

# THE CAIRNGORMS CAMPAIGNER

Winter 2005/2006

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## WHAT TO DO ABOUT DEER?

Red deer are in the news again! But then, in the Scottish Highlands they are seldom out of it for long. Recently it has been attempts to limit their depredations on protected areas that caused the fur to fly.

The July Newsletter, explained how a cull by the Deer Commission Scotland (DCS) in Glen Feshie, to permit the regeneration of the remnants of the Old Caledonian Pine Forest on the estate, was arranged with the full support of the Danish landowner and as part of a joint agreed plan with neighbouring estate owners. Notwithstanding, the cull, using a team of marksmen and then helicopters to remove carcasses, resulted in an on-the-spot, on-the-hill, TV confrontation with the Scottish Gamekeepers Association and arranged by them.

More recently the crisis on the Caenlochan National Nature Reserve (NNR) has hit the news. This problem is a long running farce. The Caenlochan NNR was designated in 1961 over 3,596 hectares, underpinned by a 25 year management agreement with two estates. Principally, the NNR is valued for the wide range of alpine species growing on the richer soils derived from the base rich rocks, but the birdlife is also valued. Part of the NNR, Caenlochan Glen and Cannes Glen, was later sold to a third estate. The then Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) acquired Corrie Fee from the Forestry Commission in 1983. These 25 year agreements only gave the NCC right of access to the NNR and permission to carry out research.



*Stags, hard pressed for grazing in the winter.*

*"The situation in and around Caenlochan has in fact got well beyond the issue of protection of rare plant species."*



*In a hard winter, where red deer populations are too high, many deer can die of starvation.*

*"The numbers of red deer present in the area were by now ridiculous."*

The situation in and around Caenlochan has in fact got well beyond the issue of protection of rare plant species. Treading and heavy grazing by large numbers of animals has reached the point of creating areas of bare ground with no vegetation that are collectively considerable; a situation no responsible land manager should have permitted to develop!

However, under the EU's Natura 2000 programme, the area is also designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Special Protection Area (SPA). This is legislation with teeth, requiring the UK government to prevent further damage to such sites, though with no provision for restoring them. In short, SNH still has no real powers to manage the most highly designated sites to conserve the habitats or species.

*"This sad tale is an example of the collision between red deer management and the protection of designated sites that is widespread in the Highlands and which has long been a major issue in the Cairngorms."*

The numbers of red deer present in the area were by now ridiculous. One experienced visitor reckoned he could count over 6000 deer without moving from one spot! Enter the DCS which, in 2002, brought ten estate owners together to prepare a voluntary agreement under Section 7 of the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996. Deer numbers were to be reduced from 11,400 to 4,800. The scale of proposed reduction gives an idea of the overpopulation of the area. Three years later, the population is only 200 less - hardly progress!

This sad tale is an example of the collision between red deer management and the protection of designated sites that is widespread in the Highlands and which has long been a major issue in the Cairngorms. The DCS's actions are an example of their "Priority Sites" policy whereby they target endangered, protected sites. SNH are working towards ensuring that 80% of special features on our nationally important sites reach favourable condition by 2008. It seems very unlikely that this target will be met without a significant increase in financial and human resources devoted to deer control measures at "priority sites".

But this is really just crisis management and there are far wider problems associated with red deer. There is no doubt that red deer have been extending their range, colonising the outer fringes of the Highlands and now even moving into the edges of the lowlands. This brings them into areas where forestry plantations are unfenced (Over a period of 20 months within the period 2003-05 alone, forestry grants in Scotland for deer fencing cost the taxpayer over £300,000 and this kind of spend has extended over many years). The spread of their range brings red deer increasingly into areas of busy roads, gardens, arable farms and other things guaranteed to cause conflict.

Total red deer numbers are also believed to have increased greatly to 454,000 or 350,000, depending on whose figures you accept. If it is the higher figure, then red deer numbers have tripled since 1962. The DCS has reservations about the belief that red deer numbers have increased but few share their doubts.

The scale of the problem is huge! Deer Forests are reckoned to cover some 10,000 square kilometres in the Highlands and red deer exist and require management over perhaps over an additional equal area. At 20,000 square kilometres, this would be about half the size of Belgium. They are the dominant herbivore over much of this land and, just as with other dominant herbivores in any area in the world, their management strongly influences the biodiversity, landscape, hydrology, soils and other ecological aspects. Hence their management affects the interests of many people other than the landowner. They are indeed the chief "tool" for managing many areas of the Highlands.

Within the Cairngorms, and indeed over the wider Highlands, the problem of deer management, of all deer species, must be solved, but there has been a long history of failure to manage the problem.

The Red Deer Commission was set up in 1959. At that time the perceived problems were:

1. Concern for the future of red deer because of organised poaching.
2. Impacts of red deer on crofting, agriculture and forestry.

The 1987 Annual Report of the Red Deer Commission, the body originally set up to manage red deer problems, concludes beleagueredly, "With few notable exceptions, passage of another year has seen little success in reducing the populations of Red Deer on the open hill and of Sika and Roe Deer in woodland." In truth, similar conclusions could be quoted from any Annual Report from the twenty years before that. Seldom can an agency have charted its failure with such remarkable consistency!

Despite words spoken and written by Frank Fraser Darling, the interests of the natural heritage were not included in the remit of the old Red Deer Commission. This was partly remedied by the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 which replaced the old Red Deer Commission with the Deer Commission for Scotland gave it a broader focus. Part 1 (2) of the Act takes account of the "size and density of the deer population and its impact on the natural heritage, the needs of agriculture and forestry, and the interests of owners and occupiers of land".

*"But this is really just crisis management and there are far wider problems associated with red deer."*

*"The scale of the problem is huge!"*

*".... there has been a long history of failure to manage the problem"*

*"Seldom can an agency have charted its failure with such remarkable consistency!"*



*"Many people believe that the cause of the whole problem was the passing of legislation in 1959 creating close seasons for deer hunting in Scotland"*

*"Among other things, the letter asserts that the evidence shows that deer close seasons do not deliver their original purpose"*

*"At these meetings, strong assurances were given that the agreements affecting the conservation resources of the estate would be observed and perhaps even improved on."*

*" . . . if you are going to have a landowner under this lottery, have a Dane"*

As previously mentioned the EU's Natura 2000 Programme and consequent designations of SACs and SPAs are designed to strengthen the protection given to places like Caenlochan. The Deer Commission Scotland is a much more focused and proactive organisation than its predecessor but there must be strong doubts as to whether such a small organisation (22 staff) can tackle such a huge problem. The Caenlochan and Glen Feshie stories show the problems that even dealing with crises in relatively small priority sites can produce.

Many people believe that the cause of the whole problem was the passing of legislation in 1959 creating close seasons for deer hunting in Scotland and certainly the perceived increase in red deer numbers and their spread seems to date from about then. The government in Scotland is now considering removing the close seasons. This is creating a howl of protest from the deer forest owners in Scotland. The Cairngorms Campaign has supported a letter to the Scottish Executive from a range of environmental organisations within Scottish Environment Link. Among other things, the letter asserts that the evidence shows that deer close seasons do not deliver their original purpose, and that these days a more modern system is required with sufficient flexibility to deliver local cooperation on deer.

### **Glen Feshie Estate is Sold Again – Again!**

Out of the blue, on a recent morning, the staff of Glen Feshie Estate learned that they had a new employer but still, hopefully, jobs. The estate had been sold to another wealthy Dane – the third in a row to own Glen Feshie! The last newsletter described the agreed plan to reduce red deer numbers to permit regeneration of the Caledonian pine forest fragments on the estate – at last! The Campaign has been kept in touch with the new developments through meetings between local parties and Anders Nelson, the new owner, and owner of Bestseller A/S (Look it up on the net). At these meetings, strong assurances were given that the agreements affecting the conservation resources of the estate would be observed and perhaps even improved on.

This last news is comforting, but the whole history of the ownership of Glen Feshie estate illustrates what a lottery the system is. In this case, the change of ownership was apparently the result of the transfer of shares in the company in whose name the estate was held. Every happy band of the nouveau riche decides it would like to buy a private kingdom in Scotland – oil rich sheiks and sultans, those grown wealthy on IT based businesses, they all come. Having said that, broader experience in Scotland indicates that, if you are going to have a landowner under this lottery, have a Dane. They come from a culture with a strong sense of civitas, the common good. However, if press reports are to be believed, the latest arrivals in this game are wealthy Russians. Now that could be a different story!



## Slugain Hill Track

### By Kenny Freeman

Editor's note:- **Bulldozed tracks are coming to the fore as a major issue again, not least due to the inadequate policies proposed by the Cairngorms National Park Authority. One organization that has been very active on this topic is the North East Mountain Trust. Here, Kenny Freeman of the Trust describes briefly their struggle to have something effective done about the spread of such tracks on Invercauld Estate, in this case in Glen an t-Slugain.**

Suggestions by North East Mountain Trust (NEMT) representatives that a retrospective planning application by Invercauld Estate be refused and that the ground be re-instated to wild land was unanimously backed by Aberdeenshire Council on 13<sup>th</sup> Dec 2005 who also agreed the need to set up a group which would help review all landowners activities in the area.

This culminated a five year roller coaster ride for members involving many hours working alongside SNH and other partner organisations who helped and encouraged us. Other official bodies gave us the feeling of being kept at arms length or were we just simply being given the run-around in the hope that perhaps we would go away?

On this five year journey with the Slugain Track we closely watched and monitored single footpaths evolving into Vehicle Hill Tracks (VHTs), in the short space of three years with a little "engineering help" from our mechanical friends. We witnessed some of the so-called experts involved in other path work getting it wrong and in their quest to improve footpaths in the area creating more damage than necessary .

We responded to the CNPA draft policy on VHTs with anxiety at their proposal. Other more recent comments from Eric Baird Vice-Convenor of the Park Board suggesting "retro-active work is something we need to move away from". This disturbed us as it conflicted with information we had gathered from expert scientists in this field and seemed to show a complete ignorance of track reinstatement.

Scotland's roadless, wild land is a precious resource. There is a range of legislation and policies intended to protect it particularly from inappropriate development. However with an almost routine occurrence of unauthorised vehicle hill tracks this seems to demonstrate that these policies are not always effective, perhaps because they have not addressed all the forces driving the development. NEMT suspect that a comprehensive assessment of these forces might identify specific constructive solutions to the problem of protecting wild land, while meeting the needs of those with an interest in it. NEMT are at present formulating a proposal that would include all the relevant bodies and partner organisations to work together and come up with a solution to protect our wild land.

**Our conclusion - We won the battle but we still have to win the war.**

*"This culminated a five year roller coaster ride for members involving many hours working alongside SNH and other partner organisations who helped and encouraged us."*

*On this five year journey with the Slugain Track we closely watched and monitored single footpaths evolving into Vehicle Hill Tracks (VHTs)*

*"Scotland's roadless, wild land is a precious resource."*

*"We won the battle but we still have to win the war"*

## AROUND THE

### Quick Quote

*"I am very concerned at the decline in the Highland population."*

Councillor Sandy Park, Chairman of Highland Council full planning committee and vice chair of Cairngorms National Park Authority planning committee at a planning hearing for 103 new houses in Boat of Garten (Strathspey and Badenoch Herald, Nov 23.

*"The Highland population in 1973 was about 1777,000. The 1991 census recorded 204,004 and by 2001 that has risen to 208914."*

Roy Turnbull, Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group (Strathspey and Badenoch Herald 30 November)

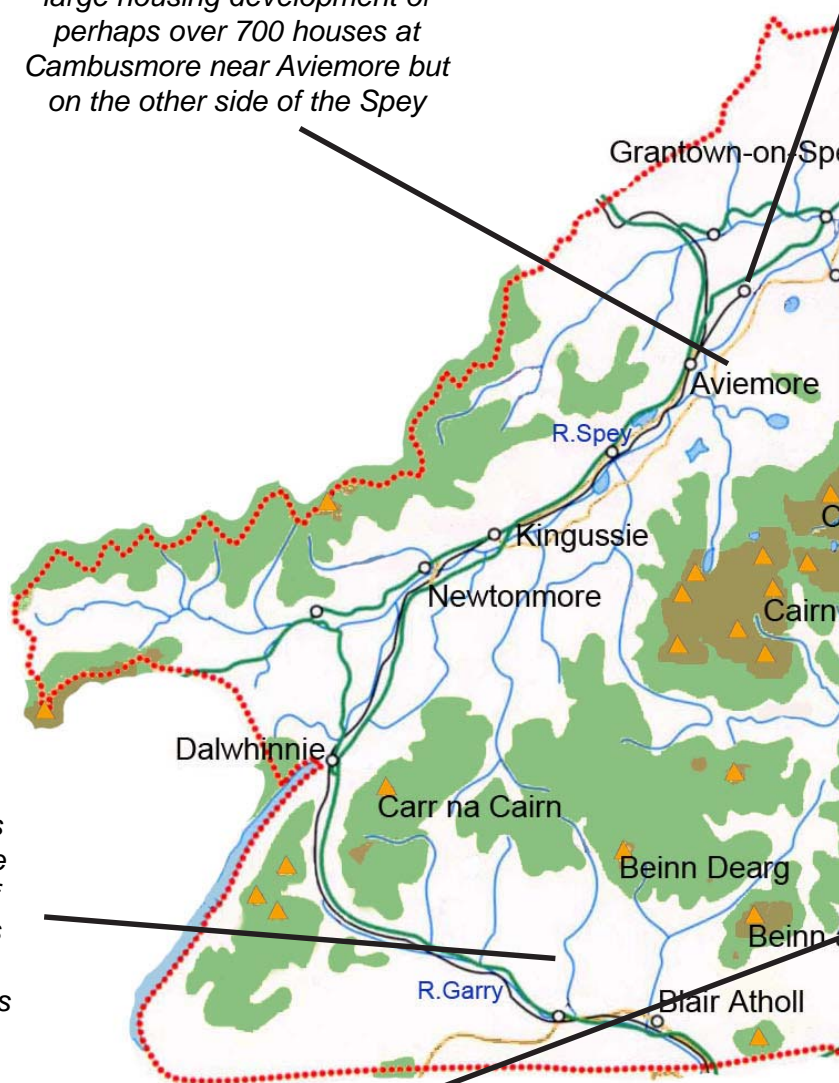
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*Rothiemurchus Estate proposes a large housing development of perhaps over 700 houses at Cambusmore near Aviemore but on the other side of the Spey*

*Cairngorm Campaigns adds its voice to those objecting to the line of giant powerline pylons proposed for erection through the Cairngorms National Park*

*Much protest by landowners over the proposed cull of red deer in the Caelochan Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area*

*Landowners in Ang electrified deer fence to deer from their land to grouse. Cairngorms enquiring as to wh Environmental Impact should have been*



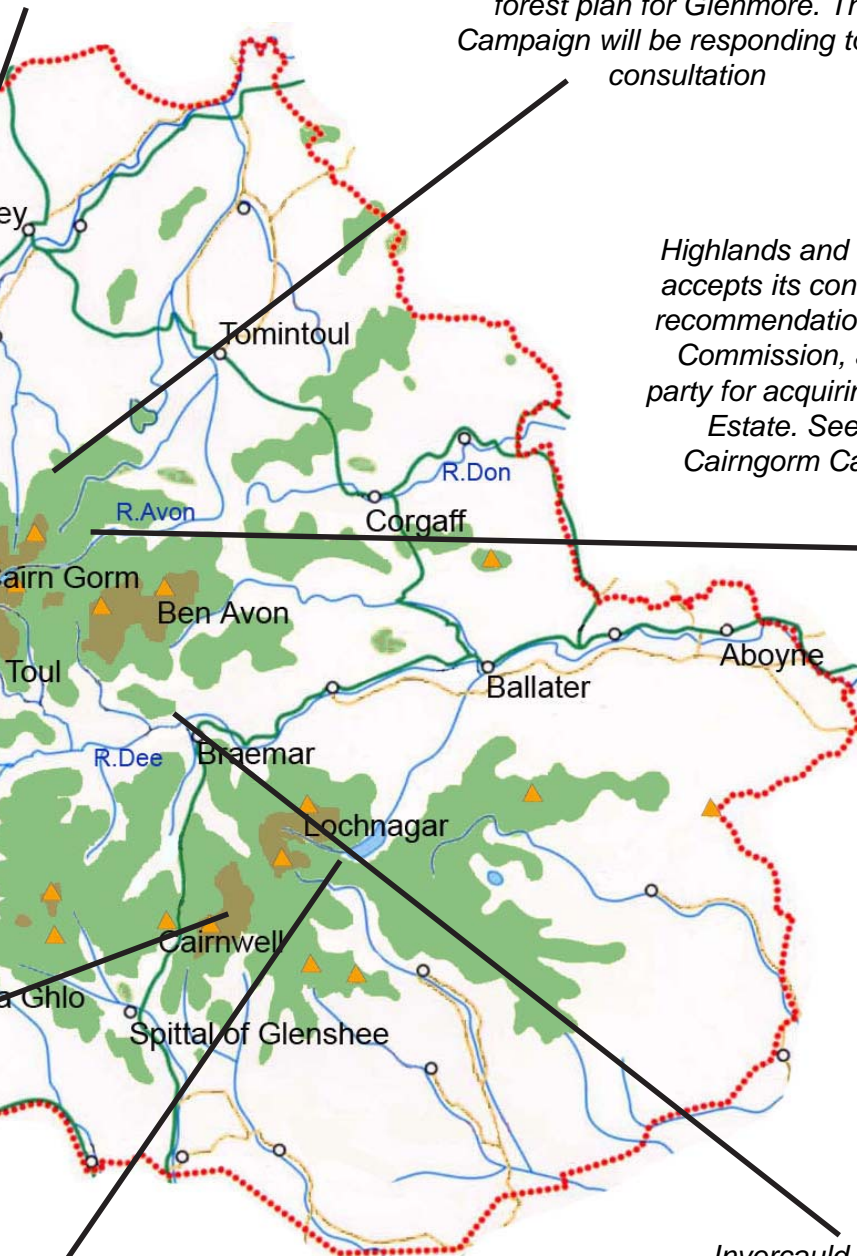


# CAIRNGORMS

Planning Committee narrowly  
uses planning permission for  
development of 120 houses at Boat  
of Garten where they would have  
aged semi-ancient woodland  
and capercaillie habitat

Forestry Commission is revising its  
forest plan for Glenmore. The  
Campaign will be responding to the  
consultation

Highlands and Islands Enterprise  
accepts its consultants, Bidwells,  
recommendation that the Forestry  
Commission, are the preferred  
party for acquiring HIE's Cairngorm  
Estate. See newsletter for  
Cairngorm Campaign's action



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to exclude red  
to encourage  
Campaign  
gether an  
Assessment  
required

Invercauld Estate is refused  
retrospective planning  
permission for its bulldozed track  
in Glen an t-Sluigan by  
unanimous vote of Marr Area  
Planning Committee of  
Aberdeenshire Council

## Quick Quote

"There has been  
little housing  
development in  
Boat of Garten  
over the past 30  
to 40 years."  
Councillor Sandy  
Park at the same  
meeting.

"On the contrary,  
Highland  
Council's housing  
completion  
figures for  
Badenoch and  
Strathspey record  
that, in the 25  
years between  
1976 and 2001,  
156 houses were  
built in the Boat of  
Garten settlement  
area. That is  
about half the  
households in the  
Boat area  
(recorded in the  
20001 census)  
were built in this  
time."

Roy Turnbull,  
Badenoch and  
Strathspey  
Conservation  
Group  
(Strathspey and  
Badenoch Herald  
30 November)

## IN BRIEF

### Cooperation and Liaison Between NGOs in the Cairngorms

*"We need to share our knowledge and experience and integrate our collective influence"*

A wide range of voluntary environmental and outdoor recreational groups has an interest in the Cairngorms but cooperation between them has not been as good as it should or could be. We need to share our knowledge and experience and integrate our collective influence. The Cairngorms Campaign has accepted that one of its roles is to assist such liaison and cooperation. Therefore, with the aid of Scottish Environment Link, the Campaign has organised two very useful meetings, each of which discussed a range of issues.

At the first, organisations whose membership of the Campaign had lapsed expressed a wish to rejoin and to support the Campaign in its efforts. All organisations present expressed a willingness to cooperate together. From the first meeting, cooperation over the transfer of the HIE's Cairngorm Estate was arranged. A second meeting focused on the National Park's Local Plan and resulted in a useful and intensive analysis of it.

The Campaign will go on facilitating this cooperation.

*"The whole of Badenoch and Strathspey has been hit by a plethora of applications for housing development, especially for holiday homes and their ilk."*

### Housing, Woodlands and Capercaillie

The whole of Badenoch and Strathspey has been hit by a plethora of applications for housing development, especially for holiday homes and their ilk. Among them, Boat-of-Garten was the subject of a proposal to build 120 houses. In itself, this would almost double the size of the village and it is doubtful whether developers should be permitted to radically change the nature of small communities in this way. The development would have damaged local semi-ancient woodland and the capercaillie populations it harboured. Capercaillie are an increasingly endangered species. Semi-ancient woodland is under pressure nationally and there is more than one place in Badenoch and Strathspey where proposed housing developments threaten to damage it. The CC therefore decided to oppose the development and lodged and objection to it. At a lively local meeting, the planning committee refused planning permission – by a narrow margin.

*"... it is also important that the Campaign acts in a supportive manner where that advances the conservation of the Cairngorms"*

### Working with the Cairngorms National Park Authority

While it is important that the CC always maintains an independent stance and does not hesitate to criticise where it feels the CNPA's policies or actions are inappropriate, it is also important that the Campaign acts in a supportive manner where that advances the conservation of the Cairngorms. Thus CC management committee members have, for example, had productive meetings with CNPA's chairman and staff to make positive contributions on a range of issues including the development of the future vision for the park, on the CNPA's Access Strategy, and on its Education strategy. On the other hand, it has made clear that it regards the CNPA's sustainable tourism strategy as inadequate and that it fails to address key issues in tourism development.



## Transfer of Highlands and Islands Enterprise's (HIE) Cairngorm Estate to New Owner

HIE has accepted the recommendation of its consultant's Bidwells that the Forestry Commission is the preferred party to take over ownership of its Cairngorm Estate. The Campaign, in response to the consultation by Bidwells, drew up a Position Paper on the situation. The paper's full text is on our website. Through the liaison initiated by the Campaign on Cairngorms issues, seven organisations added their support to the document. A copy with a covering letter was sent to the deputy minister for environment and rural development, Rhona Brankin MSP. The letter emphasized that the estate was a **key land unit** with respect to both the protection of the Central Cairngorms and the Badenoch and Strathspey tourist industry and for the future successful functioning of the Cairngorms National Park. It stated that the selection of landowner, the new owner's skills range, that owner's ongoing financing and terms of remit will have implications for the avoidance of future major conflict, for the wider Cairngorms National Park, for areas geographically outwith HIE area, and for areas designated at the European Union and international level.

The letter stated that the matter therefore could not simply be treated as a local transfer of land between a regional agency landowner and another public landowner and should take place under a ministerial overview. The reply stated that the minister was inclined to leave this decision entirely to HIE but we are not leaving the matter at that and are responding to the minister again.

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## COMMENTS AND VIEWS FROM MEMBERS

- From members' letters sent in response to the CC's last newsletter or subscription reminder:-

"Thank you very much for your letters and newsletter. I had previously cancelled my subscription due to financial reasons but there was so much of interest in the newsletter that I had a change of heart."

"I am enclosing a small donation which is sent to you and your colleagues with all good wishes in all that you are doing to attempt to halt further despoliation of the magnificent Cairngorms."

At the Cairngorms Campaign, we thank all the members who wrote to us with encouraging comments and for the subscriptions and, in many cases, extra donations. We are always interested in your views.

*"HIE has accepted the recommendation of its consultant's Bidwells that the Forestry Commission is the preferred party to take over ownership of its Cairngorm Estate."*

*"The letter emphasized that the estate was a **key land unit** with respect to both the protection of the Central Cairngorms and the Badenoch and Strathspey tourist industry and for the future successful functioning of the Cairngorms National Park."*

*The CNPA responded saying it had just "drafted a strategic objective relating to the need to minimise motorised access in the montane area, which specifically mentions aircraft noise."*

*"The draft plan has already been the subject of intensive discussion by the Cairngorms liaison group and the CC's management committee and some key issues have already been drawn out. However, the draft Park Plan is not yet available for discussion."*

## Helicopters and Motorised Access in the Cairngorms

Following a prolonged intrusion into the central Cairngorms by a low flying helicopter that turned out to be filming for a BBC TV series on place names, the CC took up the issue with both Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA). This led to an interesting discussion with SNH on how much power it had to prevent disturbance within SSSIs and sites designated as Special Protection Area and Special Areas of Conservation against this kind of wildlife disturbance. We are pursuing this with them, though the final answer may be not much. The CNPA responded saying it had just "drafted a strategic objective relating to the need to minimise motorised access in the montane area, which specifically mentions aircraft noise." This would be part of the Park Plan. We await this policy with interest.

## The Cairngorms National Park Local Plan

As explained in our last issue, this plan guides development within the National Park and the draft plan has now been issued for consultation. As the chief executive of the Park authority explained in the last newsletter, "The Local Plan takes its strategic direction from the vision and objectives of the Park Plan, which deals with broader land use." The draft plan has already been the subject of intensive discussion by the Cairngorms liaison group and the CC's management committee and some key issues have already been drawn out. However, the draft Park Plan is not yet available for discussion. The draft Local Plan must be read in conjunction with it and two large State of the Park Reports, and the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Local Plan, which is another lengthy document. This is going to be a long furrow for us to plough, but the CC and its allies will get there

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

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.

## Electrified deer fence across the Angus hills

A group of landowners in the Angus glens have decided that one way to increase the number of grouse on their land is to eliminate the deer on it. So, they have constructed an electrified deer fence running for kilometres across the open hill, with electrified wires on each side of it.

Within the fence, all red deer have been eliminated. We have lived with deer fences around forestry plantations for many years. Electrified deer fence is something rather different and in other ways too this one is different. Arguing that this is being done for agricultural purposes, they have not been required to seek planning permission, but the CC is intrigued that no Environmental Impact Assessment was required and is enquiring into this. There are other reservations we have about this venture, but more of this in the next newsletter after further enquiries by the CC.



## STOP PRESS

### ***Emerging Issues and Recent Events***

#### ***Snaring of "Vermin"***

*This is an issue that is beginning to bug members and horror stories are starting to emerge. We shall try and have a report ready for the next newsletter.*

## **THE PARK PLAN**

*This plan will cover broader land use issues and will need close attention by the Cairngorms Campaign and others.*



## CAIRNGORM STORIES

*This issue, the Cairngorm Story is a tale from Drennan Watson*

### FINDING YOUR FORTUNE

She came dressed as a policewoman! I don't know why! Once a year in June members of the old Aberdeen Mountaineering Club celebrated its birthday in typically zany fashion by ascending some hill or mountain with everyone well loaded with good food and appropriate amounts of wine, champers, etc. We scoffed the lot in a three-course meal, followed by appropriate toasts to the mountains and so on, and so on - the sort of thing that horrifies mountain safety experts. Current members probably still do it.

Now there was often a theme to the day, like the Victorian ascent of Lochnagar with all clad in proper Victorian gear. The aimed-for summit that year was Ben Avon, or thereabouts. I can't remember the theme, but it was nothing to do with police!

I couldn't recognise her as a club member, but we were never a stuffy lot so "Hullo" I said "What brings you out with us today?" A home-counties accent came back at me. "I've always wanted to find a cairngorm, so I decided to come on your picnic and I had a policewoman's uniform."

Now there were clearly some misunderstandings here, not least about the uniform, but I decided to pass over that. It was the bit about the cairngorm that gave me cause for thought. I mean I have wandered on the appropriate mountains in Arran looking for cairngorms and found a few rather unpresentable specimens, but over many years in the Cairngorms - no such luck. There are some very rare monsters like the huge one on display in Braemar Castle. Even to find the normal ones the size of your thumbnails the cognoscenti have to go to just the right places and spend much time rooting around. But who am I to spoil the hopes of a bright sunny day and a nice noshup in the hills? So I just said "Best of luck" and wished her a good day.

Somehow we didn't really have contact until we met again in that watering hole much frequented by local hillwalkers and climbers - the Red Barrel in Ballater. "Did the day go well for you" I asked. Oh yes she had a really nice day. "Did you find a cairngorm?" Oh yes she had found one - a nice one! Mm! Surprise surprise! "Could I see it?" It was then the conversation took its really unexpected turn. "Well, I put it in the boot of the car." Now who would just stow a newly found cairngorm in the boot of the car instead of your pocket? I grew more curious. "I would really like to see it. Its not very often people just walk along and pick them up." She went outside, came back in, and plonked it on the bar. It was over a foot long, and weighed several pounds!!! (Over 30cm and 1-2 Kg for the metrically minded).

I didn't meet the lady again for several months but took the opportunity to ask after the fate of the great gem. "Well" she said, "It hung around the house for a time and we used it as a doorstep and that, but my husband and son go fed up with it in the way and we shoved it out into the garden." Some people!

### Quick Quote

*From interviews on landscape preferences of visitors to the Funicular, carried as part of a student dissertation, on Cairn Gorm, on days with poor visibility, visitors ascending on the Funicular show a strong preference for the view from the daylodge over the view from the top station. But more surprisingly, even on clear days "customers still favour the daylodge as the best perspective of the landscape."*

### POSTAL ADDRESS FOR THE CAMPAIGN

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