a potential World Heritage Site, deserves no less.

Dave Morris,
2 Bishop Terrace,
Kinross.

have been looking out for a response from HIE. There has been none. The Herald usually publishes

responses from public authorities to criticism in their columns immediately after receiving them. It seems likely therefore HIE has decided they cannot defend the indefensible and are just hoping this will all blow over.

One reason it won't are the concerns being expressed by people in the local community about how Cairngorm is being managed. The Our Land festival, which is about giving people power over the use of land, includes an event being held in Aviemore on 17th September part of which is about the potential for the local community to takeover the running of the ski area:

"A community lead business model that reinvests money in staff and infrastructure, a resort that is run by boarders and skiers for boarders and skiers".

Now I believe a community business model should also be about summer use – Cairngorm is our fifth highest mountain and the main access is through the ski area – but the point here is that people in the local community have no faith in HIE's appointment of Natural Retreats. In addition to skiers and boarders, there are many other people don't have any faith in either HIE's or Natural Retreats' ability to make the ski area a good place to visit in summer and there is extensive photographic evidence to show that they are unfit to protect the environment there. There is a fantastic opportunity therefore for various interests to come together and realise these objectives.

I would not expect HIE to support this. Indeed, by stipulating prior experience of running facilities was required for the tender process that led to the appointment of Natural Retreats they excluded local community interests from bidding. I believe the only way that change can happen is if the land is transferred from HIE as Dave Morris called for in his letter to the Herald but the Scottish Government could use their powers, which are explicitly referred to in HIE's title to the land, to direct HIE to take effective action to prevent any further damage at Cairngorm and to terminate its lease with HIE

Under s.14 of the Enterprise and New Towns (Scotland) Act 1990, the Secretary of State consulting with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, give Highlands and Islands Enterprise a general or specific character as to the exercise of its function; and it shall be the duty of Highlands and Islands Enterprise to give effect to any such direction.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. conservation
2. HIE

3. natural retreats
4. Scottish Government

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