

Coire na Ciste at Cairn Gorm – what’s been lost to snowsports enthusiasts.

Description



Work starts on the repair of the funicular – HIE has still refused to explain what is actually wrong with the supporting pillars. Photocredit parkswatch.

Highland and Islands Enterprise/Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd are now pushing ahead with repair work to the Funicular and the smoothing ground-work outside the Daylodge has been completed ([see here](#)). There are also plans to install two new tube slides, create a new access track, move the snow factory and install car park barriers.

Meanwhile, nothing is being done to clear up the detritus within Coire na Ciste.



The Ciste base station building. Photo credit Alan Bratley Autumn 2020

Over a period of 6 years, HIE have allowed two planning applications for the demolition and partial rebuild [around the sub-station] to lapse. Planning consent was granted on 7 March 2014 and again on 3 April 2017. These consents both lapsed because nothing was done within the permitted 3 year timeframe. At least the building has had a coat of paint.

The building used to house a ticket office, toilets and a café upstairs. The café was well used by skiers and it was run by Rita Robertson-King. It was so well liked that a ski piste was unofficially named after her [see picture later on in the text].



Rather than demolish an unsafe building, cautionary signs have been put up instead! Photo credit A Bratney Autumn 2020

Those who have been following the Cairngorm debacle will be aware that HIE have allowed public assets to become so dilapidated that they simply do not have the money to undertake all of the necessary remedial actions. Hence the reason why the Ciste building has not been demolished and partially rebuilt, over 6 years after the first planning consent for the work was obtained.



The bridge over the Allt na Ciste which leads to the East Ciste 'path'. Photo credit Alan Bratley Autumn 2020

The downstream bridge bearer is fractured and the bridge is now bowed and leaning to one side. There's a danger here that someone will slip and go over the edge into the burn. It's another expensive maintenance job for CMSL to finance which will be all the more costly if the next big flood takes out the bridge.



The Laogh Mor Return fencing in a state of disrepair as it is further into the Coire. Photo credit Alan Bratney Autumn 2020

In good snow conditions, skiers could ski down through Coire Laogh Mor using the East Ciste traverse line fencing [see picture further down] for access and back to the bridge over the Allt na Ciste. The fencing was installed to make that a more frequent occurrence.



Remnants of fencing, higher up the East Ciste. Photo credit Alan Bratney Autumn 2020



More dilapidated fencing a bit further up the East Ciste. Photo credit Alan Bratney Autumn 2020



All that remains of the traverse line of fencing which trapped snow, on an exposed mountainside.
Photo credit Alan Bratney Autumn 2020

That fencing enabled on snow access, to the east Ciste Gullies No1 and No2 and to Coire Laogh Mor. There can be snow in the gullies now but no access to them because the fencing, which used to trap snow, no longer exists.



Exposed wire on posts that no longer carry any fencing. The Ptarmigan building can be seen in the background. Photo credit Alan Bratley Autumn 2020



Ruined fencing on the Bynack piste from the M2 into the Aonach Bowl. Photo credit Alan Bratley Autumn 2020

The Aonach Bowl can hold good snow when the route in is scoured or thawed out. A fenced piste was created to help to enable access for longer periods of time than would otherwise be the case.



Remnants of the Boardwalk. Photo credit Alan Bratney Autumn 2020

The Boardwalk was built to enable egress from the Ciste Gully, across the steep side of the hill, back to the West Wall Chairlift. The Gully would often be complete for skiing but without any snow on the gully side. In these conditions, skiers would unclip and walk back to the Chairlift. Nowadays, with only the WW Poma as uplift from here, the Ciste Gully can be a complete piste but the Poma uptrack has thawed. There is then no lift service out of the Coire and the Ciste Gully is out of use.



The hut adjacent to the WW Poma loading gantry. Photo credit Alan Bratney Autumn 2020

When HIE provided Natural Retreats with >£1million for upgrades/maintenance to snowsports infrastructure the money was insufficient to install a new shed here.



All that remains of fencing that helped to maintain snow on what was known as Rita's return. Photo credit Alan Bratney Autumn 2020

This fencing trapped snow high up on the Aonach Ridge. That enabled a route from the M2, adjacent to the top of the Daylodge Poma, along the line of the Aonach Ridge and subsequently down to the Ciste car park. Skiers/Boarders would use that as a piste to get to Rita's café in the Ciste building.....hence the name.

It certainly seems like Coire na Ciste has been abandoned by HIE. If so, CMSL will have a very significant clear up job to remove all of the dilapidated fencing and other detritus that has been allowed to accumulate.

It's very obvious that the demise of Cairn Gorm as a snowsports destination of choice for many people has come about because of what has been lost in Coire na Ciste. The destruction of the Ciste and West Wall Chairlifts was very ill-advised. The view was expressed, at an Association of Scottish Ski Areas meeting, that the removal of the two chairlifts would have no impact on the Cairngorm Mountain snowsports business. In fact, Snowsports enthusiasts were so infuriated with these actions that the Cairngorm share of the Scottish snowsports market collapsed to just 23.6% in the next season when it had, on average, been almost 40% in the decade to 2013. That loss of market share equated to over 40,000 skier days that season. That in turn represented a staggering loss of income that ultimately proved to be unsustainable. Cairngorm Mountain Ltd recorded a loss of just over £826k in the year ending 31.12.17 and the company slide into insolvency in November 2018 when it had a negative net worth of >£2.1m

Will repairing the Funicular Railway at a cost of some £16m of public money as well as an annual

public subsidy of circa £2-3m bring the lost tens of thousands of snowsports enthusiasts back to Cairn Gorm? That's a very improbable outcome given the fact that snowsports enthusiasts had been deserting Cairngorm **before** the Funicular failure and that tourist passenger numbers were also in considerable decline at the same time.

What should happen

A thorough clean-up programme should be undertaken and abandoned detritus must be taken out of Coire na Ciste and off the mountain. If when the long promised masterplan for Cairn Gorm is agreed it contains no provision for snowsports in Coire na Ciste, then all the ruined fencing should be removed as well. At least the legacy of HIE's mismanagement of Cairn Gorm will then only be visible in one Coire and the Ptarmigan Bowl.

Category

1. Cairngorms

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1. Cairn Gorm
2. HIE
3. natural retreats
4. planning
5. snowsports

Date Created

November 18, 2020

Author

nickkempe

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