

THE CAIRNGORMS CAMPAIGNER

Page 1

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

A Very Disappointing Outcome to the Legal Challenge 1-2

Action by the Campaign 3-4

Talking Point 6-7,8
Mountain Bothies of the Cairngorms

In Brief 5, 9

Around the Cairngorms 10

Cairngorm Stories 11,12
Cairngorm Migration

The Cairngorms Campaign postal address:

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



A VERY DISAPPOINTING OUTCOME TO THE LEGAL CHALLENGE



The site of An Camus Mor Development Photo Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group

Members will justifiably have been wondering what was the outcome to the legal challenge mounted by The Cairngorms Campaign and others, and supported by the SWLG, to the housing policies of the Cairngorms National Park Authority as set out in the Local Plan – a challenge which was generously supported financially by many members last autumn.

The Case was heard in the Court of Session by Lord Glennie over four days from 10 to 13 January 2012, and his Opinion or judgement was issued on 21 September 2012. At 180 pages, it is a long read: Lord Glennie acknowledged that *".. this Opinion is considerably longer than I would have wished it to be, and it has taken longer to produce than I had hoped."*

You may read the full Opinion at: <http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/opinions/2012CSOH153> and in setting out the background law so clearly, Lord Glennie's exposition is a very useful primer on much of the environmental and planning law relevant to Scotland's wild land.

But to cut a long Opinion short – he



The site of An Camus Mor Development
Photo Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group

A VERY DISAPPOINTING OUTCOME TO THE LEGAL CHALLENGE continued

rejected all the arguments put forward by The Cairngorms Campaign, and upheld the right of the CNPA to support very large housing developments in the National Park, including in particular its support for an entire New Town at An Camus Mor, on the opposite side of the River Spey to Aviemore.

Inevitably, any legal argument tends to end up focussed upon the wording of documents, and the procedures adopted in taking a decision, rather than the merits of the decision itself. The Challenge was a formal Appeal under S238 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 to the decision by the CNPA to adopt the Cairngorms National Park Local Plan, and specifically to four development policies proposed in that Local Plan – an allocation for 40 houses at Nethy Bridge, an allocation for 117 houses at Carrbridge, an allocation for up to 300 houses in Kingussie and an allocation for up to 1500 houses with associated infrastructure to form a New Town at An Camus Mor on a greenfield site of lowland heath and Ancient Woodland on the banks of the River Spey.

We believe that it is almost self-evident that the protection of the landscape and wildlife which should be guaranteed in a National Park should include (at least) the exclusion of huge new housing estates and the construction of a New Town which provide for housing construction far outwith the local housing needs even allowing for migration into to the area.

From the outset, the conservation bodies were aware that they had high hurdles to overcome. One of the main weapons in the CNPA's legal armoury was the following quote from Lord Hoffman: *"If there is one principle of planning law more firmly settled than any other, it is that matters of planning judgement are within the exclusive province of the local planning authority or the Secretary of State."* (Tesco Stores v Secretary of State for the Environment [1995] 1 WLR 759 at page 780).

Against this, the Cairngorms Campaign put forward several separate arguments – some specific to the particular sites and their circumstances, and some which applied to the Local Plan overall, and some based upon procedural failings. These included:

- the CNPA's failure to give "greater weight" to its obligation to "conserve and enhance the natural heritage",
- its failure to make an adequate "Appropriate Assessment" under the Habitats Regulations,
- its failure to have sufficient regard to further obligations under the Habitats Directive,
- failure to have sufficient regard to the very critical findings of the Independent Reporters who examined the draft Local Plan in detail at a Local Plan Inquiry,
- failure to give adequate reasons for over-ruling such criticisms,
- and relying upon the existence of planning

permissions which pre-dated the National Park, rather than reconsidering these afresh.

These arguments, and others, were put most cogently, in writing and in person, by our senior counsel, Sir Crispin Agnew of Lochnaw, QC, ably supported by our solicitors, R&R Urquhart led by partner Jamie Whittle. From the various questions raised by Lord Glennie during the Hearing it was clear that he was fully appreciative of their strengths and implications. However, after his detailed and lengthy consideration, Lord Glennie found that they fell short of over-turning the CNPA's right to propose and support such extensive housing developments in the Cairngorms, and that the CNPA's assurances of strict conditions to govern any actual developments are, in Lord Glennie's opinion, sufficient safeguard of the protected areas.

Obviously, this is extremely disappointing to all the conservation bodies and supporters who have been involved with the challenge for much of the last two years, but more importantly it highlights how the Scottish model for National Parks offers inadequate protection for the landscape and biodiversity in the face of aggressive plans for housing and other development, even in the heart of a National Park. It seems this could not happen in England or Wales, where the National Parks were set up under a tighter legal framework, and where the Sandford principle is agreed to apply – ie that if there is a conflict between the interests of public enjoyment (tourism) and conservation, then "priority must be given to the conservation of natural beauty." (Lord Sandford, 1974). In short, environmental protection in Scottish National Parks is significantly weaker than in English ones.

To understand the problem for conservation in Scotland, one must look at the legislation under which National Parks were set up here. The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 defines four National Park "Aims" which the Park Authority must try to achieve collectively in a co-ordinated way, and it is crucial to understand these. They are:-

to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area,

to promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area,

to promote understanding and enjoyment, (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public, and

to promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities. (my emphasis in each case)

Further, it is provided that if it *appears to the Authority* that there is a conflict between the first Aim and any of the others, then the Authority *"shall give greater weight to"* the first Aim – ie to conserve and enhance. Lord Glennie considered these words and pointed out that even the obligation to give greater weight to the first aim -does not guarantee development will be refused – the CNPA can still decide that housing is more important and push it through.

A VERY DISAPPOINTING OUTCOME TO THE LEGAL CHALLENGE continued

Incidentally, the CNPA obviously regards the construction of a New Town at the most vulnerable point (when considering the protection of in the Cairngorms as a whole) as being “sustainable” economic development. This is legally unchallengeable as the word “sustainable” in this context appears to be so flexible as to be effectively meaningless.

It is fair to say that many conservationists have been very suspicious of the Scottish model of National Parks

since they were introduced here, and this case has highlighted the wisdom of their concerns. However, to comply with the European Habitats Directive and the protective Policies within the CNPA Local Plan with respect to building in such a sensitive area, (which Lord Glennie has emphasised must be complied with), the CNPA has to abide by many conditions concerned with environmental protection. After winning this case largely upon the strength of these future conditions and assurances, many will be watching very closely to make sure that they are fully met.

ACTION BY THE CAMPAIGN

Campaign's Response on the Proposal to Expand Planning Control over the Construction of Bulldozed Tracks in Upland Areas

This has been an issue in the management of the Cairngorms for decades. The Scottish government at last seems to have realized the need to bring construction of such tracks for “agricultural” purposes under planning control under a *Consultation on Non-Domestic Elements of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992*. In response to this consultation, acting in concert with other voluntary organisations, the Campaign submitted detailed photographic evidence from all over the Cairngorms of the damaging impact of these tracks on landscape, loss of wild land, and also on the poor engineering standards of construction leading to erosion and further landscape impacts.

The Scottish government seems committed to action, but ministers have yet to announce their decision and opponents of such planning controls, with interests in land ownership and grouse moors etc, were almost certainly writing to oppose introduction of the planning control. The Campaign therefore wrote directly to the minister, Mr Mr Derek Mackay, Minister for Local Government and Planning, urging rapid action and pointing out two things. One was the rash of badly engineered track hurriedly being constructed in anticipation of forthcoming planning controls. The other was the widespread practice on grouse moors, as pointed out in our last newsletter, of estates taking over sheep management on the moors, using the sheep basically at “tickmops” and then claiming tracks built basically for access to grouse butts were for agricultural purposes and hence outwith planning control.

Response to the Campaign's Article on the Intensification of Grouse Moor Management

The centre spread of our last newsletter was on the intensification of grouse moor management, including some of the seemingly pointless activities like massive muirburns covering whole hillsides. The article got a significant response from a range of readers. One for example, paid for 20 more copies of the newsletter to be sent to him for wider distribution.

Dossier on Information Relevant to the Issue of Scale and Nature of Housing Development Within the National Park – Particularly in Badenoch and Strathspey

Given the topicality of this issue in the court case brought about the Park Plan by the Campaign and supporting organisations, the Campaign assembled a short summary of relevant information on this topic and lodged it in its website. The data on housing completions in Badenoch and Strathspey between 1991 and 2001 showed that, allowing for increase in population, the 867 houses completed would produce an occupancy of 1.15 per household, against a figure of 2.13 in Scotland overall. From 2001 to 2011, a further 1041 houses were completed and the trend seems to be continuing. There is a long history of building not only more houses than are required by the local population, but more houses than are required even when taking immigration into account. This really reflects of the erection of large numbers of holiday homes. A justification for this rate of building has been that 20% of houses have to be “affordable” so that local people can buy a house. This is a commendable aim but there is no evidence at all that this policy is working and significant evidence that it is not.

ACTION BY THE CAMPAIGN contd.

Campaign's Response to an Informal Consultation on the Local Plan for the National Park

A rapid assessment of this plan provided some surprises and led to the Campaign lodging objections. These included objections to developments like An Camus Mor which are in line with it's the Campaign's general policy. More surprisingly, were alterations to the lodged version of the Plan reached after extensive formal consultation and CNPA Board approval. Settlement boundaries had been expanded, sometimes radically as with An Camus Mor. Areas of land safeguarded for environmental reasons had been reduced as in Boat of Garten, Carrbridge and Nethybridge. In Glenmore, the settlement boundary had been expanded right to the edge of Loch Morlich beech. Surveys have repeatedly shown that this is the most visited place in Badenoch and Strathspey by tourists. It is a key site for its landscape and recreational value. To have expanded a settlement boundary to the edge of it seems a particular folly. Overall, the introduction of such changes to the lodged version of a local plan and subjected it to simply rapid informal consultation in such sensitive areas seems simply to be a bad planning procedure.

Upper Deeside Riparian Woodland Scheme

We wrote about the sudden appearance of this massive scheme in our last issue. The Campaign has since written to the relevant body pointing out that the design and development of this project had been pursued without public consultation in an area so important to a wider public as should have been done under the Aarhus Convention and that the project proposal for very extensive fencing within wild land conflicted with National Park and SNH policies on the protection of wild land. Other NGOs have been invited to write in support.

Court Case and Appeal

We discuss the situation more fully in our lead article but, currently, the Campaign and supporting organisations have lodged an appeal against key aspects of the judges findings. Whether this is carried further depends on the outcome of this initial step.

QUICK QUOTE

From "Ben Machdhuì and His Neighbours – a Guide to the Cairngorm Mountains
By Alex Inkson MacConnochie 1885

"The Cairngorms are a region without historical incident, no famous event or battle giving a fictitious interest to them. This is doubtless due to their complete inaccessibility and hence their reputation may be said to be derived from their own natural attractions."

In Brief

Spread of Red Deer

How far will red deer spread in Scotland out of their “traditional” ranges in the Highlands and Islands like the Cairngorms? In 2005, a consultant’s report to the then Deer Commission for Scotland warned that the most important challenge in the management of red deer in Scotland was their potential spread into the Scottish lowlands, now with their scattered small broadleaved woodlands, nourishing farm crops and busy roads. How far has this process gone? On the southern and eastern flanks of the Cairngorms, there are red deer in the bordering lowland woodlands in Fetteresso, Durriss, Finzean, Glen Dye, Tilquhillie, and down Deeside to Blackhall Forest near Banchory. In Donside, again east of the Cairngorms, red deer have certainly spread to the Coreen Hills hard against lowland areas around, where farmers are now employing a shared stalker to cull red deer eating their crops. Further east, they are now present on Bennachie. Nonetheless, the spread of red deer towards and into the lowlands continues. A complicating factor is that some of the red deer in outer areas display ear tags – that is they are escapees from deer farms. It is unclear how far they have spread to the south.

Control of Muirburn Fires

Grampian Fire Rescue Service had to be called out to bring a muirburn fire back under control on 15th September this year on Glen Tanar Estate. This of course is well outside the normal muirburn time of spring but it was part of a research exercise licensed by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). During the afternoon, the fire escaped by crossing the perimeter ‘black line’. Some mature Scots pine, and regenerating pine, were damaged. However, within a few hours the fire was brought under control by Estate staff, Grampian Fire and Rescue Service, and members of the local Estates Wildfire Group.

An internal review, at which representatives of SNH were present, was undertaken, and action is already underway to reduce the likelihood of any similar occurrence in future. A report is being prepared for SNH, and the Wildfire Group. Whilst ‘out of season’, this was licensed by SNH, for research purposes and they have asked for it to continue.

This was a relatively small-scale event, and part of a deliberate planned exercise but it does also raise the whole question of muirburn fires out of control in the Cairngorms as a persistent problem. In one week of March alone in the eastern Cairngorms this year there were three callouts for the fire brigade because of such fires and a further one in summer. Some previous years have seen similar problems and indeed muirburn fires out of control are one of the consistent reasons for fire brigade callouts in upland areas in the Eastern Highlands. Muirburn is meant to be a system of

“controlled” fires but, given the scale and the way they are lit, the large scale fires spread across whole hillsides which we drew attention to in our previous newsletter are such that they are basically uncontrollable from the start and are at the mercy of the wind and weather. In places, residents record multiple fires being left to burn in the night with nobody in attendance at the site. The Glen Tanar incident was seemingly a planned, relatively small scale operation that went wrong despite oversight but there is a wider problem in the Cairngorms that authorities need to give attention to.

Farewell to the Scottish Wild Cat? – How Many Are There Left?

How many pure-bred Scottish Wildcats are there left in Scotland, never mind in the Cairngorms alone? About 150 estimates a report from an Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) funded project, taking in the whole of Scotland. According to SNH, estimates of wildcat numbers in Scotland range between 1,000 and 4,000. If you take the classical wildcat fur and markings as a marker however, it might now be less than 400. Now enters the Scottish Wildcat Association with a team that reviewed 2,000 records of camera trap sightings, eyewitness reports and roadkills and they estimate only 35 pure-bred individuals exist (surrounded by 3500 hybrids with the common moggy which came from the Nile delta). If so, only desperate measures could ensure its survival, like trapping them and relocating them to areas where they would be less at risk.

What has caused this disastrous decline? Disease is one cause contributing to it, although the wildcat must have survived with disease for many thousands of years. Interbreeding with the domestic moggy is certainly a key cause and has gone on for a long time. In past centuries when the young people went off with the cattle and sheep to the shielings (summer grazings), they apparently took their pet cats with them. However, nobody mentions the other cause – relentless trapping, shooting and snaring by gamekeepers which close observers say continues.

Golden Eagle Found Illegally Killed

In May, a dead golden eagle was found near Potarch Bridge in mid-Deeside. This was an eagle with a fitted tracking device that gave interesting information. For 15 hours the previous day, it had sat at the same point in Glen Esk to the south. Then, after dark, it “moved” 15km north to where it was found dead. Eagles are not known as night fliers. Post mortem examination showed that both its legs were broken – as would happen if it was caught in a spring trap from which it would need released before it could move. It would seem that the eagle made its night-time trip in some other way – and not by public transport. The illegal destruction of protected species continues.

Talking Point



Ryvoan Bothy in the Glenmore Forest Park 1987 photo Roy Turnbull

What's a BOTHY? Bothies are basic – often very basic – shelters, almost always unlocked, and open for anyone to use. They are found in remote areas of the whole of the UK, and a survey published in 1979 listed a surprising 400 or so of them in the Highlands, 68 in the broader Cairngorms Area. There is a very long tradition of bothy use and culture in Scottish hillwalking and climbing. Bothy culture is classless. People of all kinds meet in bothies, drawn by their shared love of the hills, mountains, and adventure. They remain important to frequenters of the Cairngorms and the more easily accessible of them can be heavily used. Examination of the Hut Book in Jean's Hut in the Northern Corries showed that, over five months of 1978, 575 people from 14 different nationalities from the USA to Japan visited it, 250 on July alone. Since only those who signed could be counted, usage was almost certainly greater. Many left appreciative comments. *"We've not got anything like this at home"* (North Bay, Ontario). *"Thanks for the comfortable hut"* (2 Dutchmen). *"I thank you because you are here in this wonderful place"* (Danish).

Stories of bothy life abound. The late Bob Scott, head stalker on Mar Lodge Estate, ran a famous bothy by his house in Luibeg. One day an Irish biker pressed on determinedly to traverse the Lairig Ghru despite Bob's strong weather warnings. In the small hours of the morning, the biker was found, in desperate condition, knocking at Bob's door. He had finally abandoned his bike in the lee of a large cairn in the Lairig Ghru he said. But there is no such cairn in the Lairig Ghru! Later a bike was found propped behind the summit cairn of Ben Macdui! Bob could be a bit capricious about who he let use the bothy but also humorous. Finding a young couple using his bothy were on their honeymoon, while they were out on the hill, he went up into the attic of his house to retrieve an old brass bed and reassembled it in the bothy. Reindeer have an avid liking for human urine. One night several girls joined other occupants in the Sinclair Hut which stood at the north end of the Lairig Ghru, which is well within the reindeer grazing area. After dark, one went outside to relieve herself, only to shoot back inside the door a few minutes later, looking terrified and trying to pull on her knickers. While crouching down in the dark, a large nose has suddenly snuffled up behind and pushed into the urine source, along with antlers – much merciless mirth from the guys in the bothy!

In origin, bothies are largely abandoned shelters built to accommodate shepherds or stalkers. Passing

MOUNTAIN BOTHIES

*I shall leave tonight,
By the seven-thirty train
And from Perth in the
I shall see the hills again
From the top of Ben
I shall watch the gath
And see the crisp snow
At the back of Cairngorm
I shall feel the mists of
And pass by Lairig Ghru
To look on dark Loch
From the heights of S
From the broken Bar
I shall see the sunrise
On the forehead of B
And Strathspey wake
And again in the dusk
I shall find once more
The dark water of the
And pass by Ryvoan.
For tonight I leave fr
And leave the world b
Who has the hills as l
Will find them wondr*

By Mrs. A. M. Lawere

A poem for many years
inside of the door of

Talking Point

OF THE CAIRNGORMS

from Euston
ain
e early morning
gain.

Macdhui
ering storm,
w lying
gorm.
of Bhrotain
hru
Einich
Sgoran Dubh.
ns of Bynack
e gleam
en Rinnes
from dream.
k of evening
e alone
e Green Loch

om Euston
behind;
lover,
ous kind.

nce.

rs fixed to the
Ryvoan Bothy.

walkers, finding them so open, started to use them overnight. Corrour Bothy and the bothy in Glen Feshie were of this origin. Some estates accepted this and others resented it, sometimes making the bothies unusable. A few were specially constructed by climbers. The "hidden bothies" at the head of Gleann an-t-Sluigan were constructed by Aberdeen area climbers as they were halfway between Braemar (and the Fife Arms bar) and the climbing areas on Beinn a'Bhuird and Ben Avon. Similarly the Garbh Coire bothy was constructed by members of the Lairig Club of Aberdeen University as a base from which to develop the climbing on Braeriach. These, plus



Lairig Club members repairing Garbh Coire Hut July 1983

Photo Greg Strange



Opening of the new Bob Scott's Bothy at Luibeg in the late 1980's

Photo RD Watson



Bob Scott Head Stalker on Mar Lodge Estate
1965 Photo by Iain Robertson

three on the Cairngorms plateau, the Curran Bothy, St Valery and the El Alamein, were all built without planning permission of course.

Bothies have had a chequered history. After those that were built for stalkers and shepherds were abandoned, most gradually largely fell into decay. Vandalism played its part, with wooden wall linings and even flooring being sometimes used to fuel the fires. By the time the legendary Syd Scroggie found Corrour in 1938, he later recorded that, "As I first experienced it in 1938, Corrour Bothy was in a beautifully dilapidated condition, just the thing to give a place character ... we surveyed the torn-up floor with joists and bent nails exposed, moist walls of quarried granite with the protective panelling gone, the underside of a tarry felt roof, the waterproofing qualities of which were merely retrospective, and at the far end of the bothy from the fireplace, a ladder propped up against a sagging loft where lay the ancient mattress reputedly infested with fleas." By 1950, it had deteriorated to little more than a pile of stones and would have disappeared altogether, but the Cairngorm Club rebuilt it.

Talking Point continued

Other incidents influenced matters too. In November 1972, there was the so-called Cairngorm Tragedy when seven children in a school party perished in the winter weather. The subsequent Fatal Accident Inquiry concluded that the existence of Curran Bothy caused the school party to head for it to spend the night, and hence if it had not been there they would not have headed for it and not gone on and perished. There are other arguments against bothies on the highly vulnerable plateaux. The plateau bothies, the Curran Bothy and the St Valery were demolished and the El Alamein left to its own devices. Jean's Hut and the Sinclair Hut have gone, for various reasons. The Fords of Avon bothy on land owned by the RSPB has recently been rebuilt, but not for overnight accommodation. Basically it is an emergency shelter for those marooned while crossing the Lairig and Loagh. It has been credited with saving several lives over the years.

When Bob Scott's bothy burned down, long after the demise of Bob himself, a group of local climbers rallied to the cause and a replacement bothy, with such features as a modern toilet facility was built on a new site. This may have been the beginning of a

change in attitude, but undoubtedly the main turning point for bothies in the Cairngorms and the Highlands generally was the foundation of the Mountain Bothies Association in 1965. It now cares for about 100 bothies overall. It is unlikely new bothies will be constructed and indeed one that started to be constructed near the head of the Gleann an-t-Sluigan has been stopped. In recent years, bothies like Corroul, Ryvoan and now the Hutchison Hut in Coire Etchachan have been upgraded with improvements like insulation, stoves, and even toilets. Are we getting too posh? Is it wise to have a stove at the Hutchison well above the treeline? More recently, questions have been raised over the fate of the somewhat dilapidated Garbh Coire bothy – demolish or upgrade? Views differ widely and removing bothies is a tricky thing. You may remove them from the ground, but they persist on maps used by people to plan stays and routes for a long time. Watch this space.



Ryvoan bothy in the 1960s photo by Ian Lawson

In Brief continued from page 5

Inspiration from the Cairngorms?

You will have heard of the Higgs boson – that mysterious fundamental particle so important to the standard model of particle physics? Well, if you haven't, you have now! It is no longer just a concept, as it was detected this year in a particle accelerator. However, before it could be searched for, it had to be conceived and its conceiver, Professor Peter Higgs of Edinburgh, has explained that he thought of the concept when walking in the Cairngorms in 1964 – so you can never tell what the Cairngorms can help give rise to.

What a Year it Has Been – and a Bad Time for Trees

What a year it has been for trees! Anyone travelling around will have noticed that Sitka spruce in many areas has been defoliated, especially where it exists in small groups or as single trees. This is due to the proliferation of aphids, chiefly one *Elatobium abietinum*. This level of infestation occurs from time to time on Sitka spruce and trees almost always recover. More generally, the balmy April drew trees into blossom and flushing of foliage very early. Then the frosts of early May killed the blossom and often damaged young soft foliage. As a result most berryed species carry much less or no fruit. The Rowan crop is at best patchy and generally poor, while the wild cherry (*Prunus avium* - known properly in Scotland as "gean") carried little fruit. Holly too shows few berries. All this will have significant consequences for berry eating birds including migrants. When trees grew new foliage, a severe windscore in later May further damaged foliage. For some *Prunus* species like the gean, further trials awaited them as leaf curling aphids invaded and damaged the next growth of young foliage. Many gean trees look in a sad state. Within woodlands, there are blaberries, but on the open hill there are neither blaberries nor crowberries and these are significant foodsources for some birds in season.

The breeding success of birds was mixed. Red grouse did not do well and capercaillie had a pretty disastrous year, but waders in places like Strathdon did quite well and so did some of the upland gull colonies. Raptors were also a mixed picture. Buzzards did poorly and so did harriers. Golden eagles seem to do well, peregrines and ospreys below average. Red kites did well and short-eared owls exceptionally well. It is a complicated picture.

Invasive Pathogens of Trees – Closing the Door After the Horse Has Bolted.

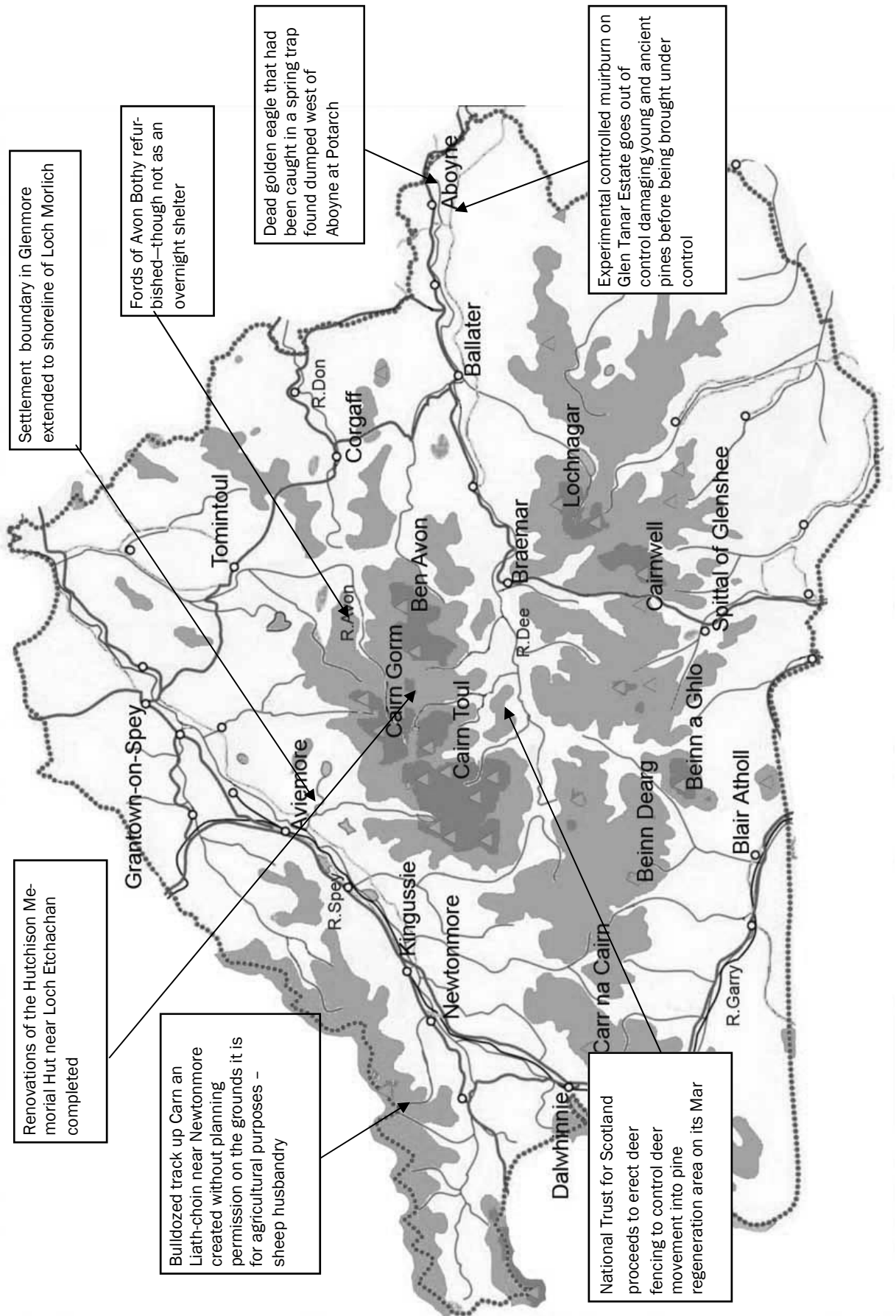
A worrying trend is the impact of invasive fungal pathogens of trees largely imported on trees from abroad. Dutch elm disease is a striking example of the disastrous damage that can be done by imported pathogens. The disease Southern Oak Wilt, also caused by an imported pathogen, the fungus *Phytophthora ramorum*, is widespread in places like National Trust gardens in Scotland. In 2009, it was found infecting stands of Japanese larch but it can infect a wide range of plant species including oaks. As yet, it has not been found in the Cairngorms area.

Dothistroma septosporum, another imported fungal pathogen, causes Dothistroma needle blight of pines. It has been with us certainly since 1954 but did not seem to have spread widely and aggressively until the 1990s. It can infect a wide range of conifers but is usually really only damaging on pines. In the UK, it affects Corsican and lodgepole pine but recently has become troublesome on Scots pine – which is the real worry. Recent Forestry Commission maps show outbreaks around the Cairngorms but as yet not apparently within them. The Commission states that one of its strategic aims with this disease is to protect ancient Caledonian Pine Forest stands but that may be easier said than done!

Now cometh, *Chalara fraxinea*, another unwelcome fungal import that causes Chalara dieback of ash. It was discovered in trees planted in 2009 in a woodland managed by Forest Enterprise Scotland at Knockmountain in southern Scotland with 58,000 ash plants. In August of this year, the Forestry Commission urged woodland managers throughout Scotland to be vigilant for signs of this serious disease.

Certainly, the weather conditions of recent seasons have probably played a part in encouraging the spread of these pathogens. *Phytophthora kernoviae* for example, a newly discovered fungal pathogen of beech, may be indigenous and encouraged to spread partly by seasonal weather. But mostly we have imported our recent pathogens in trees grown abroad or by other means. Once these pathogens are present in a new area, eliminating them ranges from the very difficult to the impossible.

AROUND THE CAIRNGORMS



QUICK QUOTE

From "The Future of the Cairngorms" by Kai Curry-Lindahl, Adam Watson and R Drennan Watson Pub North East Mountain Trust 1982

"The great rolling hills of the Cairngorms do not have the immediate appeal and imposing impact of the Cuillin of Skye or the isolated bens of Sutherland. Their appeal takes longer to mature. The far views across their high plateaux, unimpeded by soaring peaks or fretted ridges, give a sense of space and scale which no other British mountains can convey. Half hidden between their enfolding masses, the corries and the glens plunge to unsuspected depths, flanked often by immense cliffs and bottomed in places by dark and brooding lochs."

Cairngorm Stories Cairngorms Migration

Greenflies are the most damnable things you know. Also known as aphids, they are the insect family the Aphididae, of which there are a good few thousand species. All of them are plant parasites and all are small – a millimetre or less long. With their hypodermic like mouthparts, they pierce the tissues of plants that conduct the sugars etc created by photosynthesis, and let the juices flow in. These contain plenty of sugars but are low in protein so they must let much flow in to get enough protein. The rest, with their excess sugars, they exude as a sweet sticky fluid called honeydew. Insects like ants love it. Some ant species farm the greenfly like cattle. Park your car below a tree and you may find it developed a dark sticky surface. That's dark fungi growing happily on falling honeydew.

But what has this to do with the Cairngorms? Well, one day, on 27 July 1982, the foremost expert on the Cairngorms, Dr Adam Watson, was walking on the plateau near Ben Macdui when, over an area of at least several square kilometres, he found everything covered in a mat of these tiny insects, each a millimetre or less long. He recorded¹ they covered pools and streams in a thin scum, Every blade of grass or sedge had 3-10 aphids on it and, in places like edges of pools and streams or snow patches, they lay in piles up to 2cm deep. Potential predators of these insects like water beetles and snow buntings were having a feeding frenzy. A report by a

Mr Niall Campbell of large numbers on the same day from as far away as Killiecrankie, showed they must have occurred over a very large area. The sheer tonnage of tiny insects would have been substantial, but the sheer numbers must have been immense!

What were they? Where did they come from, and why? Greenfly can reproduce prolifically. Females do not need to mate and reproduce sexually. They can produce young without mating. One female can produce 100 young this way in 30 days, 3 a day, and each of these can soon do the same, and so on. However, if their populations start to become dense, leading to competition for food, or their host plants start to cease growth or die, big changes take place. Sexual mating takes place, the new young have wings, and greenfly are small enough to be borne long distances on winds. Migration is part of the greenfly life cycle – at least with most species. What Dr Watson had come upon was the result of a mass migration.

The clue to where the migration had come from was in the species identified. Most of them were of *Rhopalosiphum padi* (L.), an aphid that lived on grasses and cereals. A sharp rise in numbers of these plus another species *Metopolophium dirhodum* (Walker), that also lived on grasses and cereals, were found in traps set annually to monitor their numbers in mid July of the same year.

¹ Unusual concentration of aphids at high altitudes in the Cairngorms by Adam Watson and Henry L.G. Stroyan, Entomologists Monthly Magazine July 30th, 1984 Vol 120 (1984)

Cairngorm Stories Cairngorms Migration continued

Undoubtedly, their populations had built up to in grasses and cereals to the south and a vast migration in favourable winds had occurred, carrying them far to the north. Such mass migrations are known to occur. In the Dakotas in USA, in some years, such huge migrations originate from maturing crops southern Dakota, riding long distances on low-level jet winds, and landing on growing crops in northern Dakota. Many migrant aphids for example were noted in Eastern Scotland in 1982 and in East Anglia in 1979. The impact on crops yield can be severe for not

only do they parasitise the plant, but many aphids species also carry plant viruses. These viruses often multiplying within aphids, and infect plants with they parasitise. Barley Yellow Dwarf Virus is a serious virus of barley spread in this manner.

What triggered the mass migration that Dr Watson observed? In July that year, 1982, dry, warm sunny weather had induced early ripening of cereals and halted or slowed the growth of grass. For greenfly on the huge areas covered by grass and cereals, this meant food supplies were running out, and this would trigger changes in reproduction to winged forms. In stronger winds they would not move, but in calmer weather and light winds, they would take off en masse. All of those immense numbers arriving on the Cairngorms would quickly die – nature is profligate. But, later July of that year, large numbers were found to have arrived among cereal crops to the north and northeast of the Cairngorms in Morayshire. The crops there were, however, too advanced in their growth for the arriving infestation to reduce yields significantly.



Oat infested with *Rhopalosiphum padi* (L.),



Rhopalosiphum padi (L.),



Metopolophium dirhodum (Walker)

Breaking News

Dr Adam Watson Recipient of the 2012 Golden Eagle Award by Outdoor Writers & Photographers Guild

In our last issue we announced that Adam Watson had been awarded the 2012 Scottish Award for Excellence in Mountain Culture. Now comes this further honour, the golden Eagle Award, which is made annually to a person deemed to have “*rendered distinguished or meritorious service to the outdoors generally*”. It is an equally well-deserved award as his earlier one, given not only is his lifelong study of the mountain, but his classical guide to the Cairngorms. Previous winners of the award include Sir Chris Bonnington, Marion Shoard and Sir David Attenborough. Distinguished company indeed!