

Maintenance and Health and Safety at Cairngorm Mountain (1)

Description

This post takes a further look ([see here](#)) at the ongoing mismanagement of health and safety at Cairn Gorm.

Following review of tow inspection reports and further information provided by Cairngorm Mountain Limited a visit to the site was conducted by myself and Graham Martin, HM Specialist Inspector of Health and Safety (Construction Engineering Team) on Monday 6th December. Safety concerns constituting breaches of health and safety law were identified regarding several of the tows looked at during this visit - resulting in formal enforcement action being taken.

3 Improvement Notices have been served regarding these matters and I am currently in ongoing correspondence with the site regarding the improvements required to comply with these notices.

After concerns about the safety of the lift infrastructure at Cairngorm Mountain were raised by a member of the public in 2018 the Health & Safety Executive (H&SE) visited and issued three Improvement Notices. The Inspectors ("they") also noted:

They apparently also "observed dangerous working practices with the snowfactory and are now investigating reports that the wa by very unsafe and undocumented working methods".

Subsequently HIE released the following statement:

"There are three HSE improvement notices on Cairngorm, with a current compliance date of 8 February.

"These were issued on 10 December to Cairngorm Mountain Limited (CML), which was already in administration.

"Two notices relate to work planned, but not yet carried out, on the West Wall Poma and Coire na Ciste Drive Stations. The third notice requires improvements to be made to the current arrangements for recording all maintenance work to all Cairngorm tows.

"HIE subsidiary, Cairngorm Mountain (Scotland) Limited (CMSL), inherited responsibility for resolving the notices when it took over operations on 14 December.

"The company is providing HSE with assurances regarding maintenance arrangements to all other tows, which are ready to be used in the event of snow. It is also addressing the issues raised with regards to the West Wall and Coire na Ciste, neither of which will be used until the work has been approved by HSE."

Note the third paragraph, second sentence "*improvements to be made to the current arrangements for recording all maintenance work to all Cairngorm tows*". This was not a new issue:

5.2 Ski Tows

- The name / signature of the fitter undertaking remedial tasks should be entered on all worksheets.
- Qualification of the fitter undertaking remedial tasks should be entered on all worksheets.
- Target dates for completion of remedial tasks to be recorded on all inspection sheets.
- All tow inspection sheets to identify location of tow under inspection.
- Ensure details of certifying authority and clients details to be in filled on all inspection sheets.

Extract from report by URS Infrastructure and Environment UK Ltd
October 2013, ie before Cairngorm Mountain outsourced to Natural
Retreats

The above was not the only comment in the report recommending improvements to the way maintenance work should have been recorded at Cairngorm Mountain.

In the “Annual report and financial statements for the period ended 31/03/2020” for Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd (CMSL), the Highlands and Islands Enterprise subsidiary that runs the ski business, Mr. P. Mearns, the chair of the board of directors claimed:

other stake holders to move towards future sustainability. I would stress that first and foremost has a commitment to operating our facilities safely. One of our first appointments was to bring Safety manager and the first order of business at our monthly board meetings is Health & Safety sometimes our commitment to this can cause disappointment; we are sorry when we cannot change changing conditions on the Mountain mean we have to close early, but the safety of our visitors to be our number one concern in the challenging conditions in which we operate.

Let's compare that statement with the following photographs taken in the summer 2020:



Ptarmigan tow, Pylon 1 with concrete blocks holding it up ? Or are they holding it down as the ropes at this pylon go underneath the pulleys?

It can be seen that this work has just been completed as there is very little water marking and no green algae on the blocks! It also shows poor workmanship in that galvanised steel should have been the preferred option for the framework, but at the very least this could have been painted with a suitable metal paint rather than just left to corrode!

The interesting fact, however, is this particular pylon had previously been mentioned in reports by a firm called ADAC Structures dated 16/11/2015, 22/12/2016 and from 20/07/2017. This comment comes from the last report:

4.11 10 - Ptarmigan Tee:

- 4.11.1 Bottom station concrete surfaces spalling but serviceable. Bolts grade 3.
- 4.11.2 Top station tie back arrangement induces some bending stress in the steel. This is unnecessary but it is not showing any signs of distress. No action recommended at this time.
- 4.11.3 Base 1, bolts grade 4. Missing washer on one bolt, so this is ineffective, meaning second bolt has twice the stress, this could fail under load. Action required.
- 4.11.4 Base 2, plate is deformed, presumably due to frost action. It is recommended that all base plates be grouted up. See pic in appendix A.
- 4.11.5 Base 4 is close to being undermined. **Monitor.**
- 4.11.6 Base 5 uses wedge shaped washers, this is likely to stress the bolts. The original base appears to have been encased in 300mm of new concrete, which is now delaminating – **maintenance will be required in the near future**
- 4.11.7 Bolts generally grade 3 or 4

Para 4.11.3. raises the question was this bolt fixed or did it subsequently fail resulting in the remedial work in the first photo?

The next photos are of Ptarmigan Tow, Pylon 2, which is first mentioned in the ADAC Structures report of 20/07/2017:-

Para 4.11.4. "Base 2, plate is deformed, presumably due to frost action. It is recommended that all base plates are grouted up. See pic. In appendix A"



Photo 1 – base plate deformed by ice action.

Photo credit ADAC Structures Report 2017



Photo 2 courtesy of a member of the public, summer 2020.

That base plate is clearly in very poor condition judging by the number of welds, the angle iron welded on to an upright and the stains which form when untreated steel rusts! The long lengths of studding left above the double nut arrangement are also a safety risk to anyone working on that pylon!

Because there are no reports in the public domain after 20/07/2017 we do not know whether the work highlighted in red in paras in 4.11.5 and 4.11.6 (above) has been undertaken, but one thing is certain, the Ptarmigan tow is in a very dilapidated state possibly even needing full refurbishment!

A new Freedom of Information request will be sent to HIE for the latest inspection reports and I will update this post when I have that information but it is clear that the safety of the lift infrastructure at Cairn Gorm is still far from sorted.

Two questions that need to be answered

(1) Have any of the directors of CMSL actually walked around the ski area that they control, especially in the summer when all the maintenance and repairs are exposed, before signing off accounts that claim Health and Safety is taken seriously? And,

(2) would you use the Ptarmigan tow in its current condition?

More to follow!

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

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