Ledcharrie Hydro â?? another plook in the Park

Description



People were generally positive about the design of the powerhouse, liking the use of natural materia concerned about its impact on the landscape, unlike the scar on the right of the track.

Over the last couple of years, concerns in the outdoor community about the impact of hydro schemes has increased significantly and on Tuesday I went out with 6 members of the Munro Society http://www.themunrosociety.com/ to share knowledge and views on the ground. The Munro Societyâ??s first objective is â??To provide an informed and valued body of opinion on matters affecting the Munros and Scotlandâ??s mountain landscapeâ?• and as part of this they have decided to survey the impact of hydro schemes. We went to the recently completed â?? or should that be

compleated? â?? Ledcharrie hydro in Glen Dochart on what was a pretty wet day.



Looking uphill from the same position. The line of trees marks the former Callander â?? Crianlarich r

There was no machinery left of site, which is an indication that the developer, Glen Hydro Development Ltd, believes the work is finished. While I had seen plenty of hydro tracks with oversteep batter sides (banks) â?? which is contrary to the Loch Lomond and Trossachâ??s National Park Authorityâ??s Supplementary Guidance on Renewables (see here) â?? I had not seen mounds of earth, as on the right. The way the land lies here, they are totally out of place and have changed the landscape. These things should matter in a National park.

Afterwards, I checked the planning application.



The diagram left shows the mounds of earth on the right of the track were supposed to be temporary. Why then are they still there?



The width of the new track is in places extraordinarily wide, as the double gates illustrate. Double gates have also been left in place at the Glen Falloch Hydro Scheme. One way the LLTNPA could help ensure tracks are narrower is by requiring all double gates to be replaced by single gates after construction has finished.

The LLTNPAâ??s Supplementary Planning Guidance actually recommends tracks are not even one gate wide:

> *Where tracks are to be retained, especially in locations which are sensitive in terms of landscape impact, they should be restored from the specification required for construction vehicles and be reduced in width to the minimum required for ongoing quad bike (or similar) access.*

The LLTNPAâ??s Chief Executive subsequently clarified in a letter to Mountaineering Scotland that this should mean tracks are no more than 2m wide, which would allow for a vegetated central strip, except on uphill sections and bends where he has stated 2.5m is acceptable.



At Ledcharrie the planning documentation confirms this approach:

â??Permanent access tracks will be restored to their original condition upon completion of the works. Temporary access tracks will be removed and the surrounding ground reinstated upon completionâ?•.

and

A permanent track from the powerhouse to the primary intake (surfaced with local crushed stone and about 2 metres in width).

Now I think this is extremely welcome. Two metres is quite wide enough for a landrover or quad bike and would force vehicles to follow the same line along a track, allowing vegetation to establish in the middle of the track. Talking with members of the Munro Society they agreed. Maybe we need a compulsory National Standard for hill tracks in Scotland. The problem at Ledcharrie however is that almost everywhere the planning documentation for the track, and the LLTNPAâ??s own standards, have been ignored.



The tape measure here is extended to its maximum, 3m. The width of the track is close to 6m and there has been no attempt to restore the banks on either side creating a 9m broad scar up the hill. This should be totally unacceptable anywhere, let alone in a National Park, which says it believes uphill sections of track should just be 2.5m wide.



Not all the track restoration is as bad and there is short section above the double gate (above) where it almost meets the 2m specification and there has been a reasonable attempt to restore the land to its original condition. Why here but not elsewhere is a question worth asking? It seems totally arbitrary.

Even here, though, all is not as it should be. On the left bank the developer appears to have run out of peat to place on top of the bouldery soil. The Planning documentation required a:

management plan for the whole site shall be submitted and approved by the Planning Authority. This shall include details of:

- *The storage and management of the different habitat types and turves of different sizes and depths; and*
- *Coding of habitats to ensure habitat turves are reinstated in the correct areas*

Unfortunately the LLTNPA does not generally add documents required in a planning consent to the planning portal so its impossible for the public to see plan for retention of turves was agreed. The photos show however that whatever happened, insufficient care was taken in removing and restoring turves, with the result that large areas of ground have been left bare.



Impact of pipeline (left) compared to track

The planning consent also included a specific requirement that:

Turves should be reinstated over the pipeline as soon as possible to ensure maximum restoration.

The photo (above) shows this never happened â?? the problem is the LLTNPA is not monitoring its planning requirements on an ongoing basis through construction with the result they are ignored. While this is a failure, in landscape terms, the Munro Society members were generally agreed that the main landscape concern is the track because the vegetation above the pipe, although not restored properly, is likely to recover quite quickly.



The Munro Society team had between them been up almost every 30m bump in Scotland and besides the hill chat, one of the pleasures of going out with them was hearing what such experienced hill goers

thought about various aspects of the hydro development. I have rarely seen a constructed stone culvert in the LLTNPA hydro schemes as above. They approved. While the track at Ledcharrie is far too broad, increasing its impact on the landscape, almost every culvert pipe had been properly finished, (unlike the Glen Falloch schemes). Just why contractors are good at one thing or in one area but then fail totally in others is another question that needs to be asked. I suspect the problem is a lack of monitoring from the LTNPA to ensure consistent high standards. If the problem is lack of resources to do this, the answer is simple: re-direct resources away from chasing innocent campers and direct them to protecting our landscape. The impact of even the most irresponsible of campers is temporary, the impact of these track is, in human timescales, permanent.



Just upstream of the culvert though, Stuart Logan, Munro Society President spotted that this. No-one present thought that lining stream beds with concrete is acceptable (this was the first time I had seen this). How could this happen in a National Park?



The track above the culvert was also very poor, not only far too wide, but it had been lined with blocks which appear to have been created by the developer blasting through rock bands where the soil was shallow. The end result looked more appropriate for a quarry than a National Park.

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Another thing I had not seen was the use of netting in an attempt to hold soil in place at the edge of a track. Here the netting has totally failed and filled with material that has slumped down the slope, a consequence of the bank/edge of the batter being too steep. On the top right you can see how soil and rock, which could have been used to help reduce the angle of the slope, has been left dumped on top of vegetation.



On the downside of the track, below the scar in the photo above, the material excavated to create the track had been dumped on vegetation and no attempt has been made to restore this. The drainage ditch is a later addition bu,t instead of using the new turves to help restore the ground elsewhere, they had been left scattered on the neighbouring ground (large turf centre)

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We had a good discussion about the main intake on the Ledcharrie burn. There was general agreement that the intake was well located being tucked below the level of the banks and surrounding ground and would not be visible from afar. There was debate about whether the rip rap embankment, in this case partially embedded in concrete, could have been designed better. I asked people about the concrete dam walls, pointing out the LLTNPAâ??s Supplementary Guidance suggests these could be faced in stone, although I had never seen this. Someone pointed out there was plenty of material available to do this from the old dyke behind the intake (centre of photo). So why not?



We then walked down the track a bit before heading up to the second intake which I had only realised was there because of the disturbed ground above the pipe. You could not see it from below and some of those present had doubts about whether there was a second intake â?? a really good sign! Again the visual impact of the intake itself was not significant in landscape terms, although the concrete walls could have been faced with stone.

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The main difference in impact between the two intakes came down to the access track.



The first intake is hardly visible from 100m away except for the access track and turning area. (The burn slanting right to left has been diverted so it now enters the Ledcharrie burn above the intake. Another restoration failure can be seen centre far side of river â?? a patch of bare ground created because turves and topsoil were not properly stored).



The second, and more minor intake, has no access track and the ground has been completely restored and to a higher standard than that on either side of the track below. The line of the pipe and temporary construction track will probably have disappeared within a couple of years. Everyone thought this was great, its how hydro schemes should be.

This then raised the question of why access tracks are needed. I explained that the main reason to access the intakes is to clear them of vegetation. This can be done by a person with a rake. This raised the question of why, if maintenance staff are expected to walk to the second intake, couldnâ??t they also walk to the first intake?

This is what the LLTNPAâ??s Supplementary Guidance says should happen:

> *It is expected that any new access tracks required for the construction will be fully restored unless there is overwhelming reason why they should be retained for the operational phase of the development.*

The problem is that LLTNPA have not followed their own guidance. Had they done so and the track been removed, or restored to the condition of the old path/track which runs up the glen and then over to Balquhidder by Kirkton Glen (photo below), there was agreement that this hydro would have been quite acceptable.



The old track over to Kirkton Glen is a â??core pathâ?• â?? quite a contrast to the new track to the r
Ledcharrie intake. The loose stones in the foreground are â??spillâ?• from the recent construction w

There was a good discussion too about how many people used the old path and whether footfall would increase as a result of the new track (we were passed by one walker). While people were generally appalled by the standard of construction of the track, there was a recognition that in terms of both landscape value and recreational use, this was not one of the most outstanding areas of the National Park. While we didnâ??t reach a definitive conclusion, there was a feeling that if the track could be restored to an acceptable standard, then leaving it in place in this instance was just about acceptable.

The problem though is the message that the LLTNPA is giving to developers. Glen Hydro Development Ltd is part of a suite of companies, all with the same Directors but split into separate companies (which both limits liabilities but means that only limited financial information is available as small companies are exempt from producing full accounts). Adam Luke Milner, besides being a Director of Glen Hydro Ledcharrie, is Director of 19 further companies, mostly hydro schemes, including ones at Kinlochewe, Chesthill, Fassfern, Glen Dessary, Loch Eil and Corrimony Farm. Richard Haworth is also a Director of most of these companies. If developers can get away with unacceptable standards in a National Park, they will try and get away with poor standards anywhere. Ledcharrie is yet another indication that making money, rather than care of the environment, is the main motivation of the people financing and benefitting from hydro developments.

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An added complication at Ledcharrie, and a number of other Glen Hydro companies, is that on 1st March 2017 a Jan Tosnar was appointed Director and now appears to have a controlling financial interest in these companies (50-75%) through parallel companies called Renfin Ledcharrie, Renfin Chesthill etc based in Czechoslovakia. What appears to have happened is first the farmer/landowner agreed with a developer they could develop a hydro (for a rent) but then these schemes have changed hands and most of the profit is now not just being channelled out of the area, but out of the country. In other words these hydro schemes will create little economic benefit for the area but are leaving a permanent impact on the landscape. Our National Parks should be exposing these issues and engaging with local communities and recreational organisations to devise better alternatives.

What needs to happen

- I would like to see our National Park Authorities engage with people who care about the landscape about hydro schemes, both about where they might be acceptable but also in developing standards for how they are constructed and restored and thinking about how economic benefits could be retained in the local area. I know the Cairngorms National Park Authority has met with the Link Hill Tracks group, its time the LLTNPA started a similar engagement with a view to strengthening how it implements and enforces its Supplementary Planning Guidance. I would suggest a day out with members of organisations such as the Munro

Society would be a good place to start.
- At Ledcharrie, the LLTNPA needs to make public what plans it actually agreed following the granting of planning permission and then enforce them.

How you can help

Munro Society volunteers are starting to monitor hydro schemes across Scotland and will feed the results of their surveys to Mountaineering Scotland who has agreed to take up issues with Planning Authorities. This is a huge task and they are looking for more volunteers. If you could help or have photos of hydro schemes outwith the National Parks please contact them athttp://www.themunrosociety.com/contact-us:

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I have agreed to co-ordinate surveys within our National Parks, so if you have photos or time to contribute to that please contact Nick.kempe@parkswatchscotland.co.uk

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

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2. LLTNPA
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