

So what are the CNPA and SNH going to do to stop HIE's destruction at Cairngorm?

## Description



Dumper truck on hill track down from Ptarmigan carrying remains of concrete plinths from West Wall  
Photo Monday 28th /

On Monday I was up at Cairngorm on a pre-arranged visit to look at the Shieling Hill Track (about which more in due course) and did not go to the top of the hill. It was not difficult though to get photos illustrating the lies and hypocrisy about what is going on at Cairngorm ([see here](#)) and ([here](#)). Highlands and Islands Enterprise is making a mockery of past agreements to protect Cairngorm and future planning applications.

Contrast the reality (above) with how the Cairngorms National Park Authority were told the work on the West Wall chairlift removal would be carried out:

7. Demolish/dismantle by a mixture of mobile plant with hydraulic breakers and hydraulic shovels (tracked or with low pressure tyres) used on the more accessible locations (Fiacail and White Lady T-bar tows and the Coire na Ciste chairlift) and smaller hand-operated tools at the more inaccessible locations (Aonach Poma and West Wall chairlift).
8. Airlift all arisings (concrete, steel, steel cables and timber) by helicopter from the demolition locations to the Coire na Ciste car park and then take them to the nearest recycling location for disposal.

Extract from email from Colin Matthew, project consultant and ex- Natural Retreats employee, to Gavin Miles, Head of Planning CNPA 2nd May

So much for helicoptering out the concrete plinths. And so much for the use of hand tools.....while I did not get to the top of the West Wall, Heavy Whalley (whom I don't know) did and took more photos ([see here](#)).

## The hill track to the Ptarmigan





McGowan's vehicles are using the hill track up to the Ptarmigan and then driving down the hillside, creating new tracks and destroying vegetation, in order to remove the West Wall lift infrastructure.

At the time the funicular was constructed – and remember this was done so carefully that each stone removed had to be returned to the same place the right way up – the initial planning permission included a condition that the hill track at Cairngorm be removed. The idea was that with a train up the mountain there would be no need for vehicles to drive up in future and this would repair some of the past damage done at Cairngorm. That condition was later dropped, no doubt partly because it became clear that the capacity of the funicular to transport materials was limited and snow machines still needed to get up and down the mountain.

Still, the principle that all vehicle use should be controlled was widely recognised and in the Cairngorm Estate Management Plan 2005-09, which was clearly linked to the Section 50 legal agreement on the development of the funicular, there were strict rules for vehicle use. The gate to the hill track was kept locked and permission had to be obtained to take any vehicle up the mountain. This was because people knew vehicles caused damage.

#### **3.1.4 Traffic routes and segregation of vehicles and pedestrians**

All vehicles will be parked in the carpark at the base station.

Workers will use the designated pedestrian access routes to gain access to the funicular base station, where they will be transported up to the top station.

Extract from Wm Gray proposed method statement for development at Ptarmigan

So why does this not apply to McGowan staff now? The answer appears to be because HIE and Natural Retreats don't require planning permission, they believe they can get away with using a contractor whom all the evidence shows simply ignores planning requirements and standards of good practice. Meantime, HIE shamelessly uses reports from a more reputable contractor, Wm Gray, to promote its Ptarmigan proposals:

William Gray Construction Ltd will take all reasonable steps to ensure zero impact to landscape and wildlife and where this is not possible, minimized to an acceptable level. WGC will seek advice of National Parks Environmental personnel prior to works commencing to make sure all practices and processes are aligned with the park standards.

The hypocrisy of HIE and Natural Retreats is staggering. If the contractor for the Ptarmigan is proposing to consult the CNPA before any works commence and says they will comply with Park standards, so could McGowan.

## **Standards for work at Cairngorm**

A major difficulty – which is undermining the reputation of the National Park – is the CNPA has no standards for operations at Cairngorm and its request to Natural Retreats to develop them has been ignored. There is an easy solution: CNPA could adopt the strict standards that have been agreed for Cairngorm in the past as a starting point and call on HIE to adopt these with immediate effect.





The demolition work is clearly taking place without any care or attention – the lift structure at the bottom of the Ciste chairlift. The scrub wood around the lower lift station is very interesting: some of it was part of an experiment by the old Nature Conservancy to plant trees at Cairngorm. There were arguments then as to whether trees would grow at Cairngorm!

I returned home on Tuesday night to find there had been no response to my email to Charlotte Wright on 25th August [email Charlotte Wright 170825](mailto:170825) to stop the works at Cairngorm immediately. I am not surprised.

Charlotte Wright was, however, for a short time a Director of Cairngorm Mountain Ltd. While she only became a Director in order for HIE to sell Cairngorm Mountain to Natural Retreats, all Directors of companies have legal duties and she should therefore be well aware of the Section 50 legal

agreement at Cairngorm which was designed to protect the mountain. She should therefore be aware that in that Section 50 agreement specific measures were agreed about the removal of ski infrastructure in Coire Cas:

**(SEVENTH)**

- (a) . Prior to commencement of Development on the Development, Applicant will, at its own cost, prepare and submit to the Planning Authority and SNH for approval a schema for implementing the Development (hereinafter referred to as "the Implementation Scheme"). The Planning Authority and SNH will decide whether to approve the Scheme. The Planning Authority and SNH hereby agree to respond to the Implementation Scheme within twelve weeks of receiving details hereof and will either approve the Scheme hereunder or indicate why approval has been withheld. The Implementation Scheme shall set out details of the timing and manner of the Development but without prejudice to the foregoing. The Implementation Scheme will include details of:-
- (i) the timing and manner of the removal of the existing chairlifts;
  - (ii) the steps to be taken to reinstate the land and to deal with the consequences consequent on the removal of the chairlifts;
  - (iii) the arrangements for monitoring the results of such removal and for taking remedial action where appropriate;
  - (iv) the steps to be taken to reinstate the land and to deal with the consequences consequent on completion of the construction work of the Development and the arrangements for monitoring the results of such reinstatement and for taking remedial action where appropriate;
  - (v) the provisions for monitoring the effect on the Development of the Development and for remedying any adverse effects.

While it appears now that that agreement may be full of holes – it should have included mandatory standards for any work on the Cairngorm estate, not just the funicular and Coire Cas – the intention of that agreement was in my view clear. It aimed not just to prevent impacts from visitors at Cairngorm spreading onto neighbouring European protected sites, but to protect and enhance Cairngorm itself. HIE are, and have for sometime, been breaching the spirit of the S50 agreement if not the word. Its

time HIE declared whether they are still prepared to observe that agreement or not and for SNH, Highland Council and the Cairngorms National Park Authority to publicly challenge them to do so.

Meantime, while the current works may not require planning permission, the works in Coire Cas which involve removal of chairlift infrastructure at the Fiacaill and White Lady, appear to fall under clause 7 of the Section 50 agreement. That means that Highland Council and SNH, as parties to that agreement, can legally take action against any works which are not conducted to the highest standards and they should now be working with CNPA to ensure no works start at Coire Cas until full plans have been provided and approved.

### **Category**

1. Cairngorms

### **Tags**

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

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