

THE CAIRNGORMS CAMPAIGNER

Autumn 2005

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HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS ENTERPRISE CAIRNGORM ESTATE TO BE DISPOSED OF?

Word has reached us through various channels that Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) are looking to divest themselves of their estate on Cairn Gorm, perhaps even through a community buyout. The land includes not only Coire Cas and Coire na Ciste and the smaller corries immediately to the east, but also the Northern Corries of Coire an t-Sneachda and Coire an Lochain, plus Creag an Leth-choin (The so-called Lurchers Gully).

Until April 1971, the land belonged to the Forestry Commission as part of the Glenmore Forest Park. Thereafter, the Secretary of State for Scotland split up the estate with the upper half of the Park going to

the then Highlands and Islands Development Board (HIDB), although it remained part of the Forest Park under the terms of the Feu Charter granted by the Forestry Commission. The reasoning behind the transfer was that it was considered more appropriate for the important downhill ski developments to be handled by a development agency. Subsequent events have done little to support that theory as the HIDB often applied more zeal than insight to its subsequent promotion of development there and made basic mistakes.

The estate has major strategic significance for the future of the Cairngorms massif. There is a



The northern corries from across Loch Morlich - part of the Highlands and Islands Enterprise estate and a Site of Special Scientific Interest

"... have as a first consideration the protection of nationally and internationally important areas of the Cairngorms through judicious management of development. It does not sound a suitable candidate for a community buyout!"

well-established principle in mountain management that the successful protection of key core areas succeeds or fails depending on the management of what happens in foothill approaches to it. The Central Cairngorms have such foothill buffer areas around them except in one critical area – and that is Glenmore, of which the HIE Estate forms the upper northern half. Here, major development has lapped to the border of the vulnerable central plateaux and what happens on this key area is important for the future of the whole Cairngorms. Major tension can arise between this protective function and the fact that the Glenmore Forest Park, including the HIE's estate, is a very major recreational resource for the Badenoch and Strathspey tourist industry. In addition, parts of the land, including the Northern Corries SSSI, are of significant national value in their own right.

Whoever owns the land would need to be able to not only finance the considerable costs of maintaining a heavily used estate, but also have as a first consideration the protection of

nationally and internationally important areas of the Cairngorms through judicious management of development. It does not sound a suitable candidate for a community buyout!

It also leaves in the air questions such as who would own the facilities like the day-lodge, funicular railway etc. on Cairn Gorm which are currently owned by HIE, and how would a new landowner deal with the situation if the current operator collapsed? At present the infrastructure of the ski area is owned by HIE and leased to the ski operating company. If the operation at Cairn Gorm became unviable financially, who would be responsible for the costs of the removal of the infrastructure? At least for the funicular, this responsibility rests with the current owner – HIE. Would they maintain this responsibility after disposing of the land? If not, would anyone considering bidding for the estate be foolish enough to take the risk of the continual survival of the current operation? The costs of removal would be a high financial burden for any prudent owner to take on.

CAMPAIGN WEBSITE

More detailed information on many of the issues discussed in this website can be found on our website at

www.cairngormscampaign.org.uk

WE LIVE IN INTERESTING TIMES AND A VIGOROUS CAIRNGORM CAMPAIGN IS NEEDED!

EDITORIAL

You may be wondering why you had not heard from the Campaign for some time. The answer is simple. With the departure of Bill Wright, –project officer, and Ian Lawson retiring as the convenor, the Campaign has had to reorganise and rethink its development. This does not mean that we have been idle on Cairngorm issues, as you can see from the contents of this newsletter.

At the last AGM, members recorded their thanks to Bill and Ian for all their work and long service, but it is appropriate to repeat this here again. The Cairngorms benefited greatly from their efforts. Bill has gone to be the Director of Rural Scotland and we wish him success in his new job. Ian continues to serve as a director of the Campaign and contributed to this newsletter.

Meanwhile, many things are taking the attention of the Campaign, not just the forthcoming National Park Plan. The usual issues grumble on – the funicular, control of deer numbers, etc. But in addition, there



are catchment plans for the Rivers Spey and Dee, designation of sites under the Natura 2000 programme, dedesignation of parts of the National Nature Reserve within the Cairngorms, reform the of Common Agricultural Policy, review of the Scottish Forestry Strategy, giant pylons through the northeast end of the Park, and much else besides that will influence the future of the Cairngorms. So, there is still much to do.

To rise to this challenge, the Campaign will need all the support you, as members, can give. We are always looking for more involvement from its members. So, if you have expertise you think might be of use, or even if you just want to be involved, we would be pleased to hear from you.

Drennan Watson
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CAIRNGORM ISSUES

In each newsletter issue, we will put forward the CC's views on an issue in the cairngorms – this issue we report on five.

SHOULD FUNICULAR PASSENGERS BE PERMITTED TO LEAVE THE TOP STATION OF THE FUNICULAR RAILWAY AND WALK UP CAIRN GORM?

"... the arrangement was there to protect vulnerable and previously damaged areas."

At present, as most CC members will know, people arriving at the top station of the funicular are not permitted to leave the buildings and, for example, climb to the summit of Cairn Gorm on foot, as those who have walked up Coire Cas can do. This rather unusual arrangement is the result of the tension between the requirement to permit large numbers of people to use the funicular to reach higher altitudes and the need to protect the plateau areas beyond that were subject to spreading damage by the numbers of people going there after arriving near the summit by chairlift. In order to obtain European funding, a legally binding agreement was signed to preserve the "closed system". Cairngorm Mountain Ltd., Highland Council, and Scottish Natural Heritage are signatories to this agreement but not the Park authority.

A small minority of people have urged that this arrangement be changed to increase revenue to a hard-pressed company, which is losing money, and permit people

to leave the upper station and walk on the mountain. A briefing paper was prepared for a recent meeting of the Board of the Cairngorms National Park Authority for consideration of the situation. The paper did not recommend that alteration of the arrangement be actively considered but that the situation be monitored, and that seems to have been the conclusion.

Media interest was stirred however and the CC convenor went on radio and TV in Scotland explaining the CC's position – namely that the arrangement was there to protect vulnerable and previously damaged areas. If someone could produce a magic formula whereby large numbers of people could be released onto the mountain and the old proven and serious problems not recreated, then the Campaign would be interested. Given however, that various people who knew the area and the problems well spent a lot of time trying to think of a better alternative, that seems unlikely to happen.

LARGE SCALE SPONSORED EVENTS IN THE HIGH CAIRNGORMS

In February, the Campaign was contacted by Aid International UK regarding a proposed large-scale sponsored hike across the High Cairngorms. The Campaign responded that, while fully acknowledging the value of the work done by such an organisation, it regrettably opposed such events in the High Cairngorms, despite the careful organisation put into the event by Aid International.

The opposition is based on the high vulnerability of the plateaux and other high mountain areas, due in particular to the thin infertile nature of the granitic soils, the cool short growing seasons, frequent freeze-thaw cycles and high wind speeds that discourage growth and cause wind erosion of bared soils. All of this produces a thin plant cover to stabilise soils and support wildlife and which is easily damaged and slow to recover.

The damage done to the plateaux areas in particular by human feet has been extensively studied and documented. It is an area that can take only limited human traffic.

Damage to vegetation near footpaths can be measured 50m away from the path. This is partly because the easy terrain permits walkers to walk freely away from paths, and partly because windblown granitic particles from exposed soils on the paths impact on vegetation at that distance.

Even by International Aid's own description, several hundred people would have to use the area for this one-off event. Inevitably such an event must be well publicised to make it a success, and we have found that such publicity has a knock-on effect in encouraging others to use the areas publicised in this way. .

The Campaign expressed its general support for the efforts of International Aid UK and hoped it would find a more suitable area in which to stage your event. It also has been in contact with National Park Officials stating that they need to develop a policy on such events.

Full text of the Campaign's letter is accessible on our website at www.cairngormcampaign.org.uk.

"It is an area that can take only limited human traffic"

If you have any issues that you want to write in about, or feel the Campaign should take up, let us know.

SCOTTISH WATER APPLIES TO IMPROVE THE BADENOCH AND STRATHSPEY WATER SUPPLY FROM LOCH EINICH.

The water is of high quality requiring little treatment and the altitude of the supply permits the whole served area to be supplied by gravity and no pumping.

From this point of view, Loch Einich is probably the worst water source in the Eastern Highlands, having pretty limited groundwater storage within its catchment so that the loch level falls fairly rapidly in dry periods.

Water from Loch Einich supplies large areas of Badenoch and Strathspey, stretching from around Newtonmore to Cromdale. The water is transferred from the loch down the glen by pipeline to the Black Park in Rothiemurchus from where it is distributed to consumers. Scottish Water has identified two particular values of this water supply. The water is of high quality requiring little treatment and the altitude of the supply permits the whole served area to be supplied by gravity and no pumping. These two features make this a relatively cheap water source. There are however several problems associated with the supply.

Firstly, due to poor installation of sections of the original pipeline, breakages occur in these sections, leading to water bursting out dramatically in the middle of the glen, as well as temporary loss of water supply to the area. Since there is little water stored in the distribution system, rapid emergency repairs are needed, often in poor weather conditions.

Secondly, housing is expanding in the whole of Badenoch and Strathspey and, by about 2015, extra supplies will be needed. Studies have indicated that, technically, the easiest option would be to take the additional water from Loch Einich. This would, however, almost certainly involve building some sort of a dam in Glen Einich. Apart from

local protective designations, as well as being in the Cairngorms National Park and a National Scenic Area, Loch Einich is a Ramsar Site, part of the Cairngorms SSI, National Nature Reserve, and Special Protection Area. It is also part of a proposed World Heritage Site and lies within the catchment of the River Spey Special Protection Area. There are few sites in the UK with so many layers of environmental protection, ranging from the local, Scottish, European and international level.

There is a further problem with Loch Einich. It is not just the water stored within a reservoir that is important. Most of the water stored in catchments is generally in the groundwater that supplies the reservoir through surface and below-ground flows. This second store buffers the impacts of dry periods on the reservoir levels. From this point of view, Loch Einich is probably the worst water source in the Eastern Highlands, having very limited groundwater storage within its catchment so that the loch level falls fairly rapidly in dry periods. This is why Scottish Water sometimes has to pump water out of the loch into its pipeline.

The proposal from Scottish Water is to reline (note not realign) some six kilometres of the current pipeline, with just a few short stretches needing relined by digging trenches. CC members examined the planning application

AND STRATHSPEY

submitted, and accompanying Environmental Impact Assessment (All 5 volumes) and discussed the situation with the Cairngorms National Park Authority and staff of Scottish Natural Heritage. People must receive good water supplies, but CC objected to the application on several grounds. These included the failure to address properly the risks that relining operations would not work, which would result in long trenches being dug through the glen, the lack of adequate detail in how environmental damage would be mitigated through prevention and restoration, and inappropriate duties for the onsite, supervising environmental manager whose job description in the Environmental Assessment seemed more suited to a public relations manager.

The Park Authority has given planning permission, with conditions. Discussions with the Park Authorities and examination of the planning conditions show that most of the issues raised by the Campaign have been addressed. The Park Authority insisted that Scottish Water submit a detailed Environmental and Mitigation Plan before giving planning permission and the Campaign will examine this plan.

Some uncertainties and issues remain. CC was anxious that commitment of capital and resources to upgrading this pipeline should in no way be taken

as ground for proposing increased extraction from Loch Einich. This remains unclarified. The CC also believes considerable problems could develop during the pipe-lining operations. There should, for example, be minimal disruption to access to the Glen during construction. Environmental impacts could yet turn out to be more substantial than predicted.

If you are visiting Glen Einich and experience or observe problems of this kind that give you concern, contact us through our website or directly.

Some other issues remain. Leakage from the distribution system to consumers beyond the end of the pipeline at Black Park was, until recently thought to exceed 50%. It is important that Scottish Water reduces this considerably. Also, it appears that Scottish Water is still not even monitoring how much water it is extracting from the Loch. Without such measurements it cannot know if it is working within the limits of the Water Order that give it permission to extract.

Any proposal to dam Loch Einich would be opposed by the Campaign.

Full text of the CC's statement of objection are downloadable at our website.

www.cairngormscampaign.org.uk

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LARGE SCALE DEER CULLING IN GLEN FESHIE.

WILL THE NEW DEER MANAGEMENT PLAN PERMIT THE REGENERATION OF THE PINE FOREST?

As deer grazed out the young pine seedlings, Glen Feshie has long been the scene of conflict between deer management and the need to regenerate the Ancient Caledonian Pine Forest. The natural regeneration of pine and other seedlings in Glen Feshie has been made more difficult by the way in which most of the mature native forest grows in the narrow floor of the glen. In winter, hard weather drives deer down into this sheltered area and a whole year's crop of seedlings can be devoured in a few days. The high deer numbers contribute to the speed with which this happens.

Recently, amid major controversy, the Deer Commission for Scotland (DCS) entered Glen Feshie and carried out a major cull as part of an estate plan to reduce deer numbers. Two members of the Campaign Committee therefore arranged a meeting with the estate factor to obtain a clear understanding of what had been done and to inform him of the Campaign Committee's view on the action.

Basically, the action was the result of concerted action to reduce deer populations between four local estates. These were Glen Feshie Estate (of which the owner is Danish), the National Trust for Scotland as owner of Mar Lodge Estate, the Forestry Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage.

Under the new deer management plan, within Glen Feshie Estate, the land was divided into five subunits for management purposes, accurate

deer counts made in each one, and cull targets created to reduce the total deer population to about 1050. To do this would mean reducing the sporting stag "yield" from 150 to 80 and the owner, who spends about £300k per year on the estate, and keeps it for recreational purposes, has accepted this.

Success or failure of the effort will be determined by a monitoring scheme designed to measure habitat response - tree regeneration will be the important indicator of this.

What made these arrangements possible was a combination of factors. These include the willingness of the estate owner in Glenfeshie to reduce the sporting stag yield, the nature of neighbouring landowners including the National Trust, the involvement of the National Park Authority, and the success of such an approach demonstrated by SNH at its nearby landholding at Inschriach. Additionally, the practical common sense of the resident factor at Glen Feshie Estate, and a new-found willingness by the DCS to stick its head above the parapet encouraged the process.

Now, if this reduction to the deer population targets does not lead to the regeneration of the pine forest, what can be done? That is a bridge that will have to be crossed if we come to it. Meanwhile, the Campaign wrote to the DCS and the Glen Feshie factor expressing their support for the work and also made clear its support to Scottish Natural Heritage.

Additionally, the practical common sense of the resident factor at Glen Feshie Estate, and a new-found willingness by the DCS to stick its head above the parapet encouraged the process.

MUDDLE AND MONITORING ON CAIRN GORM

A major condition attached to planning permission for Cairngorm Mountain Ltd (CML) to build the funicular railway was the preparation of a Visitor Management Plan (VMP). An important part of this was the design and carrying out of a monitoring programme to assess the numbers, movements and impacts of visitors. It was also agreed that, if there were to be any significant changes in the VMP, then Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) would consult publicly on these. CC committee members visiting Coire Cas have found that the strict standards of prevention and management of ecological damage applied to the construction company which built the funicular were not being maintained by CML.

It came to the Campaign's notice that changes in the monitoring programme had been agreed between SNH, the Highland Council (THC) and CML after an independent report had been prepared on the monitoring programme. Since there had been no public consultation, CC committee members insisted on seeing the independent report.

What it contained was revealing. The report concluded that the monitoring programme's objectives had been confused from the start, key objectives had not been kept in focus, visitor surveys were of little or no value,

the current monitoring scheme did not fulfil the Section 50 agreement, and that monitoring on Cairn Gorm did not integrate with any other monitoring programme which might have provided suitable data. Considering the three major aspects of the programme – that is of the visitor survey, footpath condition, and impacts on habitats, it concluded none were fit for purpose.

SNH has now imposed major conditions and alterations to the monitoring programme, but it shows just how badly things can go wrong without watchdogs. A new external contractor has been appointed by HIE and CML. A survey of the birds including dotterel will be done separately by another contractor. Work is about to start on the lines the first report was meant to follow and with new methodologies.

However, this all leaves open two questions. How did such a poor monitoring programme come to be accepted in the first place? Also, why was there not public consultation when major changes had to be made to such an important part of the VMP?

The Cairngorms Campaign has taken up the second question at least and has impressed on SNH that it would expect to be consulted on any further significant changes to the VMP.

How did such a poor monitoring programme come to be accepted in the first place?

The campaign has insisted on being consulted on any further significant changes to the Visitor Management Plan

CAIRNGORM STORIES

A series of interesting happenings in the Cairngorms, with a story in each issue of the newsletter. This time, it is the story of the finding of a new species in the Cairngorms.

HELLO GASTREUM STRIATUM!

NEW EARTHSTARS FOUND IN CAIRNGORMS AREA

A species of earthstar fungus, *Geastrum striatum*, has been discovered growing near Nethy Bridge in Strathspey. This is understood to be the first record of the species for the Cairngorms area, and about its most northerly occurrence in the UK. Only eight previous records for Scotland are known, though they are commoner further south.

Earthstars initially grow underground as a sphere composed of an inner and an outer layer. The outer layer splits into lobes that bend outwards and downwards to form a star-like pedestal. This lifts the inner layer a few centimetres above the ground. The spores are then released from the inner layer via a "beak" at its top.

The earthstars were found in autumn 2004, an exceptionally good year for fungi. Six individuals were found together by Roy Turnbull, a member of the Campaign, under old pine trees at the edge of meadows he owns. He said "I am sure that none have appeared there for the previous thirty years, since my bee-hives are nearby, so I go there frequently and would have noticed them. It is interesting to speculate whether the earthstar mycelium have been in the soil for decades and have only just started to fruit, or whether they are starting to colonise this area, possibly as a result of climate change. A somewhat similar sudden appearance occurred in 2003, when a greater butterfly orchid - the only one known for miles around - flowered in the meadow just in front of my house. Again, I am sure that none has appeared there for the previous thirty years. The meadows have been managed to encourage wild flowers under the Environmentally Sensitive Areas scheme, and it seems to be working."

Since this earthstar discovery was publicised, another reported find was received from a little further north at Tomatin. The Campaign would be interested to receive any further reports, so please keep your eyes open, particularly in the winter when they are easy to find.

Photo by Dr. Gus Jones



Roy's Earth Star

The Campaign would be interested to receive any further reports, so please keep your eyes open, particularly in the winter when they are easy to find.

WHAT ARE YOUR CONCERNS AND WHAT DO YOU WANT OF THE CAMPAIGN?

As we have already said, much has happened and changed since our last newsletter. Old issues have died, others remain, and new ones have been born. The Committee of the Campaign like to think that we have our ears to the ground and that, through various links, we quickly become aware of issues and concerns. However, no doubt we are missing some. If you feel that issues that concern you are not being addressed, or if you observe something in the Cairngorms that you think the Campaign should know about, then please contact us – we may or may not be able to address them, but we will respond.

Remember this is **Your Campaign!** We are only as good as our members and your involvement with it. We need to know what concerns you and what you want from the Campaign – so with the dawning of a new era, please let us know your thoughts.

HELP THE CAMPAIGN

SITUATIONS VACANT

The Cairngorms Campaign is in need of volunteers to help. If you are interested in doing any of the jobs below, or helping them, then do let us know.

Membership secretary:- Not the routine of putting letters in envelopes etc. That is done by our Campaign secretary, but the creative business of building the Campaign's membership.

Newsletter Editor:- Bringing together the quarterly newsletter to members. Also needs some creativity.

Fundraising Group:- We do need to have some people focused on just raising funds

Obviously it would help to be reasonably near the scene of action, but you might be able to help with some aspect of them even if you were not!

STOP PRESS!

ISSUES THE
CAMPAIGN IS
ACTIVE ON

SEE NEXT
ISSUE!

Low flying
helicopters in
the Cairngorms!

Sustainable
deer
management

The National
Park Plan

Consultation on
the
Management of
Mar Lodge
Estate by the
National Trust
for Scotland

LOCAL PLANS AND THE NATIONAL PARK PLAN IN THE CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK

There is considerable confusion in the minds of many people about the different plans the Cairngorms National Park Authority is to prepare. We asked the Cairngorms National Park Authority to outline the functions of the Park Plan and Local Plan and the timetable for their introduction. Staff kindly provided this short article for the newsletter and this is what they said:-

The Cairngorms have many special qualities - from the unique landscape of arctic mountain plateaux, semi-natural forests, rivers and lochs and the species that are found there, to the distinctive local communities, recreational opportunities and cultural life.

A key role for the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) is to put in place two kinds of long-term plans for the management of this very special area. The National Park Plan will put in place an overall strategy for the Park, which all public bodies, communities and other interests within the Park are involved in shaping and delivering. The Local Plan will determine local land use, such as the pattern of built development, in the area in the future.

These two kinds of plans are closely related, which is why we have decided to develop the two in tandem. By May 2006 both plans will be going through the formal consultation process before they are submitted to the Scottish Executive. The plans will be crucial for delivering many of the priorities for the area – such as enhancing the special qualities of the Cairngorms and providing more affordable housing.

The National Park Plan will set out how the CNPA and partners are going to deliver the four aims of the Park. It co-ordinates the work of CNPA and all other public agencies in so far as they affect the aims of the Park, so it will have an impact on every public body working in the Park. All public bodies will have to co-ordinate their work to ensure that the aims of the Park are achieved.

The Local Plans takes its strategic direction from the vision and objectives of the Park Plan. The two kinds of plans are being prepared in close collaboration. The Local Plan is being developed through a very innovative and extensive public consultation and involvement process. This will continue through 2005 as it is drafted and re-drafted, and each stage of the consultation process will help to inform the National Park Plan too.

The CNPA Board will consider a draft vision for the National Park Plan in April 2005 and a first draft of the Local Plan will be published in May. There will be another round of community consultation on the Local Plan in summer 2005, and intensive discussions will continue to take place with partners and stakeholders about the National Park Plan.

The draft National Park Plan will be published for public consultation in spring 2006. Following the consultation, the final draft will be completed and submitted to the Scottish Executive for approval in autumn 2006. The final round of consultation on the Local Plan will also take place in spring 2006 and it will then be submitted to the Scottish Executive.

First of a series of articles designed to inform members of the factual background to a Cairngorm subject.

NEW POSTAL ADDRESS FOR THE CAMPAIGN

The Cairngorms Campaign has a new postal address. It is

Cairngorms Campaign,
PO Box 10037,
Alford,
AB33 8WZ