The up-and-coming ski season at Cairn Gorm and the new beginners ski slope

Description



Screenshot credit â?? CMSL video 9th December

[Post corrected 16th December 18.15]

A week ago Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd posted a video on facebook (see here) in preparation for the official opening of the new ski season on 19th December. Both interim CEO Susan Smith and Colin Matthews referred to the excellent snow cover on the mountain. As the video panned across the slopes it showed a large brown stain on the beginnerâ??s ski slope. This was recently engineered in an attempt to improve its snow holding capacity and make the artificially created snow from the snow factory at the nearby car park go further.

I had thought that the said smoothing works accounted for the brown stain:



The great Cairngorms ecologist Adam Watson pointed out years ago that snow does not lie well on bare peat. Unless the peat is heavily frozen, the snow is not cushioned from the water in the peat and melts from below. Hence I believed the brown stain. In such situations the use of piste bashers, which press the snow down into the peat, make it melt even more quickly.

I have been informed, however, that the brown snow was in fact snow cleared from the car park and been asked to remove the post. I think it is better to accept that I did not get all the facts right. The bulldozing of dirty snow full of grit from the car park raises other issues about how far Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd is caring for the environment.



Piles of road re-surfacing materials July 2020



Resurfaced car park â?? note the loose material

In my view dirty snow, along presumably with some of the grit that was used to resurface the Coire Cas car park last summer, should not be being spread over ski slopes at Cairn Gorm. Perhaps CMSL was prompted to do this precisely because snow melts so quickly on this slope? One wonders if CMSL consulted the Scottish Environment Protection Agency?

I had thought when I first saw the video that the Parkswatchâ??s concerns about the slope smoothing planning application (see here), (here), (here) and (here), and the standard of the subsequent work (see here), had been vindicated. That I accept remains to be seen. With the Cairngorm Mountain webcams showing the snow has now gone from lower Coire Cas, it will be interesting to see what happens when the snow from the snow factory is spread over these slopes if they open as promised on Friday. It is difficult to see how snow spread over this peaty surface will survive much traffic from skiers and boarders, particularly when temperatures are forecast to be above freezing until later in the weekend.

The snow factory is still in the wrong place and producing snow artificially to spread over bog appears to me just the latest in a long history of bad decisions at Cairn Gorm. There was an alternative but Highlands and Islands Enterprise ignored Graham Garfootâ??s suggestion that heather cutting would

be far less damaging, cheaper and more effective (see here).

The slope smoothing works were described in Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltdâ??s latest accounts, which were published at the end of November, as an improvement:

> So, as you can see, it has not been a "smooth" initial period for the new company. But I wanted to share with you one of many improvements we have made which will be very noticeable during the coming winter season. In December 2019 we were granted planning permission by Cairngorms National Park Authority for piste smoothing and grading works on a specified area of the lower slopes. This work has improved and increased the skiable area at base level with better access for snow sports and piste machinery. This has included the installation of buried pipe which has enabled the removal of drainage trenches which were unsightly and detrimental to snow sports and snow making. The reduction of existing mounds has enabled two new entry points and removed the fall risk at the car park tow drive unit. The landscaping has used the material available on site to recontour the area in keeping with the local surroundings. The area is ready for snow making this winter and we will realise the efficiencies in snow production on our opening day of 19 December 2020 and in subsequent seasons.

Noticeable because of the brown stains?

default watermark

Iâ??d urge the current Directors of CMSL, including Highland Council Convener Bill Lobban, and members of the Cairngorms National Park Authority Board who approved the planning application, to go and monitor the situation for themselves. Neither seem to be aware of how both the environment and snowsports at Cairn Gorm continue to be trashed, at enormous expense to the public. That, I am afraid, wonâ??t stop until they start to challenge HIE and HIE is removed from the mountain.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. Cairn Gorm
2. HIE
3. planning
4. restoration
5. skiing

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