

Run of river hydro development – a lesson from the Lake District National Park?

Description



The intake was cleverly located and hidden among trees while the intake chamber was clad in stone about the blue penstock!

A couple of hours after my encounter with a young peregrine on Sunday ([see here](#)), I came across a run of river hydro scheme along Wounddale beck north east of Ambleside. What caught my eye was that the pipeline between the intake and the powerhouse had been left above ground:



My initial reaction was “they haven’t even bothered to bury it” but then I considered the actual landscape impact. The location – running alongside a wall and wooded gorge – and the size of the pipe meant it was hardly visible except from close up and by mid-summer it will have almost completely disappeared in the bracken:



In Scotland's National Parks, the pipelines for run of river hydro schemes are buried as a matter of course on the grounds that this reduces their landscape impact.

Ironically, the consequence has been that the landscape is now littered with new tracks (as I discussed in my recent post on [Glen Etive](#)), landforms have been destroyed and the vegetation above the buried pipeline takes years to recover, if at all. The Wounddale beck hydro scheme has avoided all that damage by the simple expedient of leaving the pipe above the ground.



Ugly yes! But keeping the penstock above ground has minimised the impact of the scheme on the banks of the beck

There are other advantages to leaving the pipeline above ground. It reduces ecological impacts. It means that significantly less fossil fuel is used in the construction process – while showing the public just how much carbon, in the form of plastic, is needed to build these schemes! It also means that when the pipe has reached the end of its useful life should be much easier to replace, remove or recycle.



The start of the pipeline

Is this landscape heresy? The question is whether leaving the pipes above ground, as at Wounddale Beck would not have been better for places like Glen Falloch and Glen Etive in the long-term, particularly if grazing levels were reduced and woodland allowed to regenerate around the pipeline? It would certainly make it considerably easier and cheaper in the medium term to remove some of the more disastrous schemes that have afflicted our National Parks and National Scenic Areas.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs
2. National Parks

Tags

1. climate change
2. conservation
3. hill tracks
4. landscape
5. planning

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