

Diggers in Wild Land Areas in our National Parks – why do we allow this?

Description



Descending to the Allt Elrig, An Socach behind – the diggers were on the near skyline in front of An Socach

Yesterday I was out running with my daughter over the hills west of Glen Shee, trying to avoid the rain further west, as part of preparations for her first mountain marathon. We headed out over the Cairnwell, across Carn Gheoidh and then descended north west of Carn Binnein to the Allt Elrig heading for Carn a Clarsaich, a small hill over Loch nan Eun. There was no path after Carn Binnein, not even a bootprint.

And then, looking up from just above the Allt Elrig, I saw a digger on the horizon working close to the watershed between the Allt Elrig and Beddoch Burn maybe 1.5km west of north of Carn Binnein (GR087777 Map 43).



Telephoto shot of digger working

I have to say I was shocked. It felt like the land was being desecrated.

I hoped we might be able to see what work was being done when we returned over An Socach later in the day but I was without binoculars and it was too far away to see what was going on:



You can just see the vehicles centre right of photo with the Allt Elrig behind. They appear to have crossed the peat bog from the left edge of the photo to get to this position.

The diggers could have been constructing grouse butts, undertaking drainage work or extending the track which currently runs alongside the Beddoch Burn which runs between An Socach and Carn Aosda.



The track on the north side of the Beddoch Burn.

The tyre marks indicate the vehicles had accessed the watershed by the track – forty years ago there was only a stalkers' path here. The area is now intensively managed for grouse – the grassy areas in the photo are all a consequence of muirburn – and it seems likely the operations of the diggers was in some way connected with the intensification of grouse moor management here.

There is nothing on the CNPA planning portal about the work so one can only assume Invercauld Estate has not had planning permission, if they need it. Unfortunately, despite the fantastic wildlife in this wild area – we saw lots of mountain hare, Golden Plover and Ptarmigan, doing their broken wing trick to lead us from chicks – this is not a Site of Special Scientific Interest so there are no land management operations which require the consent of Scottish Natural Heritage. The area is however in the Cairngorms Special Protection Area for eagles – which we know have a tendency to disappear on grouse moors – and the Cairngorm Wild Land Area. Those designations in my view should be reason enough not to allow any extension of intensive grouse moor management here.

While I have alerted the Cairngorms National Park Authority and asked them to find out what is going on, unless Invercauld Estate – who owns this land – is constructing an unlawful track there is likely to be very little legally that the National Park can do. Invercauld though is part of the east Cairngorms Moorland Partnership and it will be interesting to learn if they have consulted the National Park BEFORE doing this work.

In my view if we are serious about protecting wild land then any operations using diggers should

require permission and the presumption should be against allowing any works which alter natural ecosystems. This could be done through the use of byelaws to control the use of vehicles in areas of Wild Land land. How many more incidents involving diggers will need to be reported ([see here](#)) before our National Parks take effective action to control what is going on and protect wild land?

Category

1. Cairngorms
2. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. CNPA
2. conservation
3. hill tracks
4. landscape
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Date Created

June 21, 2018

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