

The Cairngorms through the lens of Adam Watson; then and now (2) – that Balmoral cabin and the Caledonian Pine Forest

Description



1973.02.25 “new royal house in Ballochbuie”

Photo credit Adam Watson

Among the photos of Adam Watson there are a number of Ballochbuie, an important remnant of the Caledonian Pine Forest on the Royal Family's estate at Balmoral which was overgrazed for years and has now been fenced to keep the deer out.

I had not been intending to feature another of Adam's photos so soon, but realised yesterday that the cabin in this photo bears an uncanny resemblance to the building in the photo that has been featured in the media across the world ([see here for example](#)) in the last few days:



Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell at log cabin at Balmoral c1999 when a guest of Prince Andrew. Note the Caledonian Forest in the background. The photo was used at the trial to show the two had a close relationship. Photo credit US Attorney's Office

Same style cabin, same style windows and, 26 years later, the wood has aged in a way one might expect.

What has this got to do with parkswatch? The caption by Adam's photo notes "No Planning Application". Those few words mean a lot.

Back in 1973 the planning system provided the only protection for Ballochbuie. While other parts of the Caledonian Pine Forest were being designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest, where operations such as the erection of new buildings required consent from the Nature Conservancy, land owned by the Royal Family was strangely omitted from the process. In 1971, for example, the eastern Cairngorms, which included the Pine Woods in Glen Quoich on the Mar Lodge Estate, were designated as a SSSI. But Ballochbuie, equally special and just a few miles downstream, was not.

It took another 25 years for Ballochbuie to be offered any protection. In June 1998, just before the

Maxwell/Epstein visit, Ballochbuie was notified to the EU as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The paperwork records that this was WITHOUT any management plan having been agreed with the Royal Family ([see here](#)). The woods at Creag Clunie, just east of Braemar and adjoining Ballochbuie, were included in the SAC notification. But whereas they were designated a SSSI at the same time ([see here](#)), Ballochbuie was not. It is still, to this day, exempt from the legal provisions that govern what landowners can do on SSSIs and the creation of the Cairngorms National Park in 2003 has done nothing to change that.

The relationship between Prince Andrew and Jeffrey Epstein/Ghislaine Maxwell has raised important issues about how the Royal Family are trying to prevent one of their members from accounting for their actions under the criminal law. Adam Watson's photo of the log cabin at Ballochbuie demonstrates that the Royal Family have also ignored or sought special dispensation from the civil law for a considerable period of time.

I hope that Adam's photo might serve as a prompt to the world's media to start taking a look at how the Royal Family are managing their land at Balmoral and Delnadamph, how this fits with their claims to care about the natural environment ([see here](#)) and why they have been exempted from important processes that apply to everyone else.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. Caledonian Pine Forest
2. CNPA
3. conservation
4. NatureScot
5. planning

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Author

nickkempe

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