

Spreading misinformation about Glen Feshie and access in the Cairngorms National Park

Description

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Anders Holch Povlsen, a Danish billionaire retailer who has spent more than £70 million buying 12 Scottish estates, was an early convert to the idea.

Mr Povlsen, who is now Scotland's biggest landowner, intends to "rewild" the estates, which cover 220,000 acres, to provide an environmental experience for eco-tourists.

Red deer culls have been carried out on some of his estates to help the environment recover.

When rewilding plans were first revealed, critics of Scotland's concentrated land ownership – half of the Scottish countryside is owned by about 450 people – expressed fears that Glenfeshie (Mr Povlsen's largest estate) might become a reservation for the rich, but these have been partially allayed by letting ordinary hikers walk across the glens free.

Extract from article from Herald on Saturday titled “Scots country estates now being bought to offset carbon emissions”. The “idea” is that of managing land for its environmental potential.

This extract appeared in a generally informative article about growing interest from the private sector about buying Scottish Estates for their environmental potential. That raises lots of interesting questions, not least whether Agencies like Savill’s who were quoted in the piece, are now being motivated by the potential to make a quick buck out of carbon offsetting. However, anything that helps put an end to the environmental destruction being caused by sporting estates would be welcome. The damage done by large numbers of Red Deer and Muirburn has gone on far too long.

Unfortunately, when it came to Anders Povlsen and Glen Feshie, the article was misleading:

- To say Mr Povlsen intends to “re-wild” the estates he has bought, suggests this is something for the future. In fact, that process has now been going on for over 14 years, since he bought Glen Feshie in 2006. What has happened there has transformed our understanding of the ecological potential of the land in the Cairngorms and provides a yardstick with which to compare the success of conservation management elsewhere (National Trust of Scotland at Mar Lodge, RSPB at Abernethy etc).
- To say that “*culls have been carried out on some of his estates*” misrepresents the central importance that Wild Land Ltd has placed on reducing the numbers of Red Deer on its land. It is this that has resulted in Glen Feshie becoming the best example of re-wilding in Scotland. Deer numbers there have been reduced to around two per square kilometre and that is why tree regeneration has been so much faster than at Mar Lodge, for example, where the latest targets are five deer per square kilometre.

These, however, are mere quibbles compared to the claim that fears that Glen Feshie might become a preserve for the rich “*have been partially allayed by letting ordinary hikers across the glens for free*”.

First, this ignores the legal right to roam in Scotland – no landowner can prevent hikers from crossing the glens and they certainly can’t charge people for this.

Second, it does an absolute disservice to Povlsen and the staff who manage Wild Land Ltd’s Estates. Unlike most other private estates in the Cairngorms National Park there are no hypocritical “Welcome to the Moor Signs” that, when you read the small print, unlawfully recommend walkers to keep to the path where possible:



Welcome to the Moor Sign in Glen Shee, Feb 2020, with postage stamp planting. Glen Shee has has one of the highest numbers of Red Deer in Scotland. What a dire contrast compared to Glen Feshie!

It cannot be said enough that we have a general right of access in Scotland, not a restricted right to walk along paths. Any person or organisation that asks people to keep to the path is effectively undermining that general right. That is why its so wrong that the Cairngorms National Park Authority's logo is on the "Welcome to the Moor Signs" and also why they should be insisting all these signs should be removed.

Glen Feshie appears to one of the few private estates which really recognises and respects the fact that there is a general right of access in Scotland and that means you can walk where you want, path or not. That explains why there are no Welcome to the Moor signs on the estate, indeed there are almost no access signs at all, apart from those put up by Scotways marking historical routes and signs helping people find the Ruigh Aiteachain bothy. Given the proliferation of access signs elsewhere, all of which seek to limit access in some way, that is extremely refreshing and welcome.

It would be foolish not to have reservations about any large landowner, whatever they were doing. To claim, however, that fears that the Glen Feshie estate might become a reserve for the rich have been "*partially allayed by letting ordinary hikers across the glens for free*" is unfortunately peddling myths. I recall hearing that said before and suspect the article has simply repeated something written somewhere else. We need to stop those myths circulating if we want an informed debate on land use

and if we want land, whether in our National Parks or not, to be better managed.

Perhaps it's time for the Cairngorms National Park Authority media team to consider setting up a fact checking service for journalists?

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. access rights
2. CNPA
3. landed estates
4. red deer
5. rewilding

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