

Where is the guided walk income at Cairngorm Mountain going?

Description



Natural Retreats included this graphic in its announcement that its guided walks to the summit of Cairngorm had stopped for another year. It tells us a lot of what is going wrong at Cairngorm.

The walks cost Â£20 a shot which means Natural Retreats earned Â£36,640 from them between May and October this year. While the charge includes the return trip on the funicular (cost for an adult Â£12) I think we can safely say many of the people would never have taken the funicular unless they had been able to go for a walk at the top. So, I think its safe to say this is extra income for Natural Retreats and extra visitors to contribute to its formal agreement with HIE (as written in the lease) that the minimum number of visitors it should attract to Cairngorm each year should be 210,000.

These walks only happen because of the closed funicular system as explained on the Cairngorm Mountain Website:

In order to protect the plateau outwith our snowsports operation, funicular passengers are not permitted to exit the top station to go onto the mountain unless they are booked on a guided walk

or a guided mountain bike descent.

The closed system which was intended to protect the Cairngorm plateau, is being used by Natural Retreats completely ignored their obligations, now completed, and needlessly trashed

The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

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Our Ref/Àr n-àireamh-lit: 16/00288/ENF
Date/Ceann-là: 27th September 2016

Dear Sir/Madam,

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (SCOTLAND) ACT 1997 (AS AMENDED)
ACHD DEALBHAIHDH BAILE IS DÙTHCHA (ALBA) 1997 (MAR ATHARRAICHTHE)

UNAUTHORISED OPERATIONS OR OTHER DEVELOPMENT ON LAND AT CAIRNGORM MOUNTAIN, GLENMORE, AVIEMORE, PH22 1RB

Thank you for your eForm received on 24th September 2016 expressing concern over Cairngorm Mountain, Glenmore, Aviemore, PH22 1RB, .

I write to confirm that your enquiry has been recorded and is being investigated. You will receive an initial response within the next 28 days. This response will advise you of what action (if any) is proposed/has been taken by the Council or explain why it will take longer for us to resolve the case. You will also be notified of the outcome of the case within 10 working days of the case being closed.

The Council will endeavour to keep your personal details anonymous and in most cases such information will not be disclosed; however we cannot always guarantee this as we are subject to Freedom of Information/Environmental Information legislation which, subject to the provision of the Data Protection Act 1998, allows members of the public to request the disclosure of information held by us.

A Council's decision to withhold information held within an enforcement file can be challenged and the Scottish Information Commissioner, or the UK Information Commissioner if it relates to data protection, will determine the matter. Information may also have to be disclosed if a case goes to court.

Thank you again for contacting us with your concerns. If you require clarification on any of the above, or wish to discuss the matter further, please do not hesitate to contact me on 01463 255 183.

Yours faithfully
p *Roddy Dowell*
Roddy Dowell
Development and Infrastructure

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Highland Council were alerted to this

when the evidence of destruction first became evident early September but have still not responded to the formal complaint which was submitted about unauthorised operations at the end of September. Another example of the totally ineffective system of planning enforcement in our National Parks.

HIE meanwhile seem to be quite happy to allow Natural Retreats to destroy parts of the plateau on the one hand â?? they have not intervened as far as I am aware in the breaches of planning permission at the West Wall poma â?? while on the other charging people for walks to protect that same environment.

Part of lease agreement between HIE and Natural Retreats includes this clause:

Minimum of 1 Head Ranger and 2 season rangers to be employed for at least as many days and hours per annum as they are currently employed

So, maybe Natural Retreats are using the closed funicular system as a means to raise money to pay for the Ranger Service. Â£36,640 would be enough to pay for a Head Ranger. The trouble with this explanation is that as far as I am aware HIE still employ the Ranger Service at Cairngorm* and are in discussions with the CNPA about creating a unitary ranger service as part of the strategy for Glenmore/Cairngorm. I will check with HIE about this but if they still employ the Rangers public monies are being used to raise money for Natural Retreats. The much bigger issue though is that despite raising monies through the Ranger service for guided walks on the plateau, lower down the mountain they are completely failing to maintain the infrastructure that would enable people to conduct their own guided walks.



The Cairngorm Mountain Garden Project is history repeating itself. It replaced the former Alpine Garden created by Ben Humble which had been neglected and was removed by the creation of the funicular, now sadly neglected.



There is no sign of Natural Retreats investing in replacement signage



The lack of care was very evident earlier this summer. No sign of the Alpine Bistort described by this sign. No sign for the Dwarf Cornel which was easy to see.



The bleeding of Cairngorm

The wider message behind the charges for guided walks and the lack of investment in signage for walkers is really quite simple, Natural Retreats are taking every penny they can and investing as little as they can get away with at Cairngorm. The way they are treating interpretation is just a small example of a much wider problem of what happens when you allow companies like Natural Retreats to operate what should be public assets.

The accounts for Cairngorm Mountain Ltd, the company which is owned by Natural Retreats and operates Cairngorm, show this quite clearly. The last accounts ending March 2015 [cml-accounts-to-](#)

[march-2015](#) show a profit of Â£466,216. I will come back to that figure and wider issues of how money appears to be being drained out of Cairngorm in future posts but just a small part of that profit could have renovated all the signs at Cairngorm and paid for a clean-up too. Natural Retreats, in its first year of running Cairngorm Mountain Limited chose not to invest money in what would benefit Cairngorm but instead to take make a profit. This is the company which was widely touted as having the financial resources to invest in Cairngorm. I will come back to a wider look at Natural Retreats finances in future posts but I believe understanding them is the key to understanding everything that is happening at Cairngorm, from the protection of the environment, investment in the ski area, treatment of customers, whether skiers or summer visitors, to the treatment of staff.

A key question is why is HIE allowing all of this to happen?

Update

**I received this note from HIE on 22nd November â??CML/NR have funded the Cairngorm Ranger Service since taking over the lease of the ski areaâ??. I am sorry I did not have time to check this properly before the post. I think the main argument however stands and it raises questions about the National Park will be able to â??Move to a single integrated ranger service across Cairngorm and Glenmore with increased presence on the groundâ?• as set out in the Cairngorm/Glenmore Strategy approved in September.*

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. conservation
2. HIE
3. natural retreats
4. planning
5. visitor management

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