

HIE's Health and Safety record at Cairn Gorm

Description



Exposed mains power cable in Coire na Ciste November 2020 – imagine someone walking along this path in crampons in winter

“Health and Safety and customer service is what drives us at Cairn Gorm” so claimed Susan Smith,

Interim Chief Executive at Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd (CMSL) in a video on 9th December ([see here](#)), a message repeated earlier in that same video by Colin Matthews their Operations Manager. If that is the case why, after his post on Highland and Island Enterprise's environmental neglect of the Ciste ([see here](#)), did it take several emails from Alan Bratney to get the exposed mains power cable covered up?



New warning signs – there were none before – and sandbags December 2020. Note the remains of former sandbags just behind the left hand sign

In an email response to Alan Bratney on 26th November, sent by a member of staff who has been generally been very helpful, HIE reported they had been in contact with Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) on several occasions about the exposed power cable:

“Subject: *RE: Mains Power Cable*

Dear Mr Bratney

Thank you for email to Charlotte Wright [HIE Chief Executive] this morning about the exposed cable between the Ciste Building and West Wall Poma at Cairngorm. .

The cable is part of the SSEN ring main – HIE and CMSL have been in contact on a number of occasions with SSEN in relation to our concerns about sections which are either exposed or shallowly buried, and their planned replacement of the cable. Indeed, SSEN did an inspection of cable depths around 2 months ago. We have again made contact with them to advise them of the potential risk and we will follow up further with them on any actions required. CMSL are also fully aware of this specific concern and will take any necessary action.

Thank you for bringing this to our attention.

Alan then followed this up with SSEN directly and, after a bit of swithering on their part, on 8th December received an email from them which explained they had put in place temporary safety measures:

"I can confirm that SSEN has now attended site to make the cable safe and install further sand bagging. In addition, signage has been erected to make walkers and others aware of the cable location. To help explain, sand bagging and signage are a temporary measure to ensure public safety and protect the cable. Due to the terrain in the area and the elements certain sections are more vulnerable to exposure.

This situation will be rectified by a project currently in design to replace the existing cable. The on-site works are scheduled commence in the Spring, subject to obtaining all relevant consents."

So why did Alan, a member of the public, have so much more success getting this sorted than HIE/CMSL?

Health and safety since HIE bought back Cairngorm Mountain

HIE failed to monitor how Natural Retreats was managing health and safety at Cairn Gorm and was issued with no less than three improvement notices from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) soon after Cairngorm Mountain Ltd, as it was then called, went into administration in November 2018 .

Mindful of the serious safety problems that had forced the funicular to close at the end of the summer (again a lack of effective monitoring), one of HIE's first action was to appoint a temporary Health and Safety Manager to deal with the most pressing issues. They started reporting to the new Directors of HIE's new company, CMSL, and the minutes of those meetings helps reveal what has happened since:

Extract from minute of CMSL Directors Meeting 19th March 2019

3. HEALTH & SAFETY

Three improvement notices from HSE have all been cleared. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Ross Harris is keen to invite HSE on site to demonstrate how H&S is operating and how H&S will be managed when the H&S manager leaves at the end of the month. CMSL intend to be proactive with a schedule of planned works.

Discussion took place on the life expectancy of the tows. HIE has historically spent significant money on upgrading the tows. Paul Dzialdowski HIE agreed to review the information available on the upgrading work undertaken by HIE and share with CMSL.

Actions:

- CMSL CE needs to communicate internally with staff to demonstrate new H&S culture.
- CMSL CE needs to communicate externally to update those parties who have expressed concerns with CMSL's H&S record.
- Paul Dzialdowski HIE to share information available on the upgrading of the tows previously undertaken by HIE with CMSL.

Note the reference to a new Health and Safety culture AND the need for the Chief Executive to communicate this internally and externally, hence perhaps Susan Smith's recent video.

Extract from minute of CMSL Directors Meeting 10th May 2019

3. Health & Safety Update

WWTP, the installation of the shower has been delayed, this is a HSE requirement.

CMSL ICEO discussed the scope of works for the ski tows and following a meeting with the engineer [REDACTED], [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] An alternative quote to be sought and to work with HIE on future plans. CMSL ICEO is checking the report from [REDACTED].

A risk assessment has been completed on the part of the 11kv ring main which has come to the surface, SSE cable matter.

[REDACTED] H&S briefings have been held with all staff.

ICEO = Interim Chief Executive Officer

This shows that CMSL had conducted a risk assessment on the ring main 18 months ago.

Extract from minute of CMSL Directors Meeting 21st June 2019

3. Health & Safety Update

CMSL ICEO advised that BC is embedding the H&S policy into the culture at CMSL, and the teams are embracing this culture. BC is taking the lead by giving regular H&S briefings, and departments are holding toolbox talks. CMSL ICEO reported that there are no outstanding H&S issues. BC is following the Tech Ops jobs and this is also helping to improve the H&S culture across the technical department. BC is to engage with the HSE prior to their next site visit.

CMSL ICEO discussed the new culture in record keeping. DY stated that this is very positive and documented evidence breeds confidence and trust.

PM asked if BC could attend the next Board meeting, to provide his H&S brief in person. CMSL ICEO will arrange for BC to attend.

All good news, everything apparently in order, including presumably the ring main.

Extract from minute of CMSL Directors Meeting 18th November 2019

3. Health & Safety Update

Bruce Cranston joined the meeting.

CMSL ICEO informed the Board that the ARC assurance letter showed improvements across the site and she was heartened by the ARC assurance letter. BC discussed the ARC report with the Board, and informed the Board that there will be a follow up ARC report. RM asked BC if there were any outstanding concerns. BC informed the Board that there were no outstanding concerns. BL stated that this was a great improvement. CMSL ICEO informed the Board that this was down to teamwork and understanding of H&S. PM thanked BC, and praised staff for embracing H&S needs, demonstrating a positive attitude.

BC left the meeting.

Yet more assurances to the CMSL Board that everything was in order and Health and Safety had greatly improved.

There was just one problem, it wasn't true. A few weeks ago George Paton asked for a copy of the Risk Assessment of the ring main referred to at the May 2019 Board meeting. He received it at the beginning of December and it clearly there were significant risks from sections of cable that were not properly buried:

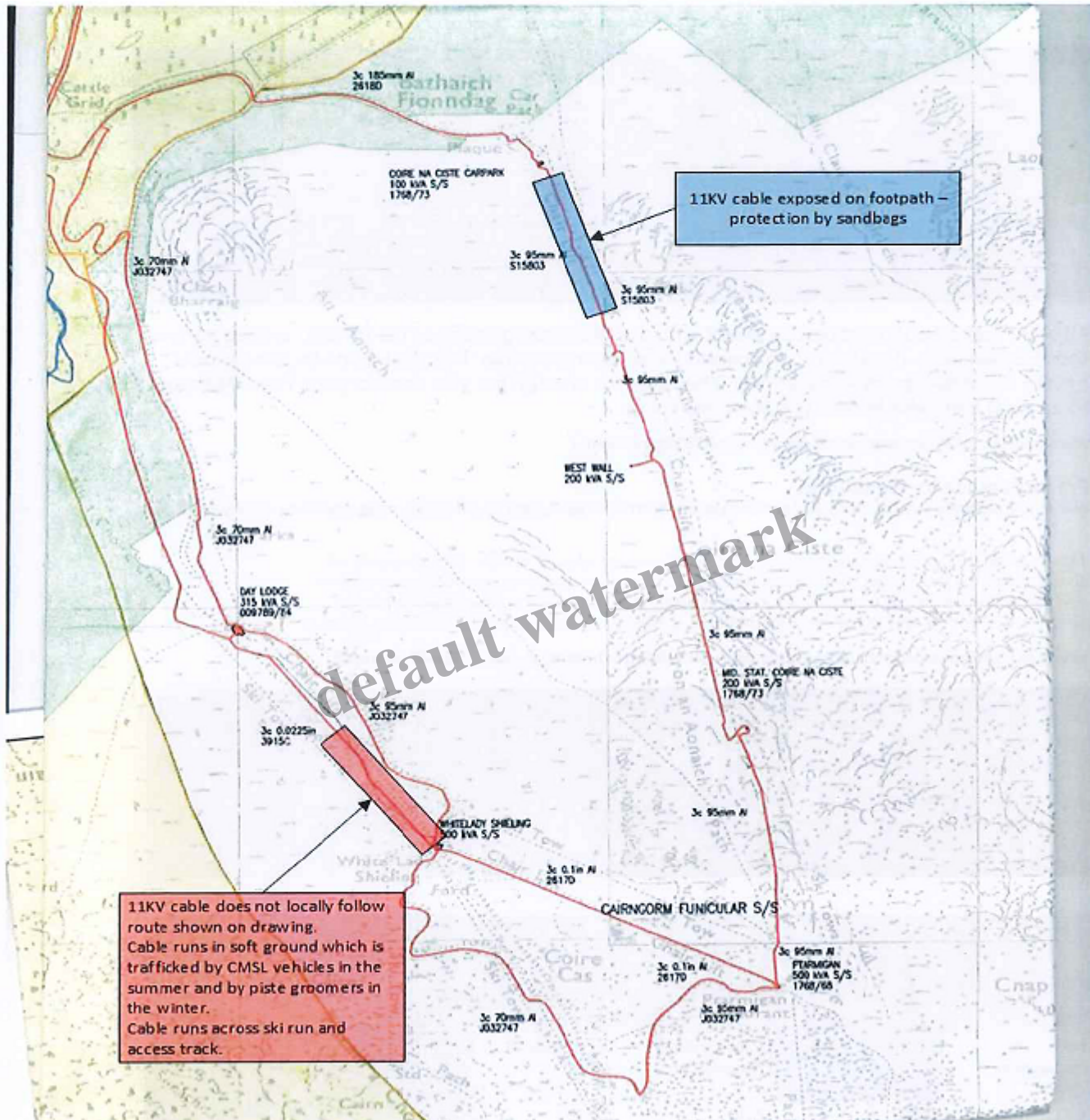
Haz No	Hazardous Physical Activity	Severity	Likelihood	Risk Level
1	Vehicular traffic across cable(s) - summer	5	3	15
2	Vehicular traffic across cable(s) - winter - piste groomer	5	3	15
3	Skiing across cable(s) - on piste	5	3	15
4	Skiing across cable(s) - off piste	5	3	15
5	Walking across / in proximity of cable(s)	5	3	15

Obtained by George Paton through a Freedom of Information request

What is more the Risk Assessment shows the areas where the main problem were located:

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Figure 1 - Plan of 11KV ring main identifying areas of concern



The blue area is exactly where Alan Bratney took his photos this November. Whatever CMSL staff had or hadn't reported to SSEN, the fact is they had allowed this problem to persist for 18 months, while at the same time claiming to their Board of Directors on at least two occasions that all the problems had been sorted. Besides the ring main, by November 2019 when the CMSL Board were told for the second time that all health and safety issues at Cairn Gorm had been addressed, the artworks above the Coire Cas car park were almost certainly already in a dangerous state ([see here](#)). In most organisations, were people to have misled their Board in this way, heads would roll. In actual fact, the ring main had been exposed in places well before the risk assessment was conducted in May 2019:



These photos of sandbags were both taken in 2016, when Natural Retreats was in charge, although many of the hill staff are the same as they are now. In 2017, the Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust asked HIE what they intended to do about the section of the 11kv ring main cable which was exposed on the surface of the Sheiling piste (red area in map above). HIE did nothing to address that issue, hence why it appeared in the 2019 risk assessment, and it has taken the intervention of a member of the public to get anything done.

CMSL Directors need to see for themselves what is happening on the ground

You don't have to walk far around Cairngorm Mountain to spot issues which, anywhere else, would be treated as a serious Health and Safety concern. These range from the obvious:



Bridge over the burn that runs down towards the Pump House on the lower Zig Zags known as chicken gully, so called as its less steep than the Cas gunbarrel

To the slightly less obvious:



Ruined fencing high on the Aonach Ridge, also known as Rita's ridge, used by skiers and boarders to return to the Ciste Car Park

In cloud, a frequent occurrence on Cairn Gorm, these wires would be hidden from skiers and boarders and could cause a nasty accident.

To the even nastier:



Imagine a beginner sliding out of control and being impaled on one of these wires. When were these posts wires ever clad in protective matting?

There are currently six directors of Cairngorm Mountain (Scotland) Ltd , all appointed by HIE ([see here](#)). One, Rachel Mackenzie, is currently employed by HIE, and another, Douglas Yule, is a former HIE employee. The Chair, Peter Mearns, is a retired chartered accountant and Andrew Burgess appears to have various commercial leisure interests. Bill Lobban is convener of Highland Council. The final Directorship is held by Burness Paul LLP, a legal firm, who should know about health and safety law, even if the other Directors don't.

It is time that all got out and took a walk around the mountain instead of trusting what their senior management tell them.

Category

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Tags

1. Cairn Gorm
2. HIE
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