

Post Script to 'Cairngorm Mountain' Death of a Ski Resort

Description

In my original post with this title ([see here](#)) I referred to 'the demolition of other viable uplift'. This led at least one person to assume that Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd (CMSL) were currently considering the demolition of other tows on the mountain. That was not my intention, I was in fact referring to uplift that had already been removed. However!

In spring 2017, when the cable was removed from the Coire na Ciste chairlifts, I said to the Save the Ciste campaigners that I hoped that it was not the start of the chairlift demolition. Their belief was that as the chairlifts had not been used since 2005, the cable was due for replacing. They thought at the time that there was no way HIE would be so irresponsible as to demolish the chairlifts, especially given the amount of public support for the re-instatement of the Ciste, so we let the matter pass.



Piste map courtesy of Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd. Dotted line in Coire na Ciste, on left, showing position of demolished chairlifts.

Oh how wrong we were! In late August 2017 HIE paid to demolish the chairlifts ([see here](#)).



The pylons

came crashing down and ended any chance of the Ciste being brought back into operation, despite the warnings about the condition of the funicular.

In Italy, to comply with health and safety requirements, lifts are scheduled for replacement when they are 30 years old, extendable by up to three years by agreement if an adequate reason is provided. Apply that to Cairn Gorm and the only two lifts left operating on Cairn Gorm would be the funicular and the Shieling Rope tow in Coire Cas. All other uplift would have been removed!

This prompts me to make a number of predictions.



Looking up Coire na Ciste to the West Wall poma, the line of which is marked by the glint of the snow. A chair lift had run along the line of the path and then to the left of the poma. Photo May 2018.

(1) The West Wall poma is now in such a remote location that skiers/ boarders will be worried about venturing that far down Coire na Ciste in case the tow breaks down! It is a long walk down to the Ciste car park and from there back round to the Cas side of the hill, where you may end up standing in a long queue before being able to get back up to the top!

As capacity has reduced on the mountain, the Ciste car park has been used less, there has been less need for a shuttle bus and anyone doing that walk once may not return to Cairngorm again! Reduced custom then makes the time and expense of sending in a piste basher to smooth the lower reaches and a lift operator to operate the tow hard to justify.

Abandoning the West Wall Poma would also allow HIE/ CMSL to cut off the power supply from the Ciste car park, meaning that SSEN will not have to dig a new track in the Ciste to properly bury the power cable ([see here](#)). All of the power that goes to the Ciste building will then be available

for a café and micro-lodges as well as hook-up and recharging points. This may already be happening with a planning application currently lodged with the Highland Council to turn part of the Ciste car park into an area for campervans! [Ed post on this coming soon]. That's the end of the West Wall poma!



(2) Once the poma ceases to operate, the Ciste bar above the West Wall will end up in exactly the same position for exactly the same reasons, although if there is snow down to the Daylodge it will be a shorter walk across the ridge to drop down into the Cas by the M2 ski run.

(3) Meantime, the Ptarmigan tow ([see here](#)) appears to be in need of a major overhaul if it is to remain viable. When CMSL applied for planning permission ([see here](#)) to bulldoze the lower areas of Coire Cas to create a more user friendly beginner area, all the local ski schools supported the application, in preference to the Ptarmigan bowl. This appears to have been because it has easier access and was more time efficient than queueing for the funicular. The only reason a more experienced skier/ boarder would use the Ptarmigan tow would be to have a longer run starting higher up the mountain than from the top of the M1 poma! That spells the end for the Ptarmigan tow!

A further factor in terms of the economic viability of operating the uplift is the cost of business insurance. The larger the ski area, the higher the capacity, the more expensive the business insurance

will be. The reduction in peak numbers of customers from 6,000 plus in its heyday to circa 2,500 currently will have made covering what will have been an ever increasing overhead and the associated costs of the ski patrol ever more challenging! If you ski outside the Cairngorm ski area boundaries and have an accident, you will not be covered by CMSL's insurance! If uplift is removed from the Ciste it is probable that there will be no longer be insurance cover over that area. More cost-cutting reducing capacity even further.

All we can do now is sit and wait to see if my predictions are correct, but if they are then this will confirm that we are witnessing the death of what was Scotland's premier ski resort.

Recently, I came across some information dated 30/07/2005 from a blog (which I think was called Snowheads):

In notes attached to a customer feedback survey published on its website, Cairngorm Mountain state:

Quote:

The fact of the matter is that these chairs are now obsolete. Trying to source any form of spare parts become virtually impossible and the cost of keeping them going is completely disproportionate to the number of people who can actually operate.

The focus for these two lifts is now looking towards decommissioning rather than refurbishment ... it makes economic sense.

As far back as 2005, therefore, the Cairngorm Mountain Trust (CMT), then owners of Cairngorm Mountain Ltd (CML) were already considering the demolition of the Coire na Ciste Chairlifts, although it was HIE and Natural Retreats who finally did the dirty deed. This raises the question of whether HIE and CMSL have already considered and secretly decided to remove the remaining uplift in Coire na Ciste?

Category

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