

HIE's failure to manage Cairn Gorm – the environmental neglect in Coire na Ciste.

Description

In the summer of 2017, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) organised the demolition of the Coire na Ciste and West Wall chairlifts ([see here](#)). That work was done at the same time as other clear-up work and it came at a cost of £267k in public money.

Now that Coire na Ciste has been all but abandoned, how does it all look today?

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Pieces of Rubber in the car park

The out of use chairs from the chairlifts were stacked here for years. They were removed as part of the clean-up operation. Regrettably, that didn't include the removal of pieces of rubber which had perished and fallen off the chairs as they lay there uncovered and unmaintained. It's evident that the regeneration of natural vegetation is being retarded.

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The footpath from behind the Ciste Base building

The path follows a route underneath the line of the Coire na Ciste chairlift but it was never a constructed path and is the result of footfall.



The first concrete tower foundation beyond the Ciste Base building



Concrete tower foundation, further up the hill.

The clean-up work required the concrete tower foundations to be ground down to 200mm below the level of the surrounding ground. It's clear that there are a number of them where that wasn't done. The vegetation that was used to cover them over has generally died, having nothing but concrete to root into.



Eroded path just 200m from the Ciste car park

The path is badly eroded and there is cabling, associated with the demolished chairlift, that has just been left in the ground.



Power cable

The power supply for the West Wall Poma comes from the sub-station that's housed in the Ciste Base Building. Despite sandbags being placed over it on several occasions the cable is on the surface of the ground in a number of places. That cannot be entirely safe and the cable needs to be buried to an appropriate depth, as a matter of urgency.



Collapsing hillside above the path.



Collapsing hillside below the path.

The path cuts directly across the collapsing hillside. There's a danger that the hillside could slide down into the Allt na Ciste below and it would be expedient to re-route the path and keep people off this area.



Ski matting.

That matting isn't biodegradable, is foreign to the area and it should have been removed during the clean-up operation.



Rusting bolts and washers.

These have been discarded beneath the West Wall Poma loading gantry. Why?



Assorted detritus

Abandoned materials that are scattered on the ground beneath the West Wall Poma loading gantry. Why?



The boardwalk

It has been several years now since the boardwalk was removed. A very substandard job was done as evidenced by the mess that still lies on the site today. It can be clearly seen that there has been no vegetation regeneration.



Broken fencing.

This has been lying on the ground for so long that some vegetation is growing through it while other plants will have died.



Dead ground higher up the coire.

Old Chesnut piling fencing, which had been rolled up for removal and then left lying on the ground for years had the effect of killing the vegetation. Even when it was finally removed, the area wasn't cleaned up and that's preventing the vegetation from regrowing.

Coire na Ciste is part of the Cairngorm Estate which is owned by HIE on behalf of the people of Scotland. It lies at the heart of the Cairngorms National Park and it should be a world class treasure. There is very clear, significant and irrefutable evidence of neglect. Out of use snowsports materials and infrastructure simply must be properly and thoroughly removed. Environmental improvements such as path repairs and regeneration of vegetation need to be made. Leaving the coire as it is today isn't an acceptable option and HIE can doubtless expect further negative publicity if remedial action is not forthcoming.



Stone path under construction on the east side of Coire na Ciste

There is however a glimmer of hope. Path construction work has been ongoing for several weeks on the east side of the Coire from just across the Allt na Ciste, above the damaged bridge. Many

hundreds of metres of path construction are required but it is good to see that a decent start has been made. Hats off to the gents who have been undertaking this work recently, in all weathers.

What needs to happen

A plan for the thorough clean up of the Coire is necessary. This should involve meaningful input from stakeholders groups, such as environmental organisations, and should form part of the long-awaited masterplan for “Cairngorm Mountain”. That masterplan should cover both Coire na Ciste and Coire Cas.

Meantime, there appears no reason why Cairngorm Mountain, which is currently closed, shouldn't redeploy any spare staff capacity to make a start on a clear-up now. Whatever its position, it needs to ensure the exposed live electricity cable is buried as a matter of urgency.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. Cairn Gorm
2. HIE
3. natural environment
4. restoration

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