

Behind the scenes at Cairngorm and the year ahead

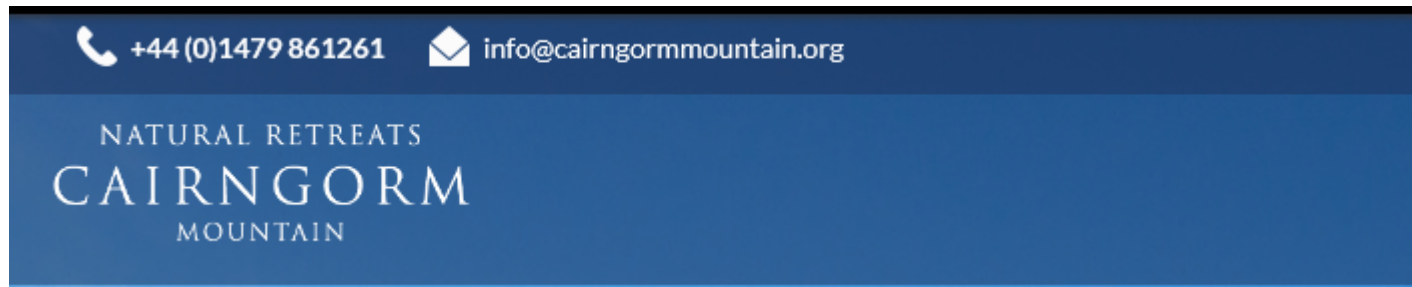
Description



Cairngorm Mountain Logo – screenshot 8th January. There is nothing in the Behind the Scenes section of the website. The website is poorly maintained: Nic Bullivant, the Head Ranger in the central photo

Following the split of the US and UK parts of Natural Retreats, the company that ran Cairngorm Mountain, and the transfer of the UK part of the operation to the UK Great Travel Company Ltd ([see here](#)) further re-organisation of the group of companies controlled by hedge fund manager David Michael Gorton is continuing. While it's unclear at present why this is happening it appears unlikely to be for the benefit of people who enjoy Cairngorm or the wider economy on Speyside.

Sometime in the last few weeks reference to Natural Retreats has been removed from the Cairngorm Mountain logo. Compare top left above with how the logo appeared in July 2017:



Screenshot Credit Internet Archive Wayback Machine

The Cairngorm Mountain Facebook Page though still retains the reference to Natural Retreats:



So has someone just made a mistake? The evidence from the Natural Retreats website ([see here](#)) suggests otherwise. All references to Cairngorm Mountain have been removed and it appears that Cairngorm is no longer being marketed under the Natural Retreats brand. This would fit with Cairngorm Mountain Ltd advertising for their own Marketing Manager towards the end of last year ([see here](#)).



How long will it be before the Natural Retreats logo is removed from Cairngorm Mountain?

The changes raise yet more serious concerns about the justification HIE gave for selling Cairngorm Mountain Ltd to Natural Retreats back in 2014 ([see here for full news release](#)):

“With over 100 years of relevant international and regional leisure and tourism experience, Natural Retreats’ senior management in both Europe and the US bring a wealth of expertise to the Resort. The UK’s largest and busiest skiing destination will be led by Natural Retreats’ market-leading operational team, who have over 65 years of experience within Ski Resorts worldwide. The brand currently operates in close proximity to four world-renowned US ski destinations and Cairngorm Mountain is the perfect addition to their portfolio.”

- Gone is the US part of the operation
- Gone is any expertise they claimed to have had in skiing (the fact they never used the experience of US ski resorts suggest this was perhaps not as strong as claimed)
- Gone is the brand

So what justification does HIE have for allowing the rump of Natural Retreats to continue to operate Cairngorm?

The recent changes to the way Cairngorm Mountain Ltd is being operated also undermine any arguments that the local community on Speyside, who are preparing a takeover bid through the Cairngorm and Glenmore Community Trust, do not have the experience necessary to operate Cairngorm.

Whether the recent changes will affect the large amounts of money that Cairngorm Mountain Ltd has paid to what is now the UK Great Travel Company for services remains to be seen. It was good in this respect to receive confirmation from HIE just before Christmas that the Outfitters Shop at Cairngorm was not connected with another of the Natural Retreats group of companies, Natural Outfitters at John O’Groats:

“The Outfitters shop at Cairngorm is managed by Cairngorm Mountain Ltd. Natural Outfitters at John O’ Groats is a separate entity”

How HIE should be judged over the next year?

I have made no secret of my view that the current disastrous management at Cairngorm will not change until ownership of the ski area is transferred from HIE and that the most likely way this will happen is through an asset transfer to the local community under the Community Empowerment legislation. While few politicians openly support this at present, here are some criteria by which they should judge HIE during 2018:

- Will HIE ensure that Cairngorm Mountain Ltd engages with local and national stakeholders – as they have failed to do so far – about how the Cairngorms Ski Area will be managed?
- Will a draft of the Cairngorm Management Plan, as promised to the Cairngorms National Park Authority under the Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy, be produced? (Natural Retreats was identified as the lead partner for this).
- Will the current review of the ski uplift infrastructure take an objective look at the potential for skiing on the mountain or will it turn out to be fig leaf for decisions already taken behind the scenes?
- What steps will HIE take to ensure that there is complete transparency about monies currently

being extracted out of Cairngorm in payment for “services”?

- What steps will HIE take to ensure that expenditure at Cairngorm benefits the local economy rather than the ultimate owner of Cairngorm Mountain Ltd, David Michael Gorton?
- Will HIE hold “Natural Retreats”/Natural Assets Investment Ltd to account and ensure they invest the £6.2m over 5 years which was promised in the News Release on their appointment?
- Will HIE ensure that Cairngorm Mountain Ltd formally adopt and adhere to the former environmental standards which were formerly governed all management operations at Cairngorm (off road use of vehicles etc)? The CNPA asked for this 18 months ago but so far there has been apparently no response.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

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

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