

The Manager,
Aviemore Highland Resort,
Aviemore,
Inverness-shire PH22 1PN

Dear Sir,

14 August 2006

Helicopter Flight Around the Cairngorms Offered as a Prize to Customers

The Cairngorms Campaign is an organisation with over four hundred members including several major recreational and environmental groups. It exists to promote the protection and sustainable use of the Cairngorms, including their wildlife, landscape, and scope for quiet and often adventurous outdoor recreation.

As repeated surveys of visitors to the area and the Highlands in general have shown, what chiefly attracts them to the Cairngorms is not the availability of hotels or other accommodation, but exactly those features the Campaign exists to protect and listed above. As research into tourism in such places all over the world demonstrates clearly, it is the protection of such ecologically based assets that ensures the longterm viability of the tourism industry. It is thus clearly in the interests of all tourism operators such as yourselves to protect these qualities and indeed surely an obligation on you to do so.

We were thus surprised at the contents of a promotional pamphlet you recently issued and which has been brought to the Campaign's attention by our members.

The pamphlet, referring to the MacDonald Aviemore Highland Resort, states it is "*Set amidst the ancient Caledonian pine forest and in the heart of the Cairngorm Mountains -----*". It is a considerable distance from your resort to the nearest fragment of the Caledonian pine forest. The resort is on the northernmost fringe of the Cairngorms, not in their heart. Indeed it sits between the Cairngorms and the Monadhliath mountains on the Monadhliath side of the Spey and, if anything, is more properly described as sited within that range - if any!

I put it to you that your statement goes beyond the merely misleading and would not be acceptable to any local trading standards officer or any advertising authority!

More disturbingly, the pamphlet goes on to promise a 1 hour helicopter flight for four persons to “*explore the majestic beauty of the Cairngorms and the surrounding area from the air.*” Helicopter flying in the Cairngorms is highly intrusive and has been a controversial subject for a considerable time on several grounds. In particular:-

- 1) It is highly disturbing to protected wildlife and does significant damage in that respect.
- 2) It is highly intrusive both to local people and to those many visitors, including the great majority of your own customers, who seek the peaceful enjoyment of the area.

In short, helicopter flying of the kind you are promoting is highly destructive of those very qualities of the area on which your business is based. As it states in your website,

“Although perhaps most famous for 'Operation Osprey' which helped re-establish Ospreys in Scotland, this area of Scotland's reputation for natural heritage conservation is almost unrivalled in the UK. A little patience, a little luck and a lot of peace and quiet will reward even the most inexperienced wildlife watcher with glimpses of the rare, lovely or just downright cute. From otters, badgers, pine martens and Scottish wildcat to vast herds of red deer, all of Britain's grouse species, the protected red squirrel, eagles, falcons, buzzards and, of course, osprey. Bring binoculars, be prepared to wait - the soft air and gentle silence makes time slip by unnoticed - and you won't be disappointed.”

One can only say that your customers will be disappointed in their attempts to observe wildlife if there are hired helicopters flying around, and there won't be much “*peace and quiet*” for your customers either, nor indeed for the customers of other tourism businesses in the area!

Surely it is apparent that promoting this kind of activity in the Cairngorms National Park is destructive:-

- 1) to your own interests as a business,
- 2) to the interests of the many other tourism businesses you share the area with and,
- 3) to the features of the Park that are the foundation of both its scientific and natural heritage values to the national and international community?

Can you therefore assure the Cairngorms Campaign that you will withdraw this offer of a helicopter flight as a prize in a draw, if it has not already taken place, and that a more thoughtful policy, mindful of the need to protect the valued features of the area on which your business is based, will be pursued in future, with no helicopter flights or similar damaging activities encouraged.

I look forward to hearing from you and would be happy to discuss the issues raised with you at any time.

Yours sincerely,

R Drennan Watson (Convenor)
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Forbes,
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