

Protest against HIE's ownership and mismanagement of Cairn Gorm –
Wednesday 24th April

Description

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Campaigners plan protest

By Gavin Musgrove
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A demonstration has been organised to protest against Highlands and Islands Enterprise's management of Cairngorm Mountain with a rallying call to 'bring signs, noise makers, food, and friends'.

The organiser, ski school worker Mike Marcus, has admitted it is a step into the unknown but said he was frustrated that no-one was doing anything about things despite, he said, the deep local concern.

He has been busy in recent days delivering flyers in and around hundreds of homes in the Aviemore area to promote the demo to take place at the resort's Coire Cas car park next Wednesday (April 24) at 6.30pm.

He has picked the date specifically to co-incide with the Kinder Scout trespass protest - near his home town - in the Peak District in Derbyshire held on the same day in 1932.

Walkers took action en-masse after long being denied access to open countryside which had been fenced off by wealthy landowners who forbade public passage.

Mr Marcus told the Strathgairn: "It seems to me that everyone is



ON HIS DELIVERIES: Mike Marcus with some of the flyers

unhappy with what is happening at Cairngorm Mountain but not actually doing anything about it.

"I do understand why because of the local politics.

"My home town is New Mills which is the place where the Kinder Scout protest started and this led to a massive change in the whole outdoor recreation culture

in Britain.

"It seems to me that the mess with the funicular at Cairngorm Mountain is basically stopping people from getting to the Ptarmigan.

"The funicular is a money pit and the more public money that goes into this abyss the more they do not want to remove it and do something else to improve uplift.

"Clearly it has been another awful winter for Cairngorm Mountain but all along there have been fantastic conditions at the Ptarmigan.

"It is the highest area that people can ski or snowboard on in the whole of the UK and that is why Cairngorm is so special as the resort has these snow-secure slopes.

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It's high time we said: 'Enough'

ON 24th April 1932, workers from nearby cities gathered on the highest summit in England's Peak District to protest unjust land ownership.

The mass trespass led to the creation of Britain's national parks and radical changes to countryside access rights.

HIE and its subsidiary

Cairngorm Mountain (Scotland) Ltd have mismanaged Britain's most valuable winter sports resource for too long.

92 years after the Kinder Scout trespass the need rises again. It's time to for the community to gather and say ENOUGH.

Meet at the Cas car park, 24th April at 6:30pm.

GB TT

It

is over three years since parkwatch published a letter from Alistair Bell in Canada about HIE's corporate gaslighting at Cairn Gorm and why people had allowed downhill skiing there to die ([see here](#)). There have of course been several campaigns against HIE before, successful in the case of the opposition to extend downhill skiing to Lurcher's, unsuccessful in the case of the opposition to the funicular and the alternative proposal to build a gondola from Glen More. But never a community protest like this.

This is not to argue there has not been widespread concern about HIE mismanagement of Cairn Gorm on Speyside. It's been there for a decade now, ever since HIE's disastrous decision to sell Cairngorm Mountain Ltd. But that concern got expressed in the Aviemore and Glenmore Trust which chose to be reasonable and not to protest. The long quote from the AGCT in the article about the protest suggests that is still the case:

Protest is to be staged at resort over HIE's 'mis-management'

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"But there is no-way to get up there for most people unless they walk for half-an-hour and even then the M1 Poma lift is only really suitable for experienced skiers and boarders - and that is when it is in operation."

On the funicular, Mr Marcus said: "It seems absolutely absurd to me that HIE is throwing good money after bad. HIE has lost all trust locally."

"But there seems like there is some traction forming at the moment and it is the right time to get the public involved - the media are interested, MSPs are interested."

"It only takes a few determined people to get the ball rolling. Universally speaking, everyone in Aviemore hates what is going on with the funicular and blame HIE for the fiasco."

"Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust is led by residents who have good experience of running successful local businesses and have brought ice skating back to Aviemore as well as being in the process of completing an community asset transfer for

the Glenmore Visitor Centre.

"It is clear that HIE needs to go and the community take over the mountain."

HIE declined to comment to the Strathay yesterday.

Resort operators Cairngorm Mountain (Scotland) Ltd referred the Strathay to HIE earlier in the week.

AGCT said it has its own concerns that Cairngorm Mountain could be lost completely if a new path is not taken.

It was formed seven years ago, originally for the sole purpose of offering an alternative community led vision for Cairngorm.

Trust director Mike Dearman said: "We remain deeply committed to finding a positive outcome for the ski area which is such a key part of the areas cultural heritage and identity."

"And we remain firmly of the view that ownership by a community body will help turn the tide of decline and provide better value for money for the community, mountain users, and the taxpayer."

"Through the trust's pro-

jects at Aviemore Ice Rink, Dalfaber Community Park and Glenmore Visitor Centre we have developed a positive, productive and valued relationship with Highlands and Islands Enterprise which we believe has shown the considerable economic and social benefits that real community engagement can bring to all sides.

"We believe that the huge sums being spent on the funicular and subsidy of the operating company are not sustainable in the long term and we are concerned that the present course does not represent value for money and may ultimately lead to complete closure of the facility."

"AGCT remains keen to be a part of a positive solution for Cairngorm and to hold meaningful discussions over possible operating and ownership models for the future, the trust submitted a draft community ownership model to HIE in early 2019 for discussion."

■ Read more on the problems which have dogged the Cairngorm funicular at www.strathspey-herald.co.uk

AGCT is still concerned but still trying to be reasonable with a Scottish Government agency which is anything but! That approach has so far not changed anything and the organisation of this protest is

therefore a very welcome development.

It will be interesting to see if Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd 's CEO, Susan Smith and Directors, who are all appointed by HIE will be on the mountain Wednesday evening to meet the protesters and discuss their concerns.

Cairngorm Mountain (Scotland) Limited

Company information

Directors

Andrew Burgess
Bill Lobban
P Mearns
Douglas Yule
T Hurst

Companies House shows the same Directories are in place now as were listed in CMSL's last accounts

While previously Highland MSPs generally avoided criticising HIE in public that now appears to be changing. While Tory MSP Edward Mountain led the way by calling for a Public Inquiry, the SNP's Kate Forbes openly criticised HIE in her most recent community newsletter:

FUTURE- PROOFING THE FUNICULAR

Another winter has passed, and still the funicular at Cairngorm Mountain remains closed. The phrase 'snagging issues' is certainly doing some heavy lifting.

The funicular remaining out of action is particularly unfortunate as the Ptarmigan bowl, the ski area which can be reached by the mountain railway, has had reliable snow this year.

Whilst I recognise the outbreak of the pandemic did not help, I do not believe that over the past few years Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) have demonstrated they are up to the challenge. I recently met with the chief executive of HIE and personally raised this matter with him.

We all want to move on from the disappointment and frustration of the past, and I still believe local expertise and knowledge should be fully utilised.

There are growing questions about funding, though one thing remains clear - Cairngorm Mountain is absolutely key for the Badenoch and Strathspey economy.

So far, however, the level of understanding and concerns shown by politicians about what has happened still appears to lag behind that of the public. If Cairngorm Mountain is so “absolutely key” to the Badenoch & Strathspey economy, as Kate Forbes claims, why haven’t we seen massive downturn in the Aviemore economy since 2018, when the funicular closed, far less the rest of Badenoch & Strathspey?

At best Cairngorm Mountain is an add on to an a local economy. It’s primary importance is that if managed properly, it could still be enabling people to enjoy downhill snow sports in Scotland.



Repair workers back on the funicular last week.
HIE abandoned trying to repair the funicular over the winter when it became clear it would not be complete for February half term

The Herald recently reported on the extraordinary news from HIE that the flaws in the repairs to the funicular might not be fixed to the end of the year. HIE have still avoided answering two fundamental questions:

1. What caused the funicular to become dangerous in the first place? And to become dangerous again in August, having been declared safe in January 2023 when it re-opened?
2. How much more, on top of the £25m to date, does HIE believe will need to be spent on the repairs between now and next Xmas and who will pay this?

Until these questions are answered all repair work should be halted.

Even if the contractors have accepted liability and will now pick up ALL the extra costs, without a guarantee the funicular will function for the next 30 years, it would be better to use the money towards the costs of demolishing what is a failed structure. What is left of the £73.09m of public subsidy committed to Cairn Gorm over 30 years in the full business case approved by the Scottish Government ([see here](#)) could then be invested in an alternative plan before yet more public money is wasted.

Category

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