

More destruction at Cairn Gorm as the landscape is “smoothed”

Description

MainCarPark 2020-10-16 16:45:19



Photo credit CMSL webcam. You would never have seen a sight like this when the funicular was be

Last year Parkswatch posted a number of articles opposing the planning application to smooth and re-

grade ground by the Day Lodge at Cairn Gorm to create a new beginner's ski area ([see here](#) – includes links to all posts). Ten months after the Cairngorms National Park Authority approved the planning application from Jim Cornfoot, a member of staff at Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd, they are now underway. One hopes that legally it is Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd or Highlands and Islands Enterprise, rather than Mr Cornfoot, who is responsible for ensuring the work abides by the planning conditions. These included a requirement that work should be *“in strict accordance with the Construction Method Statement to ensure that work on site proceeds without damage to the environment”*.

It is hard to reconcile what you can see in the screenshot above with that aim or with the detail of the Construction Method Statement:

Excavation of turf of grass/heather mat and roots, peat, mineral soil, gravel and boulders should be carefully undertaken. In peaty hollows, turves should be stripped to a minimum thickness of about 300mm.

- (a) The topsoil and immediate subsoil should be stripped very carefully as they are thin, and should be stored separately, after the contained boulders and larger stones have been removed;
- (b) The depths of the upper soil horizons to be stripped vary according to the nature of the soil present, and hence, where horizons exist, they should be identified continuously in the field by a competent supervisor to maximise the potential re-use of the material present. The separately-stockpiled soil horizons must be replaced in reverse order.
- (c) The remainder of the subsoil should be monitored continuously and an attempt made to pick out large boulders individually and withdraw them temporarily prior to their final deposition.

Not much evidence in the screenshot of topsoil being stored separately, of a competent supervisor being continuously in the field – though maybe they are below the horizon or hidden behind one of the heaps of debris – or of individual boulders being picked out. But maybe they will be retrieved after the whole slope is turned over?



There certainly was evidence of turves being stored a week ago, even if it was hard to see how soils could be separated when the ground was as saturated as this. Indeed while boulders might have been picked out for use filling holes, you can see how stones have been mixed with peat:



All excavated material and turf will be used on site in these works

The excavator will take off the turf layer on both humps and depressions, top off and cut any humps then, in-fill the depressions, then reinstate the turf layer immediately. This technique is used in peatland restoration works. – the majority of the site works involves peat.

Gravel and soil will be stored on excavated ground for reuse at locations A,G,H,I,J,K,M,N. if this is not possible, then they should be placed laid on existing tracks or in harder locations, if possible, such that their weight will not cause significant damage to underlying vegetation.

Even if the turf from the area turned over in the webcam photo has been stored out of sight, would it really be possible at 16.45 to replace it all “immediately”, i.e before dark? And will the contractors be working the weekend? One hopes that the destruction evident in the photo is not taking place in the various peatland restoration projects taking place in other locations in the National Park.

Among the planning documents ([see here](#)) is one from HIE titled “Working with the Environment at Cairn Gorm”. This is worth reading in full for some of the early history of environmental management at Cairn Gorm. It contains two paragraphs which are particularly pertinent to this work:

3. Any planning application for intrusive groundworks at Cairngorm must be accompanied by indicative method statements, taking account of the potential risks of environmental damage and suggesting suitable mitigation measures.
4. Works involving excavations should ideally be done in the late spring; completion of earthworks should be aimed for mid-June for the highest sites with reinstatement completed 2-3 weeks later because of the poor water-retaining qualities of the sub-soil and to allow the maximum growing season for the plants.

So why did HIE even consider starting the work in October and why has the CNPA allowed them to do this? The argument, no doubt, is the work was urgently needed so that any artificially created snow could be spread further this winter (and not end up in hollows in the ground). In fact, with it being too late for the vegetation to recover, the opposite may happen. Exposed wet peat has particularly poor snow holding capacity and if the remaining vegetation is cut up by skis that will get even worse.

The webcam photo is reminiscent of the destruction that took place during the construction of the Shieling Rope Tow ([see here](#)). History repeating itself. There is no excuse for this, the office of CMSL’s Chief Executive, Susan Smith, is in the Day Lodge and she can see every single thing that happens. What is happening bodes ill for the repair of the funicular. The CNPA needs to start strict enforcement of the planning conditions now and show HIE that, as a Planning Authority, it is a force to be reckoned with.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. Cairn Gorm
2. CNPA
3. HIE
4. restoration
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