More evidence that Natural Retreats are not fit to run Cairngorm

Description



Photo posted 7th September http://www.cairngormmountain.org/category/behind-the-scenes/ Coire

As part of its programme to upgrade the cabling at Cairngorm, funded by Highlands and Enterprise, Natural Retreats started work on the Coire na Ciste t-bar late August/September (see here for the earlier work on cabling of the car park tow). Now this work did not require planning permission because Highland Council had judged it, like the carpark t-bar upgrade, as ancillary to an existing development. HOWEVER, thanks to a Freedom of Information request from George Paton, we know what Murray Ferguson, Head of Conservation and Planning at the CNPA told Natural Retreats back in July.

-----Original Message-----
From: Murray Ferguson
Sent: 21 July 2016 10:03
To: a.gough@naturalretreats.com
Cc: Margaret Smith
Subject: FW: Coire Cas Work

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Adam

Here is yet another example of the sor
are a few misunderstandings.

My immediate concern is that you rea
about the high environmental standar
statement/publication with illustratio
This would involve commitments to m
avoid spoil spilling onto vegetation co
etc, etc. That document would comple

You will notice Murray Ferguson told Natural Retreats they needed to set out their procedures for doing ground works which would involving marking out the site, storing turf and storing spoil on terram matting. While you can see some turves in Natural Retreats photo, their own evidence shows that they have completely ignored all the CNPAâ??s other recommendations.

Whatâ??s happening here is that because Natural Retreats â?? and by implication Highlands and Islands Enterprise who are funding all of this â?? know that planning permission is not required they believe the CNPA is absolutely helpless to do anything about this mismanagement.

However, even where planning permission is required, Natural Retreats still ignore the rules. The replacement of the top return station of the West Wall Poma did require planning permission but this was decided by Highland Council because the CNPA did not see any implications for the National Park. Back in June though Natural Retreats sent a detailed 13 page Trial Pit Report to the CNPA by a company called ADAC structures about the foundations for the new structure. The photograph below illustrates they appear to have done a good job.

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Note the use of the matting to protect vegetation â?? photo from ADAC report.
Thanks to George Paton who obtained this report through FOI

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Contrast this though with the photos that appeared on 9th September on Cairngorm Mountain website when the main work had started â?? no ground protection at all!





The photo on the left shows that the preventive measures taken by ADAC have simply been abandoned

The Highland Council, CNPA and HIE must have seen this, its on the Cairngorm website, so why no action? For the avoidance of doubt this is totally contrary to the Method Statement approved by Highlands council which again specified the use of terram matting (15_01000_ful-method_statement-791596-west-wall-tow). There was a CNPA planning committee meeting on Friday with an agenda

item â??update at Cairngormâ?• by Gavin Miles Head of Planning. I do hope he made the Committee aware of all of this and they agreed an action plan.

Meantime, the consultation on the retrospective planning application for a hill track in Coire Cas is still open and I was interested to see that two responses in support of the track have been submitted by people purporting to be members of the public (see here and here). Iain Cornfoot, works at Cairngorm and is second in command of outside operations in winter â?? he is therefore part of the Natural Retreats management team. His brother, Jim Cornfoot, is the land manager at Cairngorm Mountain, the person with first line management responsibility for all the destruction and failures to do works in accordance with planning requirements and good practice. While I can understand him coming to the defence of his brother he should not have portrayed himself as a member of the public. Iain Cornfootâ??s response argues that tracks are needed for efficiency â?? the implication, if true, is Natural Retreats intend to create new tracks by every ski tow in the area â?? and says â??some of their wacky ideas for alternatives to this track have amused me greatlyâ?•. Actually most of the arguments to planning have said that since Cairngorm Mountain has managed up to now without tracks it could do so in future. I can only assume by â??wacky ideasâ?• Iain Cornfoot is referring to the suggestions that the CNPA should require tree planting as compensation for all the destruction carried out under his brotherâ??s upervision. Iain seems totally unaware that the CNPA has a montane scrub strategy â?? he presumably thinks that is wacky too.

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The other member of staffâ??s response is factually what one might term a pile of mince. For example he claims:

> *Last summers weather was horrendous and condition extremely difficult to landscape in. I think that the objectors should be mindful of this issue as many do not understand the difficulties of landscaping in such conditions.*

Thanks to some research from Alan Mackay the facts are:

- Met Office north of Scotland climate area data shows August having just under average rainfall (98% â?? but drier towards North and East of Scotland). By mid August fairly limited ground works along the line of the old tow track had been carried out.
- Met Office north of Scotland climate area data shows September and October as being unusually dry months. September having only 37% of the long term average rainfall and October 47%.
- Moreover, Natural Retreats Method Statement, agreed with CNPA and HIE, did **not** allow work to take place in wet conditions

- No work will commence on site if there has been a sust level of heavy rainfall therefore causing increased wate within the Allt Choire Chais leading to higher than avera rates. When work does commence on site it will be the contractor's responsibility to assess the weather and w levels daily and notify the CML Land Manager or CML manager of any concerns. It is the responsibility of the

No credibility should be given to any statements and claims by staff from Natural Retreats without independent verification. I am afraid that the Management of Natural Retreats and their staff at Cairngorm are totally out of control and will claim anything to justify the destruction they are causing. Meantime, the deafening silence from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, which has responsibility for the site and lease and is funding this destruction continues. Its time our politicians and Board Members of the CNPA got a grip of the situation.

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Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. HIE
3. natural environment
4. natural retreats
5. restoration

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September 17, 2016
Author
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