

## HIE's sale of Season Passes for the Cairn Gorm Ski Area

### Description

Before the start of the 2023/24 ski season *loyal customers*, i.e. skiers and boarders, were sent an email by Highland and Islands Enterprise (HIE)'s subsidiary Cairngorm Mountain (Scotland) offering season passes with early bird discounts and the additional benefit of funicular access until November 2024 *an extended ski season perhaps!* Susan Smith, then CEO of CM(S)L, also said that it was expected that the funicular would recommence service during the ski season, which we all know didn't happen.

However, CM(S)L's latest accounts until March 2024 ([see here](#)) seem to imply something to the contrary. Peter Mearns, chairman of the CM(S)L board, in his statement of 31/03/2024 (remember the funicular closed in late August 2023), said:

*Remedial work began almost immediately but as this progressed it became clear that with the winter weather closing in it would not be completed in 2023. If work, particularly grouting which requires a warmer temperature, is not completed in the weather window much of it has to wait for better conditions in the spring.*

This is completely different to Susan Smith's *expectations*! While the former CEO was promoting the return of the funicular in the 2023/24 ski season, the board clearly knew that that was not going to happen!

Those same loyal customers were again offered season passes with the same benefits before the start of the 2024/25 ski season to carry on until the 30/11/2025. Tim Hurst, the current interim part time CEO, repeated the same line ([see here](#)) *we anticipate the train to return to service during the upcoming snowsports season!*

On 04/10/2024 I walked up the funicular to the passing loop and was surprised at the number of steel brackets lying on the ground and on scaffolding. Did all those brackets require a grouting operation? If Peter Mearns' statement was correct then the implication was there would be no funicular in the 2024/25 winter season unless by some chance there was an Indian summer and Balfour Beatty (B.B.) carried out a huge amount of work in a very short period!



Screenshot courtesy CMSL webcam.

People (in orange) working on the funicular 6th December despite the weather conditions.



Screenshot courtesy CMSL webcam.

Three days the snow made it impossible to work on the funicular.



Screenshot courtesy CMSL webcam.

Ten days later workers were again on the funicular despite the weather conditions.

It was something of a miracle and to the credit of Balfour Beatty that they managed to complete the work in these conditions and, as they next screenshot shows, they had removed all scaffolding by 20/12/2024, a day after the previous photo was taken:



Screenshot courtesy CMSL webcam.

But still the funicular did not re-open as promised. In fact it didn't re-open until over two months later on 27/02/2025 with no explanation for the delay.

If I was one of those "loyal customers" I think I would have been replied to the invitation asking:-

(1) Can you guarantee the funicular will re-open, and,

(2) if it doesn't will I get a full or partial refund?

One month before the funicular returned to service snow conditions were:-



Screenshot courtesy CMSL webcam.

Note how the M1 towpath, to the right of the funicular, looked to be complete allowing access to the upper slopes a contrast to the snow conditions on the day it re-opened:



Screenshot courtesy CMSL webcam.

Two, amongst the many, of those *loyal customers* did ask ask for a refund of their season passes but were denied this by the Interim CEO Tim Hurst despite political backing (for the full story from the Strathy in April [see here](#)).

## Snowsports fans call for Cairngorm Mountain resort season ticket refunds after ‘misleading’ information on funicular’s return

Calls are being made for Cairngorm Mountain to partially refund season ticket holders because they ‘duped’ snowsports enthusiasts over the return of the funicular.

The operators had stated that they were confident that the mountain railway would be in operation from the start of the past winter season on December 20.

In the lead-up to this date, they used its much anticipated resumption - after ceasing service again in August 2023 - in the promotion of their early bird season tickets.

Aviemore snowboarders Paul Michaelwaite and Guy Mears have paid out more than £1500 for season passes for 2023/24 and 2024/25.

While attempts to obtain a refund have so far been denied by CM(S)L, there is an alternative and that is to seek redress through the judicial system. It would be easy for the two boarders to make a small claim ([see here](#)) and their chances of success might be improved if more of the disenchanting skiers and boarders, and I know there are more, were to also enter claims.

I can hear the argument against this, *“if we try to get our money back CM(S)L will ban us from the mountain next season”*. That is unlikely in my opinion as it would once again put the spotlight on the issue of the *“toxic culture”* of bullying/ intimidation by senior management at Cairn Gorm ([see here](#))! It may also be the case that CM(S)L and HIE would not want the negative publicity from such an action and would offer partial refunds as an out of court settlement. There’s only one way to find out!

### Category

1. Cairngorms

### Tags

1. funicular
2. Governance
3. HIE
4. outdoor recreation
5. visitor management

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