The public are paying for the current work at Cairngorm

## Description

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# ‘Mild spell being put to good use’

**By** GAVIN MUSGROVE

CAIRNGORM Mountain is using the unusually mild start to the winter to put finishing touches to improvement works ahead of the ski season.

The summer months have traditionally been used to upgrade equipment and carry out any necessary maintenance at the ski resort.

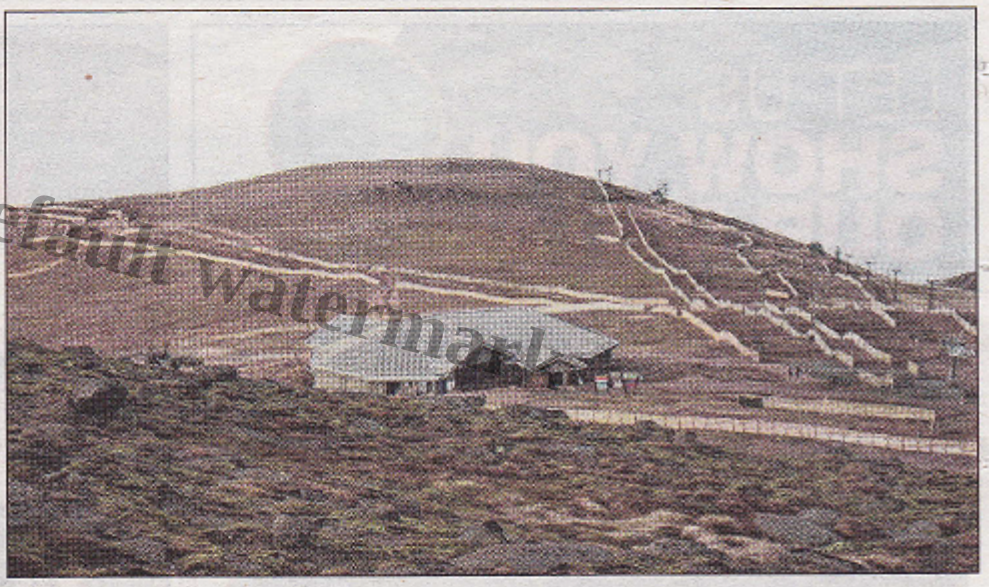
However, with just a couple of days of skiing so far because of the lack of snow, operator Natural Retreats is carrying out more work than was initially planned.

The completed programme of work has also included the replacement of the West Wall Poma return station and the extension of its lift.

Resort general manager Janette Jansson explained: “There is much more equipment and infrastructure involved in the ski and snow sports aspect of our operations and we are taking advantage of this current mild spell to do even more than would normally be possible in the summer season.

“We’ve been doing a lot of improvement works including new fencing, new motors and haul rope. We hope people will be pleased to see the work we’ve carried out.

“The final stage of the work for this year is to remove the obsolete rope from the old Coire na Ciste chairlift. It’s an un-galvanised rope which is showing signs of corrosion and has not moved in over a decade.




**NEW ADDITIONS: Some of the fencing that has been erected to help catch the snow and stop it from being blown away at the resort,**

“We are therefore removing it to minimise any potential health and safety risk, and its removal will not impact on any future developments at this site.”

Other work carried out includes:

- Strengthening of the Cas T-Bar gantry
- Installation of new safety circuit cable on Car Park T-Bar and Ciste T-Bar
- Erection of around four kilometres of new post and rail fencing on the M2, West Wall up-track, sections of the Upper Cas area on Ciste Fairway and around the top of the West Wall Poma
- Replacement of the motors, inverter drives and control panels at the Ridge Poma and a new inverter drive at the Car Park Tow
- Completion of the reinstatement and reseeding around the Shieling Sunkid and the Cas gantry
- Installation of a new motor and haul rope for Polar Express.

CairnGorm Mountain attracts more than 200,000 visitors each year and employs around 130 people. The resort has been managed by Wilmslow-based Natural Retreats since May 2014.

More than £700,000 has been spent this year on maintenance and improvement work of the snowsport side of the operation by Natural Retreats and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), which owns the site.

> **“We hope people will be pleased to see the work we’ve carried out.**
>
> **Janette Jansson**

The article that appeared in the Strathy last week

After the Strathyâ??s excellent coverage of the Save the Ciste Groupâ??s criticisms of what is happening at Cairngorm (see here) it was inevitable that Natural Retreats would try and suggest that

they are in fact doing lots to improve the skiing experience at Cairngorm and the article above duly appeared last week. While the work has been contracted for by Natural Retreats, who are therefore responsible for the quality of the work undertaken, almost all the work listed has in fact been paid for by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (see here). Indeed out of the Â£700k Natural Retreats claims to have spent on maintenance and improvement work this year, it appears Â£601,286 has been paid for by HIE. If this is right, it appears Natural Retreats has invested just Â£100k, which could easily be paid for out of Â£400k savings the accounts show they made the first year they owned Cairngorm Mountain Ltd.

The truth behind the spend on ski infrastructure listed in the article is as follows:

- Replacement of West Wall poma return station â?? paid for by HIE grant â?? planning permission breached by Natural Retreatsâ?? contractors
- Strengthening Cas T-Bar Gantry â?? Â£73,377 paid for by HIE for all works associated with gantry â?? Natural Retreats had still not in mid-December properly restored the site (see here)
- Installation new safety circuit cable â?? Â£315,641 paid for by HIE (electrical upgrades to surface uplift)
- Replacement of motors and drives at Ridge poma, Car Park Tow and Polar express â?? unclear if this part of the electrical upgrades to surface uplift and therefore who paid
- Installation of 4km new fencing â?? this is being paid for by Cairngorm Mountain Ltd, cost unknown. The work however is not yet complete as implied in the article eg for photographic evidence showing West Wall poma uptrack fencing was not complete earlier this month (see here)
- Removal of obsolete rope from Coire na Ciste chairlift â?? this is new, unclear who is paying
- Installation of new haul rope for Polar Express â?? unclear who is paying for this
- Completion re-instatement around Shieling rope tow and Cas Gantry â?? while the original works were paid for by HIE (Â£78,353 for Shieling ground works and Â£73,377 for Cas Gantry) I have submitted FOI request to HIE asking them to clarify if their payment included the costs of work undertaken by Natural Retreats without planning permission.

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While I will submit a further FOI to HIE to try and clarify further what Natural Retreats has invested at Cairngorm, on the facts as presented by Janette Jansson it appears unlikely they are paying for all the items which were not clearly covered by the FOI request. Indeed there are other items, not referred to by Janette Jansson, such as replacement lift huts ,which we know HIE have paid for. I think it is safe to conclude therefore that almost all of the investment that is going on at Cairngorm is coming from the public purse.

What Janette Jansson has failed to answer is the questions I raised previously:

*â??Can HIE and Natural Retreats answer publicly, whether they can evidence:*

*a) each are investing sufficient monies at Cairngorm, in their own areas of responsibility, to prevent further deterioration of the ski infrastructure, and*

*b) whether the cuts in staffing which were evident in Cairngorm Mountain Ltdâ??s accounts the first year Natural Retreats took over, has had an impact on the progress that has been made in replacing fencing at Cairngorm and other aspects of maintenance of the ski infrastructure for which they are responsible.â?•*

If Natural Retreats are contributing so little to Cairngorm â?? indeed they appear from the accounts to have been taking money out of it â?? the public interest question is why should the public and the politicians who represent us allow the HIE lease with Natural Retreats to continue?

**Category**

1. Cairngorms

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**Tags**

1. HIE
2. natural retreats
3. planning
4. restoration

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