

The Cairngorms through the lens of Adam Watson (4) – the Glen Ey eyesore

Description



1991.05 Glen Ey track, summit of Morrone behind. Photo Credit Adam Watson

It's a while since I posted one of Adam Watson's photos, contrasting then with now ([see here](#)), but I was reminded of this photo when starting out up Glen Ey late Friday afternoon. (It has featured on parkswatch before in a post by George Allan about the LINK hill tracks campaign ([see here](#))).



Track viewed from further to the north west from the track leading up to the Allt Cristie. Photo author, 29th April 2022.

What you can see from comparing my photo to Adam's is how the extent and intensity of muirburn on this part of the Mar Estate has increased significantly in the last 30 years.



Photo showing the start of the track above Inverey, just left of centre, and the extent of the muirburn viewed from the southern slopes Creag Bhalg 1/5/22. The main track leading up Glen Ey, from where Adam Watson probably took his photo, is just right of centre and is also on the Mar Estate. My first photo was taken from the Mar Lodge Estate track which skirts the woodland on the right and is hidden from view.

Hill tracks don't just have a landscape impact, they have enabled sporting estates to undertake damaging land-management practices far more easily than would otherwise be possible (and are only rarely used for conservation purposes). When the Grampian Moorland Group claim that the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan *"does not acknowledge the conservation carried out by sporting estates, free of charge"* ([see here](#)) this is what they mean. Hillsides cut up by ugly tracks and going up in smoke.



Photo author 13/10/20

Eighteen months ago I walked back down the main Glen Ey track from Carn Bhac and photographed the track from a comparable position to where Adam took his photo in 1991. While my photo is not nearly as good as Adam's photo, if you look carefully you can see how the edges of the track have still only partially re-vegetated 30 years later. Appalling construction leaves a long legacy, while straight lines leave permanent scars across the landscape unless hidden by trees – some hope of that on this slope!

The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) has now had 20 years to address the damaging legacy that roads such as this have had on the landscape and natural environment. But, despite the work Adam did documenting this (e.g Vehicle Hill Tracks in North Scotland ([see here](#))) and years of campaigning by the North East Mountain Trust and others, has effectively done nothing.

It is not a coincidence that the aspiration that the Cairngorms National Park should become a World Heritage Site has been quietly abandoned. Without the will to take on the sporting estates and without demanding the necessary legal powers to do so successfully, the CNPA would have had absolutely no chance of international recognition. But all this silence has done is allow landowners to go onto the offensive – as I will explain in my next post on the Cairngorms – through organisations like the Moorland Groups. It is time the CNPA tackled sporting estates head on and found the inspiration to do so from people like Adam Watson who were fearless in speaking the truth to those with power.

(Request: if anyone has recent photos of this hill road or the second road further up Glen Ey from close up I would be very interested in seeing them).

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. grouse moors

3. hill tracks
4. landed estates
5. landscape
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Date Created

May 2, 2022

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