

The state of the Cairngorms (2) - restoration of hill tracks

Description



View towards Carn Dearg Mor (right) from south. A digger being used for the restoration work is just visible above the plantation

Following my post on the failed restoration of the Beaulieu Denny powerline access tracks ([see here](#)), someone asked on twitter *“how would you have done this differently?”* The answer lies just over the hill on the southern face of Carn Dearg Mor above Glen Feshie. There, Wild Land Ltd is in the process of removing a hill road. Already you could walk past and not see the scar.



View from above November 2017. The hill road in the foreground has been removed. That on the far side of the col between Glen Feshie and Glen Tromie remains and is currently being used for deer culling and to access peat bog restoration sites



The removal of this track is part of a plan to rationalise and reduce the landscape impact of hill tracks on the Glen Feshie and Glen Tromie estates. While the track to the plantation remains prominent, as woodland develops it should eventually become concealed from view.

Because this was a longstanding road, there was no ‘‘spare’’ vegetation to cover its surface once this had been re-moulded to fit back into the landscape. The pockmarks on the slope show where vegetation has been ‘‘borrowed’’ and used to cover the track. Because the areas of borrowed vegetation are small and well spaced, each should be re-colonised by the plants surrounding them in a year or two despite the short growing season at this altitude (600-700m). That process will have been assisted by the work having been carried out fairly early in the growing season this year.

The Beaully Denny restoration should have been far simpler than that on Carn Dearg Mor, as the access roads were supposed to be only temporary and it also lies at a lower altitude. Had vegetation along the line of the access roads been removed carefully and stored properly, it could have simply been replaced once the line of the road had been re-moulded to fit the landscape. The scars should then have disappeared in a year or so. Instead five years later the scar is almost as prominent as it was when the roads were constructed:



View of section of Beauly Denny access track taken from the car 17th July

Had SSE ensured suitably skilled contractors were employed to work on the construction and restoration of the Beauly Denny access roads, none of the landscape scarring at the Drumochter need have occurred. Remedial work could still start tomorrow if the Scottish Government had the political will to hold SSE to account. There is plenty of vegetation on the surrounding ground that could be borrowed to help resurface these roads and there would be even more if the muirburn that is scarring the hillside above was stopped. But first the surface of the access road needs to be re-moulded to fit the contours of the hillside, removing the straight line that currently cuts across it.

Hill roads have been proliferating across Scotland over the last forty years and while the Cairngorms National Park Authority has now adopted a presumption against new ones in its Local Development Plan, they have no plans to restore past landscape damage. Since the National Trust for Scotland bought Mar Lodge in the 1990s and removed the road high up on Beinn a Bhuid ([see here](#)), no-one else had either until WildLand Ltd decided to remove some of the worst landscape scars on the estates it had bought: Glenfeshie, Glentromie, Gaick, Killiehuntly, Lynaberack.

The work Wildland Ltd are doing to restore hill roads should, in my view, be publicised more widely and inspire a programme to remove unsightly and damaging roads across the National Park. It also demonstrates that given the will (its taken a private landowner Anders Povlsen to show what can be

done) and the right contractor, much of the damage that has been caused by poorly planned and shoddy work — whether at Cairn Gorm or Drumochter — could and should have been avoided.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

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2. CNPA
3. hill tracks
4. landscape
5. planning
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