

Balmorality, beauty and the Cairngorms National Park plan

Description

Balmoral was in the news twice over the last week, first for a grouse shoot and second because Prince Charles collided with a deer when driving on the estate ([see Mirror](#)). Raptor Persecution Scotland provided some excellent [critical commentary](#) on the use of soldiers as beaters on the grouse moor but most of the media repeated the story of Kate Middleton being driven up above “the imposing Creag Bhiorrach” by Loch Muick by the Queen for a royal picnic and to watch the grouse shooting without any consideration of what this tells us about how the royal family views the land.

Leaving aside the intensification of grouse production and all that implies for wildlife, some of the stories referred to Prince William driving towards or over to Glen Clova – its not certain which – up the Capel Mounth road. This suggests part of the royal view of their land is it is perfectly acceptable for landowners to be able to drive up onto the tops of the hills or indeed over to neighbouring estates. I have commented before on how being in a big Range Rover must feel when passing walkers on hill tracks – a sense of power and privilege – because of course only certain people are allowed to drive here. As the technology has improved and its become cheaper, private landowners have extended tracks all over our hills. Post-war there were various proposals to create public roads through the core of the Cairngorms including the Lairig Ghru which were rejected but what has happened is that now in many parts of the Cairngorms we have private road networks instead. What happens on Balmoral is important because it gives this the ultimate social respectability, royal endorsement.

It also tells us something about landowners perceptions of our landscapes. I think most people would say that a key part of what is special about the landscape in the Cairngorms National Park is that it is unspoilt and feels wild – even if they are viewing it from the public roadside. Hill tracks from this perspective are scars on the landscape, something that detracts from the landscape and National Park. The Queen and the rest of the Royal Family can’t share that view as they use these same tracks as a matter of course, see it as their prerogative even. I suspect they, and most other private landowners, have very different ideas of beauty to the rest of the population.

A search of the Cairngorms National Park draft Partnership Plan does not come up with a single mention of the word “beauty”. Indeed, there is almost no consideration of landscape and wild land ([see here](#)). A Plan that took these issues seriously would have to take on the Royal Family and other powerful landowners and it appears the CNPA is simply not up for this – so better just to avoid mentioning it. To me it just reinforces for me that we will only effectively protect our landscapes through securing fundamental reforms in land ownership.

The draft Park Plan though does cast some light on the second story, Prince Charles' collision with a deer. On page 8 of the Moorland Evidence document [160621deermoorlandmanagementfinal1](#) there is a "crude" map of aspirations by landowners for deer densities in the National Park. It shows Balmoral, along with a great swathe of land to the west, as having aspirations for the highest deer densities in the National Park. The planners then will not have been surprised then that Prince Charles collided with a deer on the Balmoral Estate. The same report shows much of Balmoral is in a woodland expansion area where grants are available for woodland planting. The Plan offers no firm proposals for how the differences between these objectives should be reconciled – how to stop deer eating all the trees – but again that would mean the CNPA taking on the Royal Family among others. How Balmoral is managed is in a real sense a litmus test for how well the CNPA is doing.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. Deer
3. grouse moors
4. hill tracks
5. landscape
6. native woodland

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