

THE CAIRNGORMS CAMPAIGNER

Spring 2010

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The Cairngorms Campaign postal address:

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



IT'S THE DREADED FUNICULAR AGAIN!

Environmental and recreational NGOs objected to the construction of the funicular railway on Cairn Gorm on two grounds. These were that it was environmentally unwise and the other was that it was economically unsustainable. If they had been proved wrong then, ironically, a popular functioning funicular railway would have proved liveable with. That has not happened. We discussed the funicular operation in detail in our Spring 2008 newsletter and the issue has become even more troubling. It was the special construction techniques needed to prevent serious environmental damage to soils and vegetation etc that were, to a considerable extent, the cause of the initial cost of £14.1m rising to £19.6m and made the operation much less financially viable. The objectors' prediction it was economically unsustainable has proved entirely correct – and with a vengeance!

Precise calculation of the operating company's, Cairngorm Mountain Ltd (CML), losses depends on how you do the calculation, but over eight operating years they seem to approach £15m. The Audit Committee's investigation also revealed the increasing public costs. A loan of £1m ratepayers'/taxpayers money from Highland Council was written off for £1. Cairngorm Mountain Ltd's £4.9m overdraft with the Bank of Scotland has been basically written off for payment of £147,000 by HIE (ie Us- the taxpayers). Then there was loss of rent when it was reduced from £513,000 to £100,000 followed by conversion of unpaid rent of

£585,000 to a loan to the company. HIE has made contributions of £760,000 to the company as working capital, and a further £774,000 between 1997 and June 2009 for consultancy and other work HIE now proposes to spend some £4m on repairs and maintenance on the facilities prior to seeking a private operator - really a hidden operating cost sent to the public for payment. And so it goes on!



Restriction on leaving the top station of the funicular railway is being pressed for by some local groups.

There is an even bigger bill further down the line. All windfarms in Scotland have financial provision for decommissioning built into their planning permission. Since HIE, as part of its wider strategy, was trying to have the area established as a National Park, decommissioning should have had a high priority in its planning to safeguard the landscape of Scotland's national park. Even national skiing guidance, issued in June 1997, prior to construction, set the need to restore the land and dismantle the facilities if skiing ceased as condition of planning. There is no provision for this in the planning permission for the development despite the fact that the operator of the facility, CML, was responsible for reinstating the

IT'S THE DREADED FUNICULAR AGAIN! continued

land when the funicular ceased operating and, as the landlord, HIE became responsible if CML was unable to meet this obligation. Initial estimates of this cost are £30m-£50m! if this is not to be met by the public purse, then about £1m per year would have to be set aside from the operator's nonexistent profits.

A key recommendation of the Audit Committee's findings is *"Given HIE's open-ended commitment to the project, the Committee considers that the new business model for the funicular must be founded on a realistic assessment of the future viability of the facility."* But is there any such sustainable business plan in the face of such costs and losses? As the Campaign, looking at the financial situation, urged in its evidence to the Audit Committee, *"The committee should be under no illusion as to the seriousness of the situation regarding the implications of the Funicular Railway and associated developments on Cairn Gorm and the need for action on the issue."* In a dissembling response to the Audit Committee's strong criticism of HIE's management of the whole project, HIE asserted *"The mountain railway plays a central role in the economy of the whole National Park area."* This is humbug! The whole operation on Cairn Gorm plays no role in the economy of Deeside, Donside or Atholl except to leave ski developments on the Lecht and Glenshee competing against another ski development on Cairn Gorm that receives subsidies they can only dream of. Considering the broader Highlands and Islands, there are further serious implications for employment. The investment comes from HIE's limited funding for job creation in the whole of the Highlands and Islands. If cost

per job created on Cairn Gorm exceeds that per job if the same funds were invested in other parts of the Highlands and Islands, then there is an overall loss of employment, not a gain. Initially, this cost for the Cairn Gorm development was assessed at the net grant equivalent cost per job as £11,000. Even on the face of it, if the project cost the public sector just the claimed £23m and there are the claimed 174.5 jobs, then the average cost to the public per job is about £131,457! In reality, the costs are far greater. How much more employment would the same money have generated spent elsewhere in the Highlands and Islands?

Closer to home, emerging proposals to make the venture pay will be troublesome. It is suggested that there should be a fee for using the car park. Is this to include walkers and climbers who have no interest in using the uplift facility or visitor centre and, if so, where is the money to be spent? To shore up losses on facility they don't use and probably do not want? Another proposal is to let people using the funicular exit the top station to reach the plateau areas – in other words to scrap the closed system. This would involve repayment of £2.6m to the EU as it was a condition of this grant that the closed system was enforced. It also raises key issues like the repeat of past damage to the plateau through excessive foottraffic. As said at the start of this article, a financially functioning funicular is liveable with and certainly beneficial to the local economy, but the reality is a good deal more troublesome and HIE must carry a heavy responsibility for this situation, which has no end in view.

Hullo Tetrix subulata

You are also known as the slender groundhopper and a relation of the crickets and grasshoppers. We didn't know you were there! In fact, we didn't even know you were in Scotland! But there you are, now found living happily in several sites in the Cairngorms. We have a problem however. You have only been found at several sites in Badenoch and Strathspey, but they are all threatened with housing development – including at An Camus Mor where they are threatening to build a huge scheme and the largest number of you have been found by Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group! It seems a cruel coincidence this, but it is not such a coincidence when you realise just how many sites are proposed for housing for which there is no evidence of housing need. Best of luck Tetrix old pal (well new pal). You will need it the way housing is going in the area.



Slender groundhopper 31st May 2010 on threatened An Camus Mor site.

ACTION BY THE CAMPAIGN

Publication of a Leaflet on Preventing Poisoning of Wildlife

The problem of illegal poisoning of wildlife, which we have discussed in previous issues, continues. Poisoned eagles continue to be found in and around sporting estates. It is a measure of the impact and scale of the problem that in Scotland, where red kites were reintroduced some years ago, there are only about 49 breeding pairs whereas in the parallel situation in England, there are now about 600 breeding pairs. Undoubtedly, eagles and other raptors that predate grouse may be a concern to sporting estate owners, but red kites have no impact at all on any game species. The poisons used to bait carcasses are simply indiscriminate and kill anything that comes into contact with the bait. Gamekeepers have denied in the press that they are the guilty parties but the Campaign has replied that the evidence is convincing. People who illegally poison wildlife are not only indiscriminately poisoning species and using toxins that it is illegal to use, they are simply setting themselves above the law and don't basically differ from any other criminal.

There are three reasons for issuing this leaflet. In the first place, if a hilluser comes upon a carcass of an illegally poisoned bird, it is a crime scene and should not be interfered with. Secondly, the toxins used are



Poisoned Eagle

extremely poisonous and one at least can be absorbed through the skin, so carcasses should not be touched. Thirdly, these offences take place in little frequented areas and only a small percentage of poisoned animals are ever found. Hillusers like hillwalkers and birdwatchers are those most likely to come upon them. They can act as an extra pair of eyes and help end this

indiscriminate and illegal activity. The leaflet can also be downloaded from the Campaign's website.

Mass Deer Deaths and the Winter

It has been a hard winter - the hardest for a good many years. Even in lowland areas around the Cairngorms, some nine feet of snow (about 3 metres) fell, largely in three main falls. Much of the higher Cairngorms is still under snow. During the winter, red deer found it hard to find enough to feed on and there are many reports of mass death of deer in the Cairngorms and elsewhere. The late spring, as cold winds persisted through much of April and up till mid May, made the situation worse, but it is when the starving animals start to feed on the fresh young growth that many more may die.

Deer forest owners and stalkers announced that this mass death was due entirely to the harsh winter conditions. However, the Campaign answered these assertions in the press, stating that the harsh winter was by no means the only cause and probably not even the chief cause. The fact is that many deer forests are simply overpopulated by deer. In the Glas Maol area for example, in recent years, a cull to bring populations into balance with what the designated Special Area of Conservation could sustain, a staggering near 8000 deer had to be culled! Enquiries around estates reveals a pattern that supports the Campaign's view. In areas with high deer populations and no woodland or forest shelter to which deer can resort, high death rates are reported among red deer. The heavy grazing pressure and lack of woodland or forest cover are linked in that the first almost inevitably leads to the second. In contrast on estates like Mar Lodge or Glen Feshie where deer populations have been reduced and shelter is accessible, there have not been mass red deer deaths.

The situation reveals what are probably basic flaws in the so-called deer forest system in Scotland. Firstly, the population levels that deer forest owners now try to sustain probably inevitably lead to an impoverished habitat that exposes red deer populations to such dangers as mass deaths in harsher winters. Secondly, red deer are not adapted to facing winter on the open hill. It is a forest animal, adapted to that habitat. Forest and woodland cover not only provide some much-needed browse in winter, but also shelter that greatly reduces energy loss from animals. In contrast, the reindeer in the northern Cairngorms, thoroughly insulated by their marvellous coats and well adapted to exposed arctic conditions, came through this winter in fine condition.

The whole situation points to the need for a rethink. If farmers treated their stock like this, they would be prosecuted and humane standards should apply also to wild animals! Red deer are not the property of landowners. Under Scots law, they are "res nullis" – that is they are a common property resource although,

ACTION BY THE CAMPAIGN

irrationally, the right to shoot them is confined to landowners. Given the tragedies of this winter, there is a strong case for the Deer Commission Scotland and the public in general to take a stronger hand in their management.



Mothers and calves may die together. Scavengers may then eat the carrion.



In hard winters, where deer populations are high, whole groups of deer can be found where they have died, usually from a combination of malnourishment and exposure.

Contributing to Initiatives by Scottish Environment Link.

The Campaign contributes to national initiatives of Scottish Environment Link (SEL) of which it is a member. Recently this has involved being represented on the Deer Task Force and in particular at this time has been involved on formulating SEL's views on the merger of the Deer Commission for Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage trying to ensure that the best of both organisations is preserved. This merger is now far advanced. A second national issue has been the development of SEL's paper "Living with the Land – Proposals for Scotland's First Sustainable Land Use Strategy. Section 57 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 requires Scottish ministers to produce a land

use strategy by 2011 and every five years thereafter. The Campaign contributed to the SEL paper that has now been submitted to government to influence the its sustainable land use strategy under the Act.

Funding Application to the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation

The Campaign really needs a full time development officer to expand its membership but currently lacks the funds to do so. It has therefore applied to the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation for funding to support such a full time post with part time administrative support for six years. This required first the development of a Business Plan and then preparation of a short document for the Foundation summarising the case for funding that got the Campaign past the first stage of the process. Thereafter a fourteen page funding application to the Foundation was written, plus Appendices, which laid out the case concisely and incorporated key elements of the Business Plan. It has involved an enormous amount of work that has taken up much of the time of volunteers. These funding applications are "*fiercely competitive*" but the application was of good quality and we can at least hope for a favourable outcome in a few months.

Evidence to the Public Inquiry into the Cairngorms National Park Local Plan.

The Local Plan is a key document in guiding development within the Park and hence over most of the Cairngorms.

The Campaign, while unable to be represented at the actual inquiry, supplied extensive written evidence on two major issues that concerned it. Concerning the spread of bulldozed tracks into wild roadless areas, the Campaign described the history of the spread of these tracks and the impacts of these and All Terrain Vehicles on open ground, and the environmental impacts of same. These last were illustrated by maps and fifteen

photographs. It pointed out the mismatch between the Park Plan with its relatively strong policies on the mapping and protection of wild land and the significantly weaker policies in the Local Plan and argued the stronger policies in the Park Plan must prevail since the Authority's Local Plan is subject to its Park Plan.

The second main issue was the lack of any significant policies on tourism development. Given that this is by far the major employer within the Park and that all experience elsewhere has demonstrated the importance of ensuring the right kind of tourism development is pursued, this is a major omission.

The full text of the evidence is on the campaign's website. www.cairngormscampaign.org.uk

IN BRIEF

Snow Ice and Deer Deaths

The winter was not only unusual for the depths of snowfall. Other unusual weather patterns included the lack of wind over long periods which at least prevented drifting that would have made travel almost impossible. Also, the snow melted on the surface during short warmer periods, then froze to form an icy crust. The larger stronger red deer were able to break through this to reach some food. In contrast, it appears the smaller roe deer were unable to do this so well and carcasses of numbers of them are being found. The frozen crust effect has had effects elsewhere it seems. Reports are now coming in of grouse species on the continent like the willow grouse, which shelter in snow burrows, being found dead in them, trapped there by the ice layer overhead they could not break through with their beaks.

Butterfly Leaflet on the Cairngorms

The Cairngorms National Park Authority has issued the latest in its leaflets "Butterflies in the Cairngorms". It is well illustrated and, if you are interested in what species you see as you go along, well worth having in your pocket. This is the latest in a series that has included others on dragonflies and on amphibians. They are available free from the Authority at 14 The Square, Grantown on Spey, PH26 3HG email enquiries@cairngorms.co.uk tel 01479 873535 or downloaded from www.spanglefish.com/cairngormsbiodiversity.

Deer Management and Pine Forest Regeneration on Mar Lodge Estate

When the National Trust for Scotland acquired Mar Lodge Estate, this was part financed by the Big Lottery which donated £11m with the aim that the estate and partly by a charity called the Easter Trust which donated £4m on the condition that the estate continue to be run as a sporting estate. The Easter Trust donation was widely regarded as an attempt by sporting interests to block a radically different management of Highland land developing. The estate contains, among other things, some of the most important and most degraded remnants of the Old Caledonian Pine forest and a chief aim under the conservation functions of the land was to revive regeneration of the forest. This inevitably involved considerable reduction of red deer populations.

From the start, there have been tensions between these two landuses. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) provided large annual grants to facilitate the regeneration and the frustration of SNH staff at lack of progress has been no secret. Partly the lack of

progress was due to resistance within the established estate staff and partly to pressure from surrounding estates with deer stalking interests. Now however, regeneration of tree seedlings is being achieved but the problem is how to maintain it by keeping red deer numbers down. Under the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996, Section 7 permits the Deer Commission Scotland to intervene to create Control Agreements in cooperation with the landowner where deer have caused, are causing, or are likely to cause "*damage to woodland, to agricultural production, including any crops or foodstuffs, or, whether directly or indirectly, to the natural heritage generally;*" This involves culling deer to prevent further damage or injury. The National Trust now seems to be moving to adopt this approach and request such an intervention. It is to be hoped that it pursues this policy vigorously and this most important area of the Old Caledonian Pine Forest really begins to thrive. The Campaign has written to the National Trust in support of a section 7 intervention.

Wild Camping in the Cairngorms

The new access legislation in Scotland guarantees the general public, not simply access, but responsible access. In general, responsible access is that where users respect the privacy of others in houses etc, and do not damage the interests of other landusers by, for example, damaging agricultural crops. Broadly, the legislation has functioned remarkably well, with few of the huge problems predicted by its opponents.

The legislation also permits wild camping – that is camping outwith official campsites and without the necessary permission of the landowner or tenants. Wild camping to old hillgoers and mountaineers took the form mainly of overnight roadside camps en-route to favoured destinations, or camps of one or a few tents in relatively remote areas far from roads but close to favoured mountains. But wild camping has now emerged as a problem in some locales, almost certainly due to the participation of a wider public. In the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, it is a major problem, especially up the east side of the loch. In the Cairngorms problems are localised in one or two places. One is along the old military road beside the river Clunie upstream of Braemar on Invercauld Estate where, "*There are recorded incidents of up to 90 tents being recorded on peak weekends, plus caravans and motor homes.*" The other is in Glenmore around Loch Morlich within the Forestry Commission's Glenmore Forest Park. Rothiemurchus estate has also seen problems but apparently on a lesser scale.

Talking Point

Promoting and Pro

Many things contribute to the mountain experience; the drama of the mountain scene, the wild weather, the sense of freedom to roam. For many however, the animal and plant life that clothe the scene are core to the experience. Due to human activity the environment is heavily degraded and some parts of it under threat. But there is an increasing diversity of species and a selection of these that might interest you and help you become involved.

Montane Scrub Project

Montane scrub is not a new Jacuzzi experience. Just above that line where altitude and exposure permit proper tree growth lies a band of dwarfed, distorted trees mixed with low growing shrubs adapted to the tough life. Often it is called the krumholz zone – meaning the crooked wood zone, reflecting the stunted distortions of the trees struggling to survive



Photo CNPA

On the Endangered Plant List

surviving sites, educational events and activities for the general public and land management professionals and demonstrating best practice for management and restoration of mountain. See their Mountain Woodlands DVD and how to get involved at www.mountainwoodlands.org.

there. Alongside are toughies like dwarf birch, mountain willow and woolly willow. Centuries of grazing and burning have almost eliminated it in Scotland until it is found only in a few locales like the Northern Corries in the Cairngorms so that it is now one of our rarest habitats. Now however there is the Action for Mountain Woodland Project (2009.2010) managed by Highland Birchwoods. They state, *"The woolly willow, so called because of its hairy appearance, is on the endangered plant list. Mountain woodlands benefit a wide variety of wildlife providing shelter and food to deer, mountain hares, and a wide variety of insects. The insects along with fruits and seeds, provide a food source for birds, small mammals and their predators."* With *"a range of activities to attract the general public"* they want to provide a training and opportunities for volunteers to develop an inventory of

Controlling Bioinvasion in the Cairngorms

Their biodiversity is a core value of the Cairngorms and you can read much about it in the Park Authority's website. Invasion of ecosystems by alien species can be highly destructive and is an issue in the Cairngorms, as described in our newsletter of Spring



Photo: CNPA

Giant Hogweed A bioinvader

2009. Well known examples of significance in the Cairngorms are the mink and the sika deer, which

interbreed with the native red deer. However invasive plant species are a problem and we would like to control this problem where possible. V. V. Hogweed that spreads initially along river banks, Rhododendron, bamboo. A first step is to find out where they are growing. We are inviting all to help them map their distribution. If you have seen or recognize such invaders, you are invited to record them. The Northeast Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBREC) provides biological information for the North East of Scotland. Visit www.nesbrec.org.uk.



Photo Laurie Campbell

Wildcat :The H

Talking Point

Protecting Biodiversity

With scudding clouds or crystal skies or the cleanlined curves of the Scottish hills that lead the eye to the horizon, the Cairngorms and the Scottish mountains in general afford, despite the many wildlife experiences they offer, their own special beauty. There are many initiatives to protect or restore it and some invite the general public to be part of the action. Here is a



Highland Tiger Project

The Scottish wildcat, quite a different species from your domestic moggie, is also endangered. Not only has it been persecuted until recently, but it interbreeds with the common moggie potentially leading to its loss as a distinct species. The Cairngorms are regarded as one of its last strongholds, although there is uncertainty as to how much interbreeding has taken place there. Now the CNPA, SNH, and other bodies have launched a joint project to protect it. *"The Scottish Wildcat has been identified in Scotland's Species Action Framework (SAF) as one of our most important species currently threatened by man made and natural environmental pressures. Under the SAF conservation action is required to improve prospects for its future survival as a distinct native species"* states Scottish Natural Heritage on the website of the project (http://www.highlandtiger.com/cairngorms_partners.asp) where you can learn how to report sightings, adopt a wildcat (sounds risky) and learn about responsible cat ownership. This last refers in particular to prevention of interbreeding between wild and domestic cats as cats breed, well – like cats! Not for nothing is there the old saying in northeast Scotland, *"Only two things in life are free- rhubarb and kittens!"* The chief culprits are farmcats but persuading farmers to neuter those may be difficult.

Rescuing the Red Squirrel

In the cutest animal stakes, red squirrels probably beat pandas! There are "Only around 121,000 red squirrels are left in Scotland today" states the website of www.scottishsquirrels.org.uk. That sounds a lot of squirrels but it is a lot less than there used to be. Chief culprit for their gradual demise has been the introduced and invading grey squirrel, which puts pressure on it through competition and above all by transmitting a virus to which it is extremely vulnerable. Most of Scotland's red squirrels are in the Highlands and the pine forests of the Cairngorms are important strongholds for them. At www.redsquirrelsofthehighlands.co.uk, there is a Highland Red Squirrel Project where you can see where they have been spotted, record your sightings, download leaflets and find out about events.

Highland Tiger

It is also a hazard and the CNPA is aware of this. Well known examples are Giant Redwood, Japanese Larch, and Japanese Cedar. The Park Authority is aware of the botanical interest, and can help you through the website of the Cairngorms (ReC), *"which collates, manages and promotes the Cairngorms of Scotland"* through its website at



Photos CNPA

Red Squirrels

IN BRIEF continued

The problems created include litter, including dangerous material like broken glass, damage to forests where they are present as people collect firewood and may start fires, plus deposits of what is politely termed, "human waste," *Abusive and drunken behaviour* and what it termed the "visual impact."

The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) has held an informal seminar of land managers, police and others to discuss approaches to the problem. Land managers have adopted various stratagems from placing boulders to block roadside camping to education. Rothiemurchus estate has focused more strongly on an educational approach. Use of byelaws is a possible option but apparently not yet being seriously considered. Increasingly, the focus is on reaching people before they wildcamp as with Scottish Natural Heritage's diverse educational programme focusing on "be a responsible camper."

The CNPA is currently pursuing policies including drawing parties involved together to develop best practice, accumulating more information on the problem, develop management approaches for each site and possibly some formal and informal campsites, education, and working more closely with the police.

Chronic Lyme Disease/Post Lyme Disease Syndrome

Lyme Disease is now a common topic of conversation among hillgoers given its apparent increasing prevalence, perhaps related to the increased tick population in recent years. Wikipedia has an extensive online description of the disease, its causes and treatment and BADA UK supplies information including on tick removal and tick repellants at its website at www.bada-uk.org. The disease is caused by species of bacteria of the genus *Borrelia*, transmitted from ticks when they suck blood from their hosts, including humans. It is normally treated with antibiotics. However, about one third of people who contract the disease continue to have diverse symptoms after treatment and there are now significant numbers of people with this problem called either Chronic Lyme Disease or Post Lyme Disease Syndrome. The causes and treatment of this condition are matters of sometimes fierce dispute on which the Campaign has no opinion, but standard

medical treatments seem to have limited success and there are hillgoers who suffer from it over long periods.

Some have reported significant success using alternative forms of medicine. Goran Stal, who runs the Forres Natural Health Centre (01309-675279) says he has seen patients with Lyme disease fairly regularly over the last 10 years and claims a high success rate using a method called Kinesiology to diagnose and work out a combination of herbs and nutrients for treatment. For those suffering intractable long term symptoms this may be worth considering.

Return of the Aspen

The aspen, the native poplar,) has had a hard time of it. Much beloved by all grazers, this is perhaps the chief thing that has driven it to fragmented populations scattered around the highlands – often on cliffs and in gorges like in upper Glen Feshie. In places like Yellowstone in USA, where there are wolves, one way to spot a wolf's den is to look for a clump of aspen, where deer and other grazers stay away and the aspen can flourish. It is a patchy producer of seed, seeding well only in some years and then only where male and female trees are close enough to ensure pollination. But aspen also throws up masses of suckers from its roots. Where you see clumps of aspen on Speyside for example, these are almost always all derived from one parent tree in this way. In short they are all one clone, with their roots fused and connected. What looks like a clump of individuals is really one single organism and some of these clones may date back thousands of years to when the ice age retreated. But now there is a rescue effort for the aspen. A group of aspen enthusiasts, The Highland Aspen Group, are coming to the rescue. (Secretary Mary Winsch at 01479-870247). Aspen have been grown from seventy clones from widely separated areas in a polythene tunnel, where they are being deliberately stressed to get them to seed to permit their wider propagation, which is where a wider group of enthusiasts might have a role. Aspen supports a whole range of insects and other species unique to it, so it will be a welcome return along with its spectacular autumn colours. At www.treesforlife, there is an Aspen Information Resource which has articles about aspen, associated plants and animals, propagation, mythology and folklore.

BREAKING NEWS

CNPA BOARD GIVES PLANNING PERMISSION FOR NEW SETTLEMENT OF 1500 HOUSES AT AN CAMUS MOR, ACROSS THE RIVER FROM AVIEMORE

As this newsletter went to press, the Cairngorms National Park Authority Board gave planning permission for a new settlement of 1500 houses at An Camus Mor, across the river from Aviemore, even overturning a recommendation from their planners to limit it to 1100 houses. The Park Plan has an important policy to *"Seek and share experience and knowledge from the management of other areas in Scotland and the world."* Over the last 40-50 years, much applicable to the Cairngorms about basic guiding principles on sustainable mountain management and sustainable tourism development, including in conjunction with protected areas like National Parks was learned elsewhere. Even the most cursory knowledge of these guiding principles would have caused a planning authority to pause for thought, for to place this settlement here breaches all of them.

Molloy and other internationally recognised experts on mountain management have emphasized that the battle to protect core mountain areas like the high Cairngorms is won or lost, not in the core, but, control of development in peripheral zones that act as a buffer. The high Cairngorms are surrounded by foothills that act as such a buffer except at Glenmore, where the glen penetrates to the summit of Cairn Gorm. Aviemore, developed as the main resort, lies directly at its mouth and it is no coincidence that most of the main conflicts in the Cairngorms have taken place there and that Glenmore is the most heavily used part of the Cairngorms, under much pressure. Problems of such major developments at key points occur abroad, such as with Este at the mouth of the Rocky Mountain National Park and, even more so, Canmore at the entry to Banff National Park. It would be a major error to site a further major development at this key location in the management of the Park.

A further issue is the question of "What are the houses in an Camus Mor for? You build houses, because **people need homes**, but there is already more than ample provision for affordable housing under the Local Plan! There is little extra local employment for potential residents of An Camus Mor. People may even commute from Inverness. There

being no train service of a frequency that permits easy commuting, this creates car commuting, which does not accord with the commitment to sustainable transport in the Park Plan

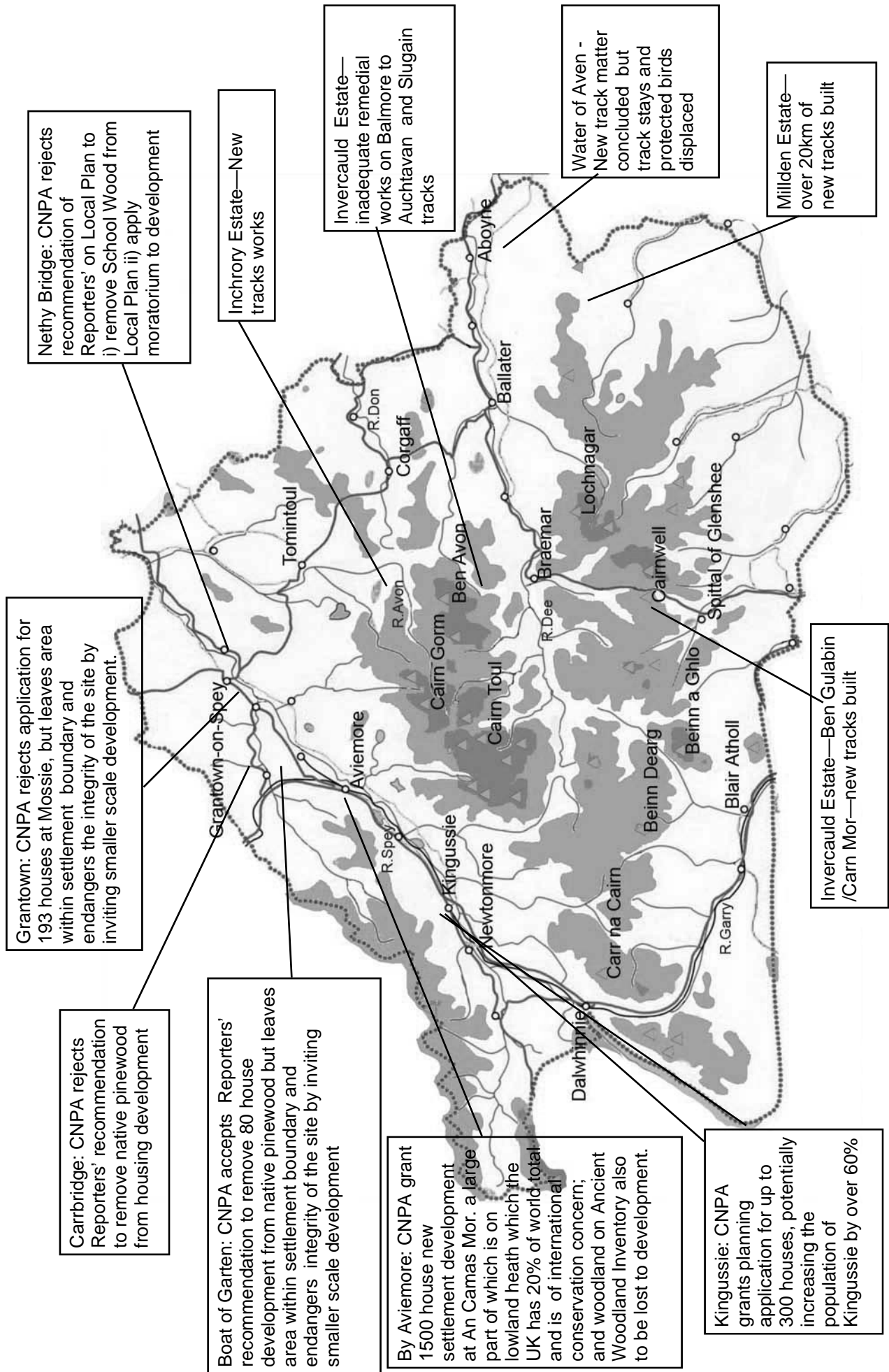
The more likely option is the majority of the houses will be sold as holiday homes. The period 1991-2001 saw some 1000 housing completions in the District for a population increase of only 800, a situation that indicates an occupancy rate of 0.8 as against a national average of well over 2. The difference is largely accounted for by the fact that a large proportion of these houses were simply holiday homes, addressing some wants but **not** housing need. This trend is well illustrated by the more recent development at Dalfaber in Aviemore, which has resulted in 60% of the housing being sold on the open market to second homeowners

All experience of tourism development abroad counsels against this! In the Alps in the French resorts, second home ownership is dominant. In Swiss and Austrian ones, government encouraged accommodation in small hotels or bed and breakfasts etc. As a result, large French resorts often have twice the number of bed spaces (35,000-40,000) of equally large Swiss and Austrian ones (often much fewer than 20,000). Annual occupancy in bednights in establishments in a French area like Savoie is only 48, but in the Austrian Tyrol averages 114 and much more of the money is spent on the local economy. In addition, there are massive negative implications the French approach in its scale of construction of buildings, roads, services, their local direct environmental impacts on landscape and ecological resources, their damaging social and economic impacts and their wider effects on carbon dioxide emissions and hence climate change. In short, permitting the development of An Camus Mor is a classic error in mountain management, tourism development, and the sustainable development of the Cairngorms National Park. In wider informed circles outwith the Park, this decision has badly damaged the credibility of the Board. More importantly, it will damage the National Park.

The Cairngorms Campaign website www.cairngormscampaign.org.uk

Email: email@cairngormscampaign.org.uk

GLOOM AROUND THE CAIRNGORMS—HOUSING AND BULLDOZED TRACKS IN MOUNTAINS



Book Review

The Cairngorms 100 Years of Mountaineering. By Greg Strange
Published by the Scottish Mountaineering Trust
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Although small mountains by Himalayan standards, the Cairngorms have played their part in world mountaineering. Climbing techniques evolved their have influenced mountaineering globally and they have been the breeding ground for mountaineers who have cast their ambitions much more widely. Prominent among them is Greg Strange, the author of this book. Like many who have grown to know and explore the Cairngorms, he lives in northeast Scotland that has always had a special relationship with the Cairngorms. He has painstakingly researched the history of the first 100 years of climbing in the Cairngorms, of which of course he himself is a significant part. Three hundred black and white and colour photos illustrate the 400 pages, many of historical significance. As the publishers state, *"It is a tale of human endeavour played out among the remote corries and cliffs of Britain's premier mountain range. The book recounts the pioneering activities of climbers drawn to the high hills of The Cairngorms from all over the country and it details the continuing development of summer and winter climbing on the famous granite cliffs located there, as well as on other lesser known cliffs."* The Scottish Mountaineering Trust is publishing texts on the history of Scottish Mountaineering, the first having been *"Ben Nevis – Britain's Highest Mountain."* This is the second in that series and it will be of interest to many who have spent long days in the Cairngorms.

Cairngorm Stories

MOMENTS IN CAIRNGORM DAYS

There are days, there are moments, that the Cairngorms bring that linger long, long in the memory. Here are two that happened!

LIFE-RISING, FLOWING, FLYING

It is a bright May day and the sun smiles unusually warmly on the Cairn Gorm-Macdui plateau. The breeze has stilled completely and I stride along in this untypical warm, balmy calm. Everything is stirring, nesting, emerging – for it is spring. I have hit a moment when the craneflies are emerging en masse, metamorphosed from soil-borne grubs into lesser "daddy longlegs" as we called them. Everywhere they rise gracefully on long slender whirring wings in a well-timed, synchronized, mass event that will permit mating in their brief, brief lives. I have never seen this event before in the Cairngorms and I stand to look close. That's when I hear it. Somewhere, all around, there is a sound of faint wild cries. Faint though it is, it seems to come from everywhere. But, I think, I think, I know that sound! I scan the skies, yet can see no source of it. This requires some thought, so I lie down on the warm sward on my back and gaze up into the blue skies – and an idea comes. I get out my binoculars, train on the heavens and slowly focus up – and there they are. I see the wild geese, thousands of them, in great skeins across the sky, and it is their haunting cries that are cascading faintly down on me. High above the Cairngorms, so high you cannot see it just with the naked eye, a great river of life is flowing north. It

is spring and life is rising, flowing, flying everywhere. I will make MaDui today, and far beyond, but for the moment I will lie here, on the warm ground, and just absorb the spring.

IN THE STILL OF THE NIGHT

It is Winter! I have climbed Lochnagar on my own, setting out late, and dark falls ere I reach the summit. Deep snow lies everywhere. After a short rest, I start for home heading out steadily on the long reach across the plateau. The night is clear, with enough moon to light my way but not so much to obscure the stars that carpet the sky along the Milky Way. Such nights are not so unusual, and always the stars leave you a little awed. But tonight is very unusual, for there is not a breath of wind - not even the slightest stir of air to touch my cheeks. There is a blanket of freshly fallen snow and it absorbs any sound almost completely. Thus, as I stride out across the plateau, it is not even the panorama of the stars, or the far unfolding waves of snowy hills that impress me most. It is the silence! Save my own footsteps softly crunching in the snow, there is complete quiet and I hear nothing. But yes I can! Behind me is the crunch of another set of footsteps falling regularly in the snow. I turn and look back. Who follows? No-one! I tramp on, thinking it is my imagination. But no – there they are again. This time I turn and slowly scan the

Cairngorm Stories continued

open snow fields of the plateau. Not only is there nobody there, but there are no other bootprints in the snow to mark where the phantom feet fell. I travel on and, when the footfalls persist behind, it is time to stop and think. It is a long thought, but as I turn my head and realise the footfalls move with it, I realise what it is. The world around me, the breathless air, is so utterly silent that what I hear is my own pulse throbbing through my ears! And then the silence really strikes. I gaze across the rolling waves of snowclad

hills to that horizon where the stars arch down to meet the hills. I listen to that great silence in all that vastness and slowly it became like a presence. I stand and stand and absorb this presence. I would have to march on down, and would reach Ballater and the Red Barrel pub before closing, and life goes on. But always one remembers and wonders. Perhaps behind all the silliness and din of life, the great silence is always there.

Photo: Greg Strange



Two lonely figures in a high and lonely place - Lochnagar!



Ptarmigan—on a warm still day in the high Cairngorms