

The restoration of the Beaully Denny access track between Feagour and Dalwhinnie

Description



The construction track as it looks after “restoration” . It appears very little vegetation was saved prior to construction for use once the track was removed and the pile of boulders created by the construction has simply been left without any attempt to re-position so they would appear more natural. Photo Credit: Jonathan Binny

The stretch of land between Dalwhinnie and Feagour, on the A96 west of Laggan, taken by the Beauly Denny powerline is fairly unfrequented. Following my posts on the Beauly Denny at Drumochter ([see here](#)) and ([here](#)), my thanks to Jonathan Binny for sending these photos of the section between Feagour and the col east of Meall nan Eagain.



The Scottish Government, which overruled the objections of Cairngorms National Park Authority to the Beauly Denny, required all construction tracks to be restored to their original condition. These restoration works were supposed to be complete last year, so the photos show the “final restoration” – clearly not the original condition.

In 2013, Ben Alder Estate, which covers part of this area, applied for planning permission to keep part of the construction track (just like the Drumochter Estate did at Drumochter) but this was refused by the CNPA – for which they deserve credit. I suspect it helped the CNPA that an excellent case was made by John Thomas for refusing the track, including the added impact it would have on wild land ([see here](#)). (NB I know John slightly but I had no idea he had made representations on any part of the Beaully Denny until I checked the application on the Park's planning portal). The primary problem that the photos illustrate is not that the CNPA are failing to consider planning applications properly or set appropriate conditions – they do most of the time – its that they are failing to enforce those conditions.

I checked with the Scottish Government about responsibility for enforcing the Beaully Denny planning conditions:

My question

"I am interested in trying to find out what the role of the Scottish Government is in ensuring the Planning Conditions that were attached to the decision to allow the Beaully Denny powerline to be constructed are enforced"

The Scottish Government Response.

"In relation to the enforcement of conditions on planning consent, this is primarily the responsibility of the relevant planning authority, i.e. the planning authority within whose area the development is taking place."

I think this is pretty clear. Responsibility for ensuring Scottish and Southern Electric properly restored the land after the construction of the Beaully Denny lies with the CNPA within the Cairngorms National Park. I can sympathise with the CNPA that they never wanted the Beaully Denny to run through the National Park but once that decision was made their responsibility was to ensure the work was done to the highest standards. That clearly hasn't happened and there is no record of the National Park taking any enforcement action.

In case any reader is thinking from all the photos of destruction posted on parkswatch that destruction is an inevitable consequence of development in our hills, its worth comparing Jonathan's photos with restoration work elsewhere



Photo of moorland restoration on the upper Gynack hydro scheme Kingussie February 2016. The line of the pipeline runs from the view up the centre of the photo.

The Pitmain Estate avoided constructing a new track here and used different construction techniques for this hydro (which I will feature in a future post) but you can see quite clearly that heather has been retained and then replanted. Most hillwalkers probably walk past this pipeline without realising its there. That is not going to happen any time soon with Beaulieu Denny – in fact they are now talking of 20-30 years before the land “recovers”. That is NOT restoration but a very slow reclamation by nature processes.



Part of the track from Feagour went through woodland. Photo Credit Jonathan Binny.

The land looks just like any other clearfell, a mess, which will take years to recover. Contrast this with the restoration of the ground in Stank Glen by Loch Lubnaig in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs

National Park



The line of the pipeline runs diagonally across photo from bottom left and has been cut through the t

Again, this was not restoration of a track as shows, but does show how woodland can be restored after major construction works. The work here post-dates the Beaulieu Denny and will be all but invisible long before nature reclaims the Beaulieu Denny destruction.



In addition to the destruction caused by the construction track, which appears to have been in addition to the forest track far right, you can see the usual failure to restore the ground around the base of the pylon. Photo Credit Jonathan Binny

What Jonathan's photos demonstrate along with the photos published in earlier posts, is that there has been a serious failure to restore the ground and tracks after the Beaulieu Denny works within the Cairngorms National Park. This should matter to SSE the developer – it claims to take a responsible approach ([see here](#)), including treating staff decently and tackling climate change. Along with claims about sustainability its foundational aim is to “Do no harm”. That's not what these photographs show. SSE's claims seem to count for nothing when it comes to how it treats the land.

However, responsibility for addressing SSE's failures lie with the CNPA. This is not just one isolated bit of land that has been trashed by some landowner that doesn't care, its a huge swathe of ground running right through the National Park. The CNPA should be exposing SSE for failing to hold by its

own claimed principles. This is actually one case where the public could have an influence. If the destruction was publicised and SSE does nothing, customers could change their accounts. There is huge potential in this case for CNPA to sort matters out without the costs of any legal action simply through the adverse publicity for SSE which would be created if it threatened to take enforcement action along the length of the Beaulieu Denny. What has the CNPA got to fear?

Category

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2. hill tracks
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