

Lessons from the Italian Alps (5) - keeping plastic out of mountain areas

Description



Leaflet in the Posta Tappa in Balme which I saw towards the end of my walk along the northern half of the GTA

I really liked the message on this leaflet and the wider message of the ALP Project, which aimed to safeguard high alpine habitat, one of the last pristine environments in southern Europe?• ([see here](#)).

Having not seen a single plastic tree tube and next to no litter in something like 300km and 25,000m of ascent along the GTA ([see here](#)), I wondered whether opposition to plastic might be stronger in Italy than it is in Scotland. Here thousands of hectares of the Cairngorms National Park, some near pristine (e.g [see here](#)) and some not (e.g [see here](#)) have now been covered with polluting plastic tree tubes, many fabricated from oil and none proven to be biodegradable in natural conditions. I explained to the people running the Posta Tappa that this was being done in the name of conservation and offsetting carbon emissions and they thought we must be bonkers.

In fact the ALP project was very small and had limited objectives, an attempt to get four mountain refuges in Italy to stop using plastic products and a clean-up of the areas around them.

Back home I found a video about the project ([see here](#)). This is worth viewing even if you don't understand Italian just to see what efforts volunteers made to remove tiny pieces of plastic from the environment. A great story about people caring for the natural environment. A contrast to Scotland where politicians ([see here](#)) public agencies ([see here](#)) and conservation organisations ([see here](#)) have been encouraging volunteers to plant trees in plastic tree tubes, which then start to break up and pollute soils and watercourses, in the name of conservation.

The ALP Project was funded by the European Outdoor Conservation Association. This was set up in 2006 by the European Outdoor Group to "enable companies from the outdoor sector to have a bigger impact looking after the natural environment by working together". For 2025 EOCA are funding three projects in the UK. One is similarly motivated to the ALP project, the removal of litter from the crags of Yr Wyddfa/Snowdon in Wales to help the arctic alpine plants growing there. A welcome initiative. The other two are in Scotland and both involve planting trees. The first, managed by the Borders Forest Trust (BFT), is at Talla and Gameshope in the Scottish borders ([see here](#)). The second, managed by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) is to "create wildlife-rich corridors of native woodland, along the iconic River Coe and River Etive, through the creation of tree islands".

Both BFT and NTS have used plastic tree tubes to plant trees in the past and it is not clear from the description of these projects whether they intend to do so again. While BFT has gone to significant efforts to remove plastic tree tubes from the Carrifran wildwood, there is still a tendency from conservation organisations to claim its fine to use plastic tree tubes as long as they are later removed. This ignores the fact that the tree tubes start breaking up the moment they start being used shedding plastic into ecosystems. Many are so small that not even the most determined of volunteers would ever retrieve them.

If EOCA really wants to have "a bigger impact looking after the natural environment" it could insist that those applying for funding from Scotland learn from how the natural environment is managed and protected in other European countries. It could also encourage a European wide approach by asking organisations like BFT and NTS to promote a call for Scotland's Mountains to become plastic free as the ALP project did in Italy.

Category

1. Lessons from abroad
2. National Parks

Tags

1. CNPA
2. conservation
3. LLTNPA
4. natural environment
5. NTS
6. plastic
7. tree tube

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