

HIE/Natural Retreats' failure to maintain ski infrastructure at Cairngorm

Description

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Rusted and corroded bolts Ptarmigan t-bar – recommendations to fix these in 2015, 2016 and 2017 Bratney

Author's Note: I withdrew this post minutes after it was first published last week because HIE asked me to do so to allow for further discussions. I did so in good faith and then received this email:

Dear Mr Bratney

Thank you for your email on Wednesday outlining the concerns of 'Save the Ciste' with regard to infrastructure on Cairngorm Mountain.

As you know, the operator is responsible for maintenance and Health and Safety obligations as part of the Lease and Operating Agreement that HIE has in place with CML. We have been in touch with CML over the document that you have sent us and sought their assurance that any action required is being taken.

Going forward it would be helpful that if you are on-site photographing and have any immediate safety concerns please draw it to the attention of CML so that if the company perceived any risk action can be taken or tasks added to their maintenance programme.

Once again, thank you for drawing this to HIE's attention.

Regards – Susan.

Susan Smith

Head of Business Development

In my view this is a total abdication by HIE of their Health and Safety responsibilities but you can judge for yourself by the evidence set out below in the post I initially withdrew at HIE's request. NB under HIE's new vision for Cairn Gorm announced on Wednesday two of these lifts would be retained making proper maintenance essential not just for health and safety reasons but to prolong their working life.

Following my post on the dilapidated state of the day lodge (see [here](#)) and the closure of the funicular on safety grounds, today I submitted to Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Fergus Ewing, the Scottish Minister responsible, a report on HIE/Natural Retreats' response to the Conditions Reports with respect to the Concrete Support Structures for the surface Tows on Cairn Gorm Mountain as prepared by ADAC Structures.

ADAC produced reports on 16 November 2015, 22 December 2016 and 20 July 2017 which have been obtained through FOI. Cross-referencing those reports enables identification of maintenance work that has not been undertaken by the operator in response to specific recommendations within those reports and I have been able to verify this through checking the position on the ground.

In what follows, items highlighted in the ADAC Reports requiring attention in the short term are in **bold** and those where action was more urgent are marked with ******.

Ptarmigan T-Bar



Bolts pylon 1 – and see top picture. Photo credit Alan Bratney

2015: *“Pylon 1; bolts grade 4. It is probably not possible to service these. This pylon should be monitored for signs of distress.”*

2016; *“Pylon 1; bolts grade 4 plus failed washer.”*

2017; **“**Pylon 1; bolts grade 4. Missing washer on one bolt, so this is ineffective meaning second bolt has twice the stress, this could fail under load. Action required.**”**

West Wall Poma

2015: *“The lower platform should be inspected and assessed for its suitability as a public access platform.”*

2016: *“The lower platform should be inspected and assessed for its suitability as a public access platform.”*

2017: *“The lower platform should be inspected and assessed for its suitability as a public access platform.”*

Comment: despite some remedial work having been done during September 2018, the loading area remains in a dilapidated condition



West Wall poma20th October 2018 – photo credit Alan Bratney

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West Wall poma 20 October 2018 – Photo Credit Alan Bratney

Coire na Ciste T-Bar

2015:

“A review of the access platform is recommended.

Top station anchorages are buried to varying extents. All steel work should be exposed and inspected for corrosion. Ground levels should be maintained to give free drainage and air circulation.”

2016:

*“The timber access platform was seen to be broken – possibly due to vehicle access. **This needs to be replaced before the coming season.** This was discussed with CML staff at the time and assurances that this would be done were received.*

*Top station anchorages are buried to varying extents. **All steel work should be exposed and inspected for corrosion.** Ground levels should be maintained to give free drainage and air circulation. Paint system is failing.”*

2017:

*“The timber access platform was seen to be broken – possibly due to vehicle access. **This needs to be replaced before the coming season.** This was discussed with CML staff at the time and assurances that this would be done were received”*

Comment: this platform was finally repaired during the summer of 2018 following intervention by stakeholders.

*“Top station anchorages are buried to varying extents. **All steel work should be exposed and inspected for corrosion.** Ground levels should be maintained to give free drainage and air circulation. Paint system is failing – **clean and repaint. There is significant corrosion and **plans should be put in place to replace****– a more detailed inspection is recommended once it is fully exposed.”*



Photo credit Alan Bratney

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Photo credit Alan Bratney

Car Park T-Bar

“2016: Top Station – Painted frame, paint system has failed and surface corrosion is extensive. **The corrosion system should be renewed if this steelwork is expected to last much longer.** There are buried mild steel parts. **These should be exposed and inspected.**

Bolts are generally grade 2/3 however ****pylon 1 bolts are grade 3/4**.**

2017: Top Station – Painted frame, paint system has failed and surface corrosion is extensive, **the paint system should be renewed if this steelwork is expected to last much longer.** There are buried mild steel parts. **These should be exposed and inspected.**

Bolts are generally grade 2/3 however ****pylon 1 bolts are grade 3/4**.**

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Bolt car park t-bar Photo Credit Alan Bratney

“2016 Executive Summary

“Many items recommended in the previous year’s report have not been implemented.

Tow Bases

General: *Many of the pylon bases were covered or partially covered in soils and rocks. These should be uncovered and the surrounding ground arranged to be say 100mm below the concrete plinth level to allow free drainage and prevent a continual damp environment around the bolts.*

Most pylon bases were not grouted up. In some cases, the base plates were seen to be deformed – this could be due to ice build up. It is recommended that the base plates be grouted up.”

2017 Executive Summary

“There are a number of recommendations in this report, some urgent. Many items recommended in the previous year’s report have not been implemented.”

Tow Bases

General: *Many of the pylon bases were covered or partially covered in soils and rocks. These should be uncovered and the surrounding ground arranged to say 100mm below the concrete plinth level to allow free drainage and prevent a continual damp environment around the bolts. In some cases the bases were entirely covered and could not be reported on. **This is a general comment and applies to many bases – a comprehensive inspection is not possible until all areas have been exposed**.*

Most pylon bases were not grouted up. In some cases, the base plates were seen to be deformed – this could be due to ice build up. It is recommended that all base plates be grouted up.”

Commentary

The consultant has expressed increasing concern about the lack of maintenance and it can be seen that he has escalated his comments in the 2017 report.

It is very clear from the evidence that the operator, Natural Retreats, is not abiding by the terms of the lease agreement by failing to undertake the maintenance that has been identified in the consultants reports of 2015, 2016 and 2017. This is leading to a deterioration in the condition of the infrastructure to the point where safety may be compromised in a number of areas, as identified above.

When the Coire na Ciste and West Wall Chairlifts were demolished in August 2017, HIE cited Health and Safety concerns as the principle reason for their removal.

When the Funicular Railway had to be closed in September 2018, HIE emphasized that public safety had to come first.

We now have a situation where the tenant is failing to undertake maintenance, over a period of years, to a point where the consulting engineer has expressed concern that Pylon 1 on the Ptarmigan T-Bar is in danger because a retaining bolt “**could fail under load...action required**” There has been no action....what price safety now? Double standards from HIE? It's a safety issue if it is in the public eye but not if it isn't?

Yet another failure by HIE to add to an increasingly long list which show they are unfit to manage Cairn Gorm.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. Governance
2. HIE
3. natural retreats

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