

Cairn Gorm – HIE’s mis-management of the Coire Cas car park and an alternative future

Description



View of the Coire Case car park from the northern corries footpath Saturday 11th July. Photo Credit Ian Tupman

On 13th July Highlands and Islands Enterprise announced that Cairngorm Mountain was re-opening today ([see here](#)). While the Scottish Government had been advising people they could travel unlimited distances by car since the weekend of 4th July, HIE decided to keep the Coire Cas car park, the most popular access point to the northern side of the Cairngorms, closed.



Photo credit Ian Tupman

The consequences were quite predictable:



Car parked along the ski road Saturday 1th July . Photo credit Ian Tupman.

By the afternoon there were at least 150 cars parked along the ski road. The possibility of such parking taking place was raised by objectors to HIE's proposal to install barriers at the entrance of the Coire Cas car park but dismissed ([see here](#)). In all likelihood the Cairngorms National Park Authority planners knew this would happen – they are not stupid – it is just that they do not have the power to stand up to HIE.



Sign at Inverdrue Tuesday 14th July. Photo credit Ian Tupman

Just what HIE thought the continued closure of the Coire Cas car park and toilets was doing to prevent the spread of Covid-19 is unclear. The contrast with HIE's approach and that of Forestry and Land Scotland in Glen More below is striking:



Sign at Inverdrue Tuesday 14th July. Photo credit Ian Tupman

Forestry and Land Scotland have quietly re-opened all their car parks in the last few weeks and also stopped trying to restrict campervans stopping off overnight. The pay and display machines are out of use meaning there is free parking.



Campervans in Glen More 14th July Photo Credit Alan Bratney

This is very sensible and helps people to get out and enjoy the countryside safely. It adds to the argument that the Cairngorm Estate should be handed back to Forestry and Land Scotland to manage.

HIE have, however, more recently re-opened the Coire na Ciste car park. This is now also being well used by campervans:

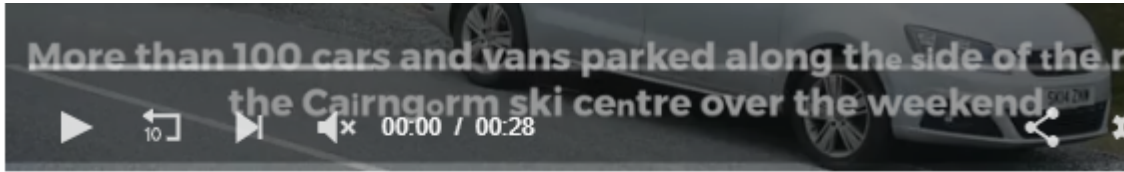


Campervans near entrance of Coire na Ciste car park 14th July. Photo Credit Alan Bratney

This begs the question why HIE allowed one of its car parks to open and not the other? I suspect there is no rational answer.

It also illustrates the missed opportunities at Coire na Ciste which Alan Bratney highlighted in his post yesterday ([see here](#)). A few campervan hookups would help relieve some of the pressure in Glen More. Another argument for why both the Cairngorm Estate and the Glenmore Forest should both be owned by Forestry and Land Scotland. Until HIE is removed from the mountain, integrated visitor management is never going to happen.

Forestry and Land Scotland has however created one major problem in Glen More which has been highlighted by the corona crisis. Having outsourced the campsite, perhaps the most important of all the recreational facilities in Glen More, the outfit that now runs it had decided to keep it closed until April 2021:



Campaigners are pleading for a north caravan park to reopen after wild campers descended on a Highland beauty spot and left it littered with rubbish and human waste.

Scores of vehicles were seen parked at Loch Morlich near Aviemore and a line of more than 100 cars and vans snaked along the side of the road to the Cairngorm ski centre over the weekend.

While locals have condemned those acting irresponsibly, they say part of the problem is the controversial decision not to open a nearby campsite where people could have stayed and made use of the facilities.

They believe the mess created by the unofficial campsites could have been avoided if Camping in the Forest (CITF) had opened the [Glenmore Campsite](#) rather than opting to keep it closed for the remainder of the year.

Badenoch and Strathspey councillor Bill Lobban said the ongoing closure of the campsite was "ludicrous".

He said: "We welcome tourists to Badenoch and Strathspey but they need to act responsibly. Part of the problem is Camping in the Forest refusing point blank to accept advice to open their facility. It's disgraceful.

"If you regularly come to the area you would expect places like Glenmore Campsite to be open."

[Read more here.](#)

from 24 live blog. One wonders how much subsidy Camping in the Forest has received from the Scottish Government during the lockdown.

Local Councillor Bill Lobban rightly condemned Camping in the Forest for this unjustifiable decision and the knock-on effects for visitor management in the glen. It is just a pity that, as one of the five directors of Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd ([see here](#)), Cllr Lobban has been silent on the continued closure of the Coire Cas car park for which he has directly responsibility. While with proper cleaning of the toilets, there is no reason for the campsite not to open, re-opening the Coire Cas car park should have been even simpler. Perhaps Cllr Lobban will now call for Camping in the Forest to be brought back fully into public ownership or handed over to the local community?

The political contradictions at Cairn Gorm and Glenmore go further. Fergus Ewing is the lead Scottish Minister for both Forestry and Land Scotland and HIE and has overseen the disbursement of grants to rural businesses. He is therefore ultimately responsible for the diametrically opposed position HIE and FLS have taken on the re-opening of their car parks and any money Camping in the Forest may have received from the Scottish Government during the lockdown.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority rightly tried to promote an integrated approach to visitor management from Aviemore to the summit of Cairn Gorm in its Cairngorm and Glenmore Visitor Strategy ([see here](#)). Unfortunately that is unlikely ever to happen until the politicians who have a key role to take in the area start taking a more consistent and joined up approach based on the importance of outdoor recreation to the people of Scotland and the local economy.

The predictable influx of visitors to Glen More and Cairn Gorm as a result of the relaxation of the Covid-19 lockdown should prompt a political re-think of HIE's plans to repair the funicular ([see here](#)). The area clearly doesn't need the funicular to attract visitors in summer. What it is crying out for, however, is improved visitor infrastructure, including the Glen More campsite and increased provision for campervans. Instead of wasting £10-15m on the repair of the funicular, a fraction of this amount would deliver vastly improved visitor infrastructure in the glen, with plenty of money left over for the construction of new ski lifts to bring people back to the mountain in winter.

Category

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