

Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the funicular

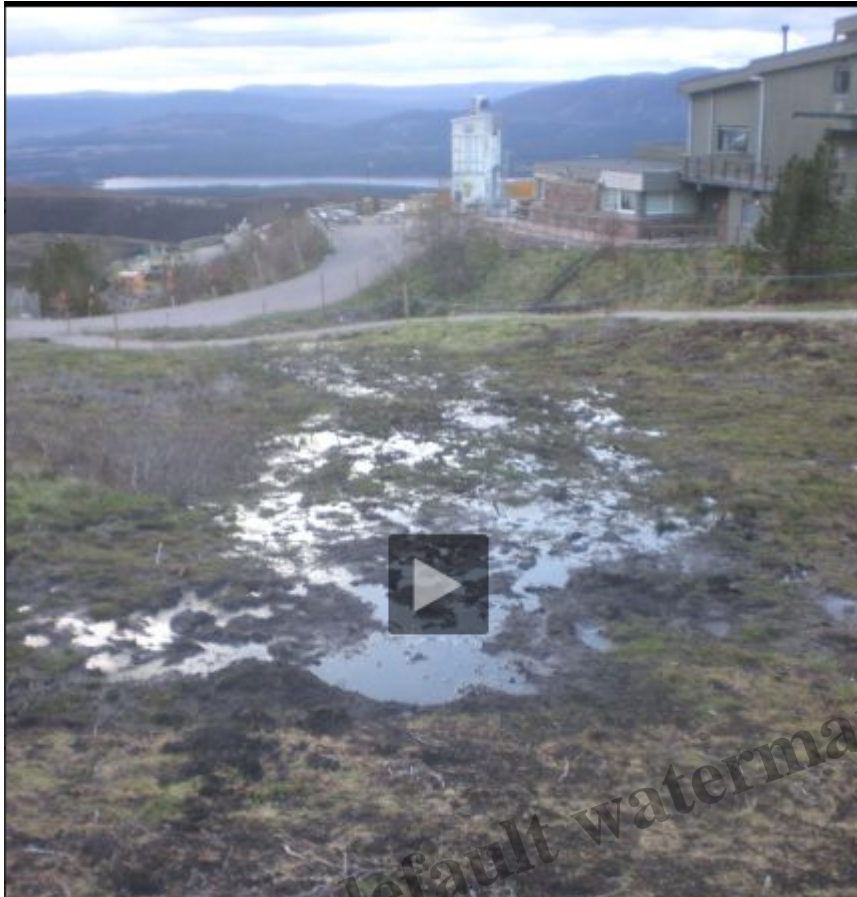
Description

Cover-up, incompetence, negligence or all three?

At the end of my post in May [\(see here\)](#) I stated that the Scottish Government appeared at last to be realising that the business case presented by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) for the repairs to the funicular railway was not as comprehensive as it should have been. Since then I and others have been raising concerns with the Scottish Government and drafted a report into the place of the funicular with respect to snowsports (it's been a disaster) and the wider economy. This post highlights three of the issues we have raised: .

(1) Ground conditions

As I have already mentioned, before the original funicular construction there was no adequate geo-technical survey carried out, probably due to the urgency to get the project started, and, the same failing happened again when COWI carried out their report into the repairs! To give them credit COWI did carry out a "limited survey", although this was at their instigation not HIE's. Look at the following pictures and you will see why water is such a big problem on Cairn Gorm!



Beginner's area Photo credit Alan Bratney



The new drainage pipes under the beginners area. Photos courtesy of Mr A. Bratney.

The pictures are of the beginner area approved by the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) planning committee in September 2020 and constructed thereafter. The first shows water flowing down the slope surface with the second showing the new drainage pipes which replaced the natural drainage channels that used to exist. Note how there is only a trickle of water out of one of the pipes (on the left)

when the ground above was saturated.

The Ecological Clerk of Works reports on the funicular repairs constantly mention water flow ([see here](#) for example) the problem is CMSL don't know where it goes!.

(2) Obsessed with the funicular

When presenting the Business Case for the future of Cairn Gorm as a ski resort to the 2021 AGM of the Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust, Mr D Macleod of HIE confirmed that one option not given any consideration was for a chair/ gondola hybrid despite a partial quote being obtained from Doppelmayr ([see here](#)) and this being submitted to the last master planning exercise. Why not you may ask? The obvious answer is that HIE were only ever going to consider and promote repairs to the funicular.

(3) The importance of snowsports to the local economy

With all due respect to Sir Edward Mountain ([see here](#)) , while his continued demands for a full and thorough investigation into the ski resort fiasco is correct, I have to disagree with his underlying belief that the funicular underpins the Aviemore and wider Strathspey economy. **Snowsports** are what supports the winter economy in the area and the funicular has been terrible for that: for example in 2012 CML had 50.5% of the skier days market in Scotland, dropping to 23.6% in 2018, before the funicular was removed from service! Snowsports customers have long been voting with their feet on the operations at Cairn Gorm and that is primarily due to the funicular and removal of other uplift. And it is the contribution that the Cairngorm Mountain business makes to winter tourism that matters as summer numbers are booming without any funicular.

What needs to happen

A few weeks ago this appeared on social media:-

It is a whole lot worse than mismanagement by HIE.
Having been interviewed for the project manager's role for the repair project, I understand what a shambles this whole thing is.
Repair design is inappropriate and will not last 5 years.
Project management of the whole enterprise is wrong.
Three parties "to do the job", so when it goes wrong it will always be the other guy's fault.
And there is more.



A funicular railway was and will never be a success on Cairn Gorm.

The Scottish Government should now ask HIE to close the business Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd in its current form, removing HIE as operator of the facilities at Cairn Gorm, with HIE picking up the cost of any staff redundancies etc. They should also ask HIE to cease all work on the Funicular and

other associated projects, some of which have recently been approved by the CNPA planners, before more millions are wasted.

The Scottish Government should then transfer ownership of the Cairngorm estate to Forest and Land Scotland and ask them to engage the Aviemore & Glenmore Community Trust about them operating what remains of the business – except the funicular which should remain the responsibility of HIE – on behalf of the community, if that is still their desire, and the snowsports enthusiasts who have supported Cairngorm Mountain.

This will allow the AGCT to start a new operation with a clean slate. Unless they are able to attract external investment, the business should re-start a minimum of uplift and staff to keep overheads as low as possible. I would suggest the Fiacail ridge, Cas and M1 tows as the only uplift necessary with the base station open for refreshments and the Ptarmigan only for its public convenience. The other tows should be kept maintained on the off chance that one winter has a major snowfall and skier numbers justify their use on a limited basis. Paying huge salaries to staff and ridiculous directors fees will almost certainly guarantee failure again. This operation needs to run on a shoe string until it becomes established again

The role of HIE/ CMSL and some of its current and former employees involved in this fiasco should also be thoroughly investigated.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. funicular
3. Governance
4. HIE
5. Scottish Government

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