

HIE's campervan park in Coire na Ciste at Cairn Gorm

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Motorhomes site is 'driving folk away'



Campaign group for Cairngorm resort improvements claims brand new campervan park is sadly lacking and being steered clear of by campervans

A CAMPAIGN group is claiming motorhomes which used to park at the Ciste car park at Cairngorm Mountain are being displaced as owners are not getting value for money from the newly introduced fee.

Save the Ciste has said that instead of paying £15 per night visitors are parking up at the side of Loch Morlich or using the resort's Coire Cas parking for free.

The group is a supporter of motorhomes facilities on the hill - and first suggested the idea more than five years ago - but claimed that the standard so far falls well short of what is required for it to be a success.

Group spokesman Alan Bratley said: "The phenomenal growth of campervan ownership has been well documented as has the lack of facilities to cater for their needs locally.

"There have been some excellent local initiatives, notably in Kingussie and Nethy Bridge, to provide facilities and welcome campervans to the area.



UNTESTED WATER: Alan Bratley at the Ciste campervan site at Cairngorm Mountain. TOP RIGHT: Campervans parked in the designated area.

"But the Glenmore infrastructure is sadly lacking. Forestry and Land Scotland's answer has been to ban overnight parking in all of their car parks from Loch Morlich up to the Sugarbowl.

"The average number of campervans parked within their car

parks was found to be 20 per night in surveys conducted in 2019/20.

"Campervans can now be found parking on the roadside verge along Loch Morlich side. There were 12 parked there, nose to tail, on Friday evening (September 10).

"They could now represent a

hazard while that was not the case when overnight parking in FLS car parks was permitted.

"The new campervan park opened in the Ciste car park on September 7 and it might have been expected that it would take up some of the demand.

"However, in a weekend survey conducted around 7pm on Friday, Saturday and Sunday (September 10 to 12) there were just one, six and four campervans respectively parked there.

"On Saturday evening, there were also five parked up in the free to park area at the Ciste intended for cars.

"At the same time, there were eight, 14 and 14 respectively, parked within the Cas car park and 14, 10 and 10 points on the 'down' road.

"It is sad that this does not appear from previous studies conducted over four one-week periods that charging for parking in the Ciste car park has led to a significant displacement.

"The Ciste facility at present is very third rate and is unlikely to attract significant numbers prepared to pay £15 for a poor offering. A water supply that is untested is

testament to the third-rate quality."

Mr Bratley said the present offering is also too exclusive: "They are excluding those that do not have on-board toilet facilities and there is no provision at all for tents.

"That is simply because they have no vision and they do not want to rebuild the Ciste building with toilets and showers and a nature themed cafe."

A Cairngorm Mountain spokeswoman said on Tuesday: "The site only opened on September 7 for online reservations and to date we have had 66 bookings.

"It is far too premature to make any assessment of the impact or otherwise of this facility.

"It is a much-needed secure facility which we are confident will prove beneficial for this visitor segment travelling through the Cairngorms National Park."

Save the Ciste has worked up a series of phased proposals for the redevelopment of the Coire na Ciste area on Cairn Gorm.

The Cairngorm

National Park Planning Committee saw fit to grant Cairngorm Mountain [Scotland] Ltd (CMSL), Highland and Island Enterprise's wholly owned subsidiary, permission to set up a Campervan Park in Coire na Ciste on Cairn Gorm. That consent was granted on 21 May 2021.

CMSL indicated to the planning committee that they might be able to have it up and running by the end of July. However, it didn't open for business until Monday 6 September so revenue from the main holiday month of August was lost as well as the opportunity to provide a new facility for tourists.

Parkswatch has previously had a look at the condition of the Coire na Ciste car park and environs ([see here](#)) and ([here](#)). This post takes a look at:

1. What has been done to Improve the condition of the Ciste car park and environs.
2. The facilities that have been provided for Campervan/Motorhome owners/renters who choose to pay £15 for a 1-night stay.
3. The usage rates within the Ciste Campervan Park and the displacement to other locations.

The condition of the car park and environs



The bridge over the Allt na Ciste remains broken and prevents easy access to the East Ciste paths. Photo credit Alan Bratney.



The Ciste base station building remains unsafe. Photo credit Alan Bratley.



Ring main above the car park. Photo credit Alan Bratney.

The ring main cable has not been reburied [despite Scottish & Southern Energy Networks saying that it would be, during the summer, which is now over] and the "Danger of Death" notices remain in place. Note how the sandbags are now all burst - waiting for the winter rains and snow-melt to wash the sand away.



The Grouse Butt viewpoint appears to have had some repair work done but it is far from complete. Photo credit Alan Bratney.



The car park roadway continues to be in a poor state. Photo credit Alan Bratney.

First impressions that owners/renters form as they drive into the car park will not be good. Some screeding work has been done but it does little to improve the ground conditions within the campervan park.

It is clear that nothing meaningful has been done by HIE or CMSL to improve the car park or environs in advance of the campervan park being opened for business and they continue to be in a demonstrably poor state.

Facilities



The information Board at the entrance, with environmentally friendly wood surround. Photo credit Alan Bratney.



The barrier across what is/was a public road. Photo credit Alan Bratley.

There is a coded entry system whereby users received the code to open the gate after they have paid the fee for parking the night in there.

Inside the "compound" users will find nicely clad bins for disposing of rubbish in an environmentally friendly manner.



Photo credit Alan Bratney.

There is also a water supply



This sign was still there on 18th September 2021.

Photo credit Alan Bratley

There is some dubiety about whether or not it can be called "clean". Can that be considered to be acceptable, given the hefty £15 per night charge.

There is also a "grey water" disposal facility



Photo credit Alan Bratney.



Photo credit Alan Bratney.



The 'clean' water facility on the left, the grey water disposal facility on right

The clean and grey water facilities are very close together. A commentator on CMSL's facebook page suggested the two are too close and there is a risk of the clean water facility being contaminated. Instead of answering the concerns, CMSL staff removed the comment.

Apart from these facilities, there are no electric hook up points so no recharging can be done. There are also no toilets/showers or a caf   bar. Notably, the Ciste building does have power and water and could be reconstructed to provide these facilities. Regrettably, HIE [as owners] have twice gained planning consent to demolish and partly reconstruct the building but they've allowed that consent to lapse twice. How difficult would it be to get plans made for a nice new building and offer the services that would greatly enhance the product/service offering and doubtless lead to considerable increased usage of the park by allowing those without onboard toilet to stay there?

The creation of a small campsite for tents would also be beneficial, as has proved to be the case at Glencoe Mountain, but the noticeboard tells campers to keep well away - potentially displacing

them into the important areas for capercaillie below!

Usage Rates

The numbers using the car park were monitored over the 7- day period from Friday 10 September to Thursday 16 September. Additionally, the numbers parking up in the Coire Cas car park and at the side of the 'down' road were also noted. Observations were made at around 7pm each evening so they do not take account of any later arrivals.

22 campervans were recorded in the Ciste site over the period. That was made of 1, 4, 6, 0, 3, 4 & 4 from Friday to Thursday.



The Ciste campervan park on Thursday evening, 16 September 2021. There was one other campervan, out of shot. Photo credit Alan Bratney.

During the same time period, there were 71 campervans recorded in the Coire Cas car park. That was made up of 8, 14, 14, 9, 9, 10, 7.



The Cas car park on Thursday 16 September 2021. There were 2 other campervans, out of shot. Photo credit Alan Bratney.

In addition, a total of 52 campervans were observed parked along the verge on the "down" road.



The 'down' Road on Thursday 16 September 2021. There were four others, out of shot. Photo credit Alan Bratney.

In studies done by the Save the Ciste campaign over four separate 1-week periods in 2019 and 2020 it was noted that the number of campervans in the Ciste car park was: 59, 97, 133 & 87. During the same time periods the numbers parked in the Cas car park were: 3, 18, 23 & 19. The greatest number recorded in the Cas car park on any evening was 8.

Perhaps CMSL expected that campervan owners/renters would simply continue to use the Coire na Ciste car park and be happy to pay Â£15 per night for a dodgy water supply, a grey water disposal facility and some bins to dispose of their rubbish. If that was the case then they could not have been more erroneous in their judgement.

There is no quality here and discerning customers are entitled to expect much better than what is third-rate apology for a campervan park. Although it is very early days, the Ciste campervan park is clearly being avoided by the overwhelming majority of users who have simply decamped to the Cas car park and the down road where they can park up for free. The statistics tell that story very clearly.

What needs to happen now

1. The Scottish Government should take note of yet another expensive waste of public funds and take the decision to remove HIE from all Operational and Strategic decision-making on Cairn

Gorm. Enough is more than enough.

2. The members of the CMSL Board of Management must have agreed to this failure and they should each consider if they have the skills to make successful strategic decisions.
3. The Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust should be invited to take over the entire Cairngorm Estate and business thereon. They need to be given a free hand and sufficient public funding must be provided to enable them to sort out the ongoing shambles and put the business into a self-sustaining position [rather than HIE's ridiculous business plan that provides for an ongoing subsidy over the next 30 years]
4. The Coire Ciste building needs to be redeveloped so that toilets and showers are available. A caf   bar would be a great enhancement.
5. The other dilapidations around the campervan park require to be rectified.
6. No attempt should be made to ban campervans from the Coire Cas car park or the Down Road. CMSL has no need to alienate another group of potential customers as has been the case with snowsports enthusiasts.

Only by making the required improvements can the campervan park have any realistic hope of being a commercial success.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

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