

All quiet at Cairngorm?

Description



The unauthorised tip/storage area at the former Fiacail T-bar loading area in Coire Cas has grown in size

Publicly, all has gone quiet at Cairngorm, though these photos taken last week during the dry weather tell a tale.

Coire Cas



Unauthorised tip at White Lady loading area



Yet more dumping and evidence of a lack of care

The promised clean up of Cairngorm does not appear to have lasted long.

Evidence of the basic lack of care by Natural Retreats, even of what is new, is not hard to find:



Buttons from new shieling rope tow, paid for by Highlands and Islands Enterprise for a cost of £82,243 left lying on the ground.



Judging by this work, the new Sunkid tow may not have been properly installed in the first place – who is paying for this, HIE or Natural Retreats who supervised the works?



About 1/3 way up the Shieling track, there is evidence of water seepage despite the long dry spell. In my critique of the Cairngorms National Park Committee Report which approved the retrospective planning application ([see here](#)) I raised concerns about the impact of the track on the drainage:

- *There is no attempt to describe the extent of the area where works took place in breach of the planning permission (the application was for a strip of ground 30m broad). This is important because without a description of what has been done, the CNPA is not in a position to stipulate what remedial measures are required.*
- *Related to this, there is NO description of the impacts of the works on the hydrology of the area.*

It doesn't take any expertise in hydrology to appreciate that the track has not been properly constructed – patches are soft and spongy – and will not be able to bear regular vehicle use. Indeed the photo below shows how its continuing to erode even in a dry spell.



Meanwhile

the CNPA's agreement to grant planning permission to this track retrospectively has done nothing to stop Natural Retreats' staff from driving vehicles all over the hillside causing yet more damage.



Still, on the plus side, Natural Retreats do appear to have started to repair the monoblock outside the Shieling:



You can judge the quality of the repair for yourself.

Treatment of staff

Meantime, this advert appeared recently <http://www.environmentjob.co.uk/adverts/64102-senior-ranger>. The Rangers were the people who have tried to repair all the damage caused by Natural Retreats at Cairngorm – I met one last year re-seeding a bulldozed area, trying his best to restore the damage caused around the Cas Gantry by the “de minimis” emergency works there. The advert describes the Senior Ranger “*as an important cog in the operation of Cairngorm Mountain*”. “Cog” tells you something.

Natural Retreats are proposing to pay the lead person with the expertise to care for the environment at Cairngorm all of £22-24k.....and its worth reading the job description for what they are expected to do, including working bank holidays and weekends for no extra pay apparently.....tells you something more about how little Natural Retreats value their staff and the environment. While the average UK salary is now apparently £27k, wages in Scotland are lower and wages in the Cairngorms National Park lower still.

The contrast between what Natural Retreats pay their staff – and they have taken over the Ranger Service from HIE – and the wealth of David Michael Gorton, the man who basically owns and controls the Natural Retreats suite of companies ([see here](#)) is striking. According to efinancial careers ([see here](#)):

In 2002, London Diversified [the Hedge Fund he set up] spun out on its own. Initially, it did well. In 2004, Gorton and two others are said to have shared a [55m](#) payout and the business expanded to around 70 people.

Yes, you have read that right, and this was just 14 months after David Gorton and two others had setup the fund. London Diversified was subsequently hit by the financial crisis – caused of course by the casino capitalism of the city of which it was part – and the assets it managed collapsed from \$5 billion to \$300m. David Michael Gorton though would appear to remain a very rich man being party in 2015 to a £12.5m divorce settlement ([see here](#)).

The disparity – gulf would be a more accurate term – between Mr Gorton's wealth and the low pay at Cairngorm is not accidental, its connected and a reflection of our neo-liberal capitalist times. The rich have got richer at the expense of others. In my view the primary purpose of the Natural Retreats suite of businesses has nothing to do with caring for the environment or the people working at Cairngorm, its a vehicle for making money for its ultimate owner and one way that is done is by paying staff as little possible.

The other way is to invest as little money as possible in the environment and that is reflected in what you can still see on the ground at Cairngorm.

Coire na Ciste



The area by the former Coire na Ciste chair lift, where planning consent has now been granted to remove the abandoned buildings (and rightly so), is still a dump.



The Aonach Poma loading gantry – its been in this state for almost 7 years now

The historic neglect at Cairngorm of course is not Natural Retreats' responsibility – its the responsibility of HIE. There have been no planning applications to demolish or remove the other abandoned infrastructure in Coire na Ciste and, because the masterplan for Cairngorm is still secret ([see here](#)), its not clear whether there are any such plans.



Natural

Retreats' lease however covers the whole ski area, including Coire na Ciste, and while the delapidated buildings and infrastructure may be HIE' responsibility, Natural Retreats does have responsibility for the general amenity of the area.



Collapsed snow fencing, approaching West Wall poma upload area

Natural Retreats also has a specific responsibility for maintenance of snow fencing, though its not clear if anything has been agreed with HIE about removal and replacement of old snow fencing in Coire na Ciste.



Abandoned chairlift sheaves which have been on the ground since 2012

Again, while this has not been caused by Natural Retreats, their purchase of Cairngorm Mountain Ltd has not resulted in any improvements to the historic delapidation and rubbish in Coire na Ciste.



Windblown? pipe January 2017 Photo Credit Louis Mullen

However, judging by the age of this pipe, Natural Retreats appears to have added to it. The Allt na Ciste, within the ski area, has collected all sorts of rubbish and needs a clean-up.

What needs to happen?

The secret masterplan at Cairngorm needs to be made public and there needs to be a full consultation by HIE and Natural Retreats about how to address the historic neglect at Cairngorm as a precondition to any plans for new developments.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. conservation
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