

THE CAIRNGORMS CAMPAIGNER

Spring 2011

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>The Cairngorms Campaign has Lodged an Appeal Against Sections of the Cairngorms National Park Authority's Local Plan</i>	1-2
<i>Action by the Campaign</i>	3-4
<i>Talking Point The Grasslands of the Straths – Are We Protecting Those Most Valuable for Wildlife and Amenity?</i>	6-7
<i>In Brief</i>	5, 8
<i>Around the Cairngorms</i>	10
<i>Book review</i>	9,11
<i>Cairngorm Stories</i>	11-12

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The Cairngorms Campaign has Lodged an Appeal Against Sections of the Cairngorms National Park Authority's Local Plan !

The Campaign has lodged an appeal with the Court of Session against several housing development proposals under Section 238 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act of 1997. Taking a case like this to court is a serious step for the Campaign. How has it come to this? There are a number of issues that the Campaign has pursued with the Park Authority (CNPA) but the issue of the scale of housing development in Badenoch and Strathspey under the Draft Local plan is the one where collision in viewpoints is major.

National Parks are an entirely new development in Scotland. They require an approach specific to National Parks and their cultural and environmental significance to Scotland. It is important that all that has been learned from experience of the management of national parks and similar protected areas elsewhere in the world – now a considerable body of knowledge – is applied. More specifically, in the Cairngorms, those bodies of knowledge built up on mountain management and sustainable tourism, also considerable, need to be learned from. Unfortunately, this just has not happened.

As a key example, one of the main points made by the Campaign in its comments on

the Local Plan and in its evidence to the public inquiry was that the housing allocations for Badenoch and Strathspey were not only excessive but, effectively, a plan to build large numbers of holiday homes. There is an undeniable need to provide affordable homes or some form of social housing for local people, but tourism is the lifeblood of the local economy and it is important that sustainable tourism policies are followed. Building holiday homes on this scale is, effectively, a tourism development policy and one that experience elsewhere warns against.

In the Campaign's newsletter of Summer 2008, it was explained this leads into the hard versus soft tourism debate. By hard tourism is generally meant investment in large-scale developments like Aviemore Highland Resort, timeshare and holiday homes, and by soft tourism is meant development focused on small scale, locally owned, hotels, farm accommodation, bed and breakfast, etc. To demonstrate the point, the contrast between areas of the Alps in this respect is revealing. Comparing French with Swiss and Austrian resorts, in the French resorts, second home ownership is dominant. In Swiss and Austrian ones, government encouraged accommodation to be in small hotels or bed and breakfasts etc. Thus large



Photo Gus Jones

Part of the An Camas Mor site that is to have 1500 houses built on it.

The Cairngorms Campaign has Lodged an Appeal Against Sections of the Cairngorms National Park Authority's Local Plan continued

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). As a result, annual occupancy in bednights in establishments in a French area like Savoie is only 48, but in the Austrian Tyrol averages 114. Further, much more of the money spent on the soft tourism accommodation is spent locally than with the hard tourism.

7.10 para.28 "we can appreciate the disquiet of some objectors who suggest that ... too little emphasis has been placed on the first aim of the Park: *To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area* and rather too much emphasis on the promotion of the fourth: *To promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities.*"

The French approach is much more destructive 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. This was submitted in the Campaign's evidence to the Public Inquiry.

In Badenoch and Strathspey, this is demonstrated in the destructive impact of active or proposed housing developments on sites of very significant value for their wildlife, landscape and local recreational value. Objections to these are the focus of the Campaign's appeal to the Court of Session. The findings of the two reporters to the Public Inquiry largely supported the Campaign's evidence and objections, as demonstrated by the quotations from their report in the boxes. Indeed, given the measured comments typical of such reports, the criticism is scathing but little seems to have changed in the Local Plan in response to the reporters' severe criticism!

The rate of housing completions or proposed completions in Badenoch and Strathspey has increased from 96/year in the 9 years to 2003, to 134/year in the next 4 years to 2008 and 174/year in the period to 2013. Such rates far outstrip the needs of local populations for housing of any kind. Most will simply be sold as holiday homes – a fate that has already befallen even state housing bought by its previous council house tenants within the area. In particular, in its appeal, the Campaign has appealed against the construction of 40 houses in Nethybridge, 117 in Carrbridge, 300 in Kingussie (which would double the size of this village), and a massive 1500 at An Camus Mor. This last is directly across the river from Aviemore.

The proposed massive An Camus Mor development demonstrates the issues perfectly. Although the proposal had been part of the Structure Plan for the area prior to the designation of the National Park, the reporters pointed out that the creation of the Park changed the situation fundamentally and there was no requirement to follow that plan. The site itself has significant value for its biodiversity and this would be lost. More broadly, global experience in mountain management on the problem of protecting a central, valued, mountain core, a key function of the Cairngorms National Park, demonstrates the battle is won or

lost, not in the core, but in the scale and nature of development in surrounding areas. These core areas need a buffer zone between them and major development. In the Cairngorms, this zone can be provided by the foothill areas around the core, except opposite Aviemore. Here the road through Glen More leads directly to Cairn Gorm, where conflicts and pressures from human have been most intense. An Camus Mor would be directly sited in this area. Experience in management of national parks has also demonstrated the problems that arise from large scale tourism development within or on the margins of sensitive areas. Banff National Park in Canada provides a perfect example but others could be cited. In addition, Aviemore Highland Resort has now received planning permission for the second phase of its development plans - a massive £80 million mixed use development comprising residential, retail, office, community, leisure and environmental improvements, roads, additional lodges and hotel extensions to create a new village centre including 60,000 sq feet of retail space, 40,000 sq feet of office space, 280 homes and a seven story block of holiday apartments.

7.11 "In particular, we can understand the concerns of those who can find no support for a policy approach which is directed towards:
encouraging population growth in the Park rather than accommodating that which is projected;
allocating substantial areas land for market house building in the expectation that this will ensure the provision of affordable homes for young people and the working population;
encouraging a substantial increase in homes for commuters, retired persons or those purchasing second homes which will lie empty for considerable parts of the year."

In short, in terms of lessons learned on mountain management, sustainable tourism development and national park management, An Camus Mor is a classic blunder. It might be possible to argue the issues either way for and against it but the real measure of the problem with the Park Authority is that these issues really did not figure in their considerations. There seems to be an emerging gulf between the Park Authority and many of the voluntary environmental and recreational groups

7.19 para.31 "Nowhere in successive versions of the CNPLP, or in the evidence brought to the inquiry, have we been provided with a convincing explanation of why the increase in the numbers of houses required to accommodate the projected increase in population should be uplifted at all, and certainly not by the considerable amount of 50%. Similarly, we are also not convinced that an allowance [15%] should be made for uncertainty in the projections.

7.19 para.32 "the 15% uplift, as well as the 50% noted above, appears to have **been plucked out of the air**"

whose efforts were important in creating National Parks in Scotland. That gulf could grow into the constant conflict that has characterised issues in the Cairngorms for decades and which National Parks were meant to resolve and the failure to learn from global experience in these areas would be a chief cause.

ACTION BY THE CAMPAIGN

Consultation on Wildness by the Cairngorms National Park Authority

The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) is developing a policy for the identification and protection of wild land within the Park. It is viewable at www.cairngorms.co.uk/planning/localplan'spg_consultation/. The Campaign has coordinated its response with the North East Mountain Trust and discussed it with other voluntary organisations involved in the Cairngorms.

In general, the Campaign views this as an important and welcome policy couched within a constructive document, zoning the Cairngorms into bands A, B, and C in order of decreasing wildness. However, the value of the policy will only be realised if planning applications are only approved if they meet the 'development sensitivities' tests. Zoning carries the risks that those wishing to carry out developments will interpret lower bandings as areas where 'anything goes' but the document does, rightly, emphasise the need for decisions to take into account the impact of developments in lower zones on those designated as having a higher wildness value.

The policy defines wilderness as "A large area of unmodified or slightly modified land that retains its natural character and influence, without permanent or significant habitation. There is no wilderness within the Cairngorms National Park." The Campaign would argue that the Cairn Toul/Braeriach plateau and the Ben MacDhui plateau, above krumholz zone, is wilderness in this sense and it is a large area – at least collectively meet the criteria for wilderness under this definition. It defines Wild Land as, "An area where an individual finds the experience of wildness is particularly strong. It is entirely a personal response to a place and will therefore vary from person to person." This may have some truth in it but research and the shared experiences of recreationists show that what people experience in wild land/wilderness is remarkably consistent between people.

The policy document identifies four key attributes that characterize wild land: naturalness, ruggedness, remoteness and the lack of modern human artifacts. This is true, but the Campaign believes the Cairngorms provide some additional elements that enhance that sense of wildness. These are:-

- 1) Exposure to often hostile and unpredictable climate – enhancing scope for adventure experience and activities and the sense of exposure to "nature".
- 2) Peneplain effects on vistas and associated skies – that is the Scottish mountains are not fold-mountains like the Alps with large variations in heights between peaks and between peaks and lesser summits. They are derived from a peneplain, a low eroded down plain, raised up and thereafter eroded by weathering including ice. Thus, from even lesser summits, unimpeded

vistas to far horizons are revealed, giving an sense of expansive wild land..

- 3) Mix of degrees of wild land that, collectively, enhance each others' value. – People often go on a lifetime journey in the experience of wildness, perhaps initially experiencing semi-wild land and exploring wilder landscapes thereafter. The entire catena of wild landscapes with increasing levels of wildness permits such journeys over time and each has a value in itself and deserves appropriate protection.
- 4) Development of wild-forested landscapes. There is increasing opportunity to experience natural forested landscapes in places like Abernethy that are wild land of a distinctive character in the Cairngorms, and is unusual in the Scottish context, but many such forests lie in band B which is graded of lesser wild land value.

Hill Tracks in Wild Land

On the important issue of new "hill tracks", really vehicular tracks, the policy states that, "*It is necessary to balance the reasonable requirements of working land management to those of recreational and wild land interests. In general, if a new track is required, or repair of an existing one, then following good guidance (for example Constructed Tracks in the Scottish Uplands, SNH, 2005) should result in an acceptable solution. In some areas the wildness qualities are so sensitive that alternatives should always be considered.*" No – guidance on design of hill tracks in wild areas will not result in an acceptable solution because 99% of the impact is because it is there! There should be a strong presumption against new tracks in Band A, the wildest areas, and consent for new tracks in Band B should only be given in exceptional circumstances.

The Campaign submitted these and other comments to the National Park Authority.

National Trust for Scotland's Appointment of an Independent Panel to Review the Trust's Deer Management Policy on Mar Lodge Estate

Mar Lodge Estate contains large areas of degraded Old Caledonian Pine Forest and important areas of the Cairngorms plateau. Centuries of overgrazing, chiefly by red deer, had prevented regeneration of the pine forest. Much of the land was part of the Cairngorms National Nature Reserve, a designation now largely replaced by EU protective designations under the Habitats Directive. The National Trust for Scotland took over Mar Lodge Estate in 1994 but, through part of the funding coming through a charity called the Easter Trust, had to accept that the estate had a continuing role as a Hunting Estate, so grouse shooting and deer stalking continue. Under

ACTION BY THE CAMPAIGN contd.

management agreements with Scottish Natural Heritage, deer numbers were to be reduced to levels that permitted regeneration of the forest. This was a strategy that had successfully been applied elsewhere in the Cairngorms – most recently in Glen Feshie. For at least the first five years, this was not achieved. Much of the failure to achieve this has been widely attributed to resistance of estate staff responsible for deer management. Recent years however have seen major reductions in deer numbers and regeneration of the pine forest. This has created loudly voiced opposition locally, at least among neighbouring estates, who argue that deer from their ground then move into areas of Mar Lodge Estate where they can be shot. There is pressure to pursue regeneration of the forest, not by reducing deer numbers but by placing deer fencing around selected area, a measure that creates more problems than it solves. In response to this clamour, the Trust has now appointed an “independent review group” to review its deer management policy. This has set alarm bells ringing in the Cairngorms Campaign and among people with knowledge of the history of this area.

The Campaign is therefore sending a strongly worded letter to the Trust, urging it to stand fast by its deer management policies and pointing out, among other things, that the surrounding estates have, to a considerable extent, created their own deer management problems by overpopulating their ground with red deer, and fencing off sizeable areas of land for forestry that previously provided deer grazing. The Campaign strongly supports the Trust’s current policy on the estate of achieving regeneration of the pine forest and by will be pursuing this issue with the Trust.

Guided Tours for People from the Top Station of the Funicular to the Summit of Cairn Gorm

It remains the arrangement that people ascending in the Funicular railway may not leave the premises to ascend the summit of Cairn Gorm or to go onto the plateau areas. Cairngorm Mountain Ltd has obtained agreement that conducted tours on foot can be taken by rangers out of the top station to the summit and back. A Campaign representative went on an invited demonstration of the tour organised for people by the company. Apart from the fact that this could represent an erosion of the strict condition against access from the station, only part of the path up Cairn Gorm from there has been made into a hard, erosion resistant surface. The rest of the ascent route, and all the descent route, is on highly vulnerable tundra easily damaged by foot traffic and thereafter vulnerable to further erosion by wind and water. The Campaign feels that, if such tours are to take place, then first the footpath must be brought to a state where it can resist the impacts.

Other Action

At time of going to press the Campaign is also moving to take the Cairngorms National Park Authority to court over aspects of the local plan and a case has been lodged with the Court of Session in Edinburgh.

It is also in discussion with Park Authority staff on its sustainable tourism strategy.

WEBSITE HELPER NEEDED!

Are you good with websites and have time to act as a volunteer updating and developing the Campaign’s website? Our website has much potential but is neglected for lack of someone to love it and make it more useful to members and others.

If you think you could help in this way then please contact Iain Robertson at iain-robertson@usa.net

IN BRIEF

RSPB Acquires New Reserve At Crannach on Deeside

Crannach Hill forms of the southfacing slopes of the hills north of the north Deeside Road (the A93) just before the B972 cuts off to go through the pass of Ballater. In recent decades, 520 hectares owned by the Crannoch Woodland Group saw careful planting of native trees and widespread regeneration of the forest. The RSPB has now acquired this area as a reserve in March 2011. The RSPB describe that area as "a beautiful and tranquil woodland site" containing Scots pine and birch regeneration as well as some small ponds. It states, "The habitat in this area supports priority species such as black grouse, Scottish crossbill and a wide range of other woodland birds." A formal opening of the reserve is being planned later this year.

Estates Within the Cairngorms National Park to Become Wildlife Estates

Atholl Estates, in Perthshire, the Allargue Estate on Donside and the RSPB-owned Abernethy Estate are to pilot the development of wildlife estates. What are wildlife estates? The concept is interesting but the name rather misleading. The initiative developed in Europe. Essentially it is a scheme whereby hunting estates, or at least those on which hunting is a major activity undertake voluntary commitments to conserve habitats and wildlife through "sustainable sporting management" (Although Abernethy was acquired by the RSPB, the previous owners retained hunting rights on it). This initiative was developed in Scotland by the Scottish Rural Property & Business Association and the Scottish Estates Business Group. Participating landowners must make 10 commitments. These include undertaking active wildlife management following a long-term integrated wildlife management plan, sustainable shooting, stalking and/or fishing, managing for a sustainable balance of habitats and species, and compliance with all legal requirements and relevant Scottish codes of practice. Estates who sign up to these 10 commitments are expected to move to the full Wildlife Estates quality label through an assessment process.

The RSPB's Pete Mayhew, representing the Abernethy Estate which includes Loch Garten nature reserve commented:

"We are delighted to have the Abernethy Estate included as one of the first areas within the National Park piloting WES. We look forward to following through with our WES commitments and helping the SRPBA and SEBG demonstrate estates can and do have a successful and harmonious relationship with wildlife and conservation aspirations".

This will be an interesting space to watch.

Pollution in Mountains

Mountains lie largely outwith the most industrialised areas. Few large sources of pollution feed into their headwaters for example, and we tend to regard them as a cleaner, more pristine environment. However, they are vulnerable, especially to air pollution, as the whole acid rain issue revealed clearly. A recent report on the New Scientist emphasized this, stating "Dangerous levels of arsenic and cadmium have been found in snow samples from Mount Everest, 7000 metres above sea level. Pollution from Asian Industry is probably to blame." (New Scientist, Dec 4 2010, p. 72, referring to Soil Survey Horizons). This parallels surveys showing the diversity of pollutants found in the lochan in the main corrie of Lochnagar and mentioned in previous newsletters.

Progress in the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill in the Scottish Parliament

The Scottish government announces its intention in 2009 to bring forward a Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill which sought to "*modernise game law; abolish the designation 'areas of special protection'; improve snaring practice; regulate invasive non-native species; change the licensing system for protected species; amend current arrangements for deer management and deer stalking; strengthen protection of badgers; change how muirburn can be practised; and make operational changes to the management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest.*" Much progress has taken place since then including changes that will be important in the management of land and wildlife in the Cairngorms. Liability for wildlife crime like the poisoning of raptors will no stop simply at keepers who do this, but apply also to those who employ them, who would be subject to a licensing system. Deer management will be guided by a code of practice and damage by deer justifying action will no longer be serious damage but simply damaged, with sustainable deer management now being clearly defined. Legislation on muirburn practice will also be changed with Scottish ministers able to alter the dates within which it can be done. It will be interesting to see how these and other changes work in the Cairngorms.

Green Sustainable Energy Sources and Windpower

Few issues have generated more controversy between environmentally aware people than windfarms. On the one hand, they are regarded as potentially significant sources of "green" renewable energy and on the other they have massive landscape impacts. Certainly, although the CNPA has opposed windfarms within the National Park, they increasingly figure on views from the Cairngorms.

Among the claims made by supporters of windfarms are:-

1. "Wind turbines will generate on average 30% of their rated capacity over a year."
2. "The wind is always blowing somewhere."
3. "Periods of widespread low wind are infrequent."

Talking Point

The Grasslands of the Straths – Are We Protecting

Comparing Surveys for Macrofungi and Green Plants

THE FUNGI – THE NEGLECTED ORGANISMS

Most people are only aware of fungi when they see toadstools but the great bulk of the fungal body, probably over 90% of it, is below soil. Fungi are everywhere. They are important to soil fertility. Other species cause human, animal or plant diseases that can destroy crops, as with the fungus that causes late potato blight produced the Irish potato famine of the 19th century. Others are important sources of medicines like penicillin. A very important group, called the mycorrhiza, form close relationships with plants, penetrating their roots, receiving nutrients from the tree and in turn providing minerals from the soil to the tree. When you look at a tree like a birch or pine or aspen, you may think you are looking at just one organism, but really the tree is a complex combination of the tree and its mycorrhiza. The study of the fungi is much neglected. We have known for a long time that many plants can send signals to each other through giving out chemicals into the air that can cause neighbours to strengthen their defences when the issuing plant is attacked by a pest or pathogen. Now it has been discovered that such signals can be sent via the threads of the fungal bodies, called hyphae, which connect between roots of neighbouring trees.

The Cairngorms Campaign focus on the Cairngorms ER
In terms of wildlife conserva
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lowland grasslands, many o
grasslands over a long perio
of plants, insects and other
which are nationally rare. In
are under threat from housi
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that are of high conservatio
identified so that they can b
protection. But how do you
value of these sites? The C
Authority (CNPA) surveyed
as described below, using th
a rich green plant flora as th
conservation value. But do
plants adequately assess th
of such grassland sites? Th



Meadow Coral Branching coralloid structure and golden yellow colours of this fungus makes it easy to distinguish.



Scarlet Waxcap a lovely medium sized species has a stem up to 6mm across and gills that join the stem by their full depth. The cap is scarlet and often feels greasy



The survey showed surveys of such sites based solely on assessm
do not identify all sites of conservation value. Relying solely on pla
conservation importance of grassland sites will miss sites of conse
organisms, particularly the fungi. Fungi should be taken into accou
grassland. Specifically, certain sites being considered or likely to b
development have been undervalued for their conservation value
needs to reassess its assessment techniques for measuring the bi
expanding the diversity of biological groups taken into account. A f
interest of grasslands within the CNPA should be undertaken to es

Left Dark purple Earthtongue These strange club shaped structures can grow singly or in clusters This is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan Species

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All Fungi Photographs: Liz Holden

Talking Point

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has always had a broad environment. In addition, an outstanding feature of Badenoch and Strathspey is the presence of sites which have been identified as being of high value and contain a wide range of plant and animal species. Increasingly, these grasslands are being lost through developments or changes in land use. It is important that such sites of high value are correctly identified and given appropriate protection. How do we measure the conservation value of Cairngorms National Park sites? A wide range of these sites, from heath to bog, the presence or absence of a particular species is a measure of their value. How do we do a survey using just green plants? How do we measure the overall conservation value of sites where there are more than just plants? What other groups of living things should be considered? What methods should be used to measure the conservation value of sites?



Splendid Waxcap In this beautiful species the cap is dry and smooth. This is one of the species that indicate good quality waxcap grassland



Blackening Waxcap starts bright yellow or orange. With age or handling the whole fruit body turns black but retains a conical shape throughout.

community of fungi that have been found in long established, low nutrient sward grasslands (managed by either grazing or mowing) are recognized as being excellent indicators of the conservation value of this habitat. Among them, are a group collectively called CHEG species and the habitat they are found in is called 'waxcap grassland' as many of them are called waxcap fungi producing brightly coloured, easily spotted, fruiting bodies above soil in season. Such grasslands, as a habitat, are threatened across Northern Europe by agricultural improvements, housing, reforestation and other activities. These pressures are certainly found in Badenoch and Strathspey where a comparison between sites using green plants as the measure and using waxcap fungi would show whether green plants were an adequate assessment of biodiversity. It is also whether some sites were being undervalued in this way and hence inadequately protected. The campaign also identifies important sites in Badenoch and Strathspey. The Cairngorms Campaign has commissioned a survey of the presence and diversity of fungi by Liz Holden.

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LIZ HOLDEN BA

Liz Holden BA is a mycologist – someone who studies fungi, which she has studied for 25 years and is recognised for her expertise in the “macrofungi” – those fungi that produce large fruiting bodies we see as mushrooms, toadstools and other forms. She is a self-employed field mycologist involved in surveys and in projects with Plantlife Scotland when it hosted ‘Lower Plant and Fungi Project’. She worked on the production of a number of fungal information leaflets, including ‘Scotland’s rare tooth fungi’, ‘Managing Trees in Scotland’s open spaces for lichens, bryophytes and fungi’, ‘The wild and wonderful world of Scottish fungi’ and two identification guides to the fungi of Scottish pinewoods. She is a tutor at Kindrogan Field Centre on Identifying Fungi. She was an obvious choice for the Cairngorms Campaign seeking someone to survey macrofungi in Badenoch and Strathspey.



ment of green plant diversity. It is important to assess the conservation importance for other sites in any future survey of sites to be considered for housing. The Cairngorms National Park Authority therefore aims to assess the biodiversity of sites by conducting a further survey of the fungal diversity of sites to establish the distribution of fungi on grasslands and to inform future surveys of what constitutes an indicator of a good waxcap grassland in a local

IN BRIEF continued

4. "The probability of very low wind output coinciding with peak electricity demand is slight."
5. "Pumped storage hydro can fill the generation gap during prolonged low wind periods."

Frequently, opponents have questioned the validity of such claims made for windfarms. Now, Stewart Young, in a report for the John Muir Trust based on a 2 year from 2008 to 2010 of study of windfarm output, concludes none of the above are true. He concludes, for example, that windfarm output was below 20% of capacity more than half the time and below 10% of capacity over one third of the time. He states, *"Over the two-year period studied in this report, the metered windfarms in the U.K. consistently generated far less energy than wind proponents claim is typical. The intermittent nature of wind also gives rise to low wind coinciding with high energy demand. Sadly, wind power is not what it's cracked up to be and cannot contribute greatly to energy security in the UK"*.

Broader concerns over the whole green energy scenario are also being raised by Axel Kleidon of Max Plank Institute for Biogeochemistry (New Scientist 2 April 2011). Looking at the whole system of energy reaching earth from the sun, he postulates that it is a mistake to assume that energy sources like wind and waves are truly renewable. Take enough energy out of the global system through windfarms and wave energy based generators he opines and you can disturb the global atmospheric energy system with consequences as severe as climate change. He calculates that humans already use 5-10% of the "free" energy available and that the limits on what can be utilized in this manner are much more severe than realized. One of the first effects would be a reduction in energy yields of windfarms. *"We have more effect on Earth's energy balance than all earthquakes and volcanoes put together"* he is quoted as saying.

This research has a long way to go yet before firm conclusions can be drawn but Kleidon, who is regarded as a leader in this new area of research, is being taken seriously.

Fords of Avon Bothy Retained as a Shelter but not an Overnight Bothy

The Fords of Avon Bothy, sited on the northern bank of the Avon on the Lairig an Laoigh pass has become so dilapidated replacement had to be considered. This was a difficult decision for the RSPB, the landowner, with arguments both ways. This is a wild area where, arguably, buildings should be absent but this bothy has a role as a shelter for those using this route finding the river in spate. A final compromise has been that the bothy will be replaced – but at the same size and as a mountain shelter not as an overnight bothy and that the Mountain Bothies Association will maintain it on that basis.

Fires in the Hills and Broader Countryside

The recent exceptionally dry spell has seen some spectacular fires raging over lengths of the countryside. How are they being lit? Answers to that seem uncertain – at least as yet – but there has been a tendency to issue the usual warnings to walkers and others to take care. It is not at all clear how walkers are thought to be a possible cause. Cigarette butts thrown away smouldering? Long observation has shown that smoking is simply non-existent in the rambling, hillwalking and mountaineering community and the same seems to extend to wildlife enthusiasts and ecologists. Campfires setting light to the surrounding vegetation? Nowadays, the same people use simple gas stoves. The reality is that the great majority of fires in the countryside are caused by the people who live there and the visiting public have little to do with the problem. Keepers losing control of muirburn are a prime example. The recent fires in gorse stands could have another cause. Acreage under dense gorse stands does not count in adding up the Single Farm Payment that farmers now receive as their subsidy. This year the EU has been checking up on this on the ground. What a temptation to set a light to such stands and bring the area within that recognised for payment. Is this the cause of some of these fires?



The Cairngorms Campaign website www.cairngormscampaign.org.uk
 Email: email@cairngormscampaign.org.uk

Book Reviews

This issue, we review three books, two of which tell much about the people who live or lived in the Cairngorms

The Cairngorms and Their Folk Folklore and History from the Glens of Royal Deeside and Beyond, by Ian Murray

Published by Lochnagar Publications 2010 ISBN 978 1 873891

This Ian Murray's third book about the area where he grew up in and lives. Before were "In the Shadow of Lochnagar" and "The Dee from the Far Cairngorms." He draws not only from fond memories of the people he describes but by recording his conversations with them and their recollections of times past. This may not be the book for you if your passion is confined the high hills of the Cairngorms but, if you are interested also in the people who lived in the now often deserted or semi-deserted glens, this is a straightforward and satisfying read. Many were colourful characters, some hardy old men living alone in isolated houses and farming their sheep. The death of Rob Bain from Richarkarie in Glen Gairn last July removed one such character. He was the last person to have even a smattering of the form of Gaelic indigenous to the area and his mother the last reasonably fluent speaker of it. Rob's diverse adventures and talent for a good story were such that, even at his funeral, "the kirk was dirlin wi laughter." Much of the oral history recorded describes a life that is largely gone or going. Many of the ruins in remoter areas of glens like Glen Gairn were their abodes. It is tempting to think of the traditional lifestyles described as once fixed, but of course they were always changing and still are. Even the farms they worked were the results of often harshly enforced lowland enclosure movements that removed the old "fermtouns" with their common grazings. Over much of the Highlands, Gaelic was replaced by English, but in the glens of the Eastern Highlands, it was replaced among the folk on the land by Broad Scots. Ian Murray quotes them in their native tongue, but even that is now under pressure from English. This constant change is one reason why this kind of history is important and interesting. It gives a track to time and at least permits us to ask what change is good and what not.

It's a Fine Day for the Hill – Hills Folk and Wildlife 1935-62 by Adam Watson

Published by Paragon Publishing 2011, 181pp

ISBN 978-1-907611-58-2 £29.99

This is a collection of accounts of Adam Watson's earlier years, especially in the hills, five being repeats of articles already published in climbing club journals and other publications describing his encounters with people he met through the hills and who influenced him. It is not an autobiography but, though each chapter is a story that stands alone, the largely temporal order of the chapters, from childhood to adulthood, conveys a sense of an unfolding story and life. A river of life flows through it and the passion that drives the river is his intense interest in mountains and, above all, the Cairngorms on which he is outstandingly the foremost expert. Encounters with those who became his friends provide windows on key aspects of the Cairngorms that attracted that intense interest. Bob Scott, stalker at the Derry in Mar Lodge Estate, introduces the world of the sporting estate and deer stalking; Seton Gordon the world of wildlife study, and Tom Batey and Tom Weir the world of hillwalking and mountaineering. Experiences are often described with details of conversations or events of decades ago; this made possible by Adam Watson having kept a daily diary over the years, and it is the detail that often conveys most the flavour of the moment and times and the meaning of his experiences. Some of the colour photos are excellent given they were taken decades ago, and some of the moments described are poignant – like when one character is on the roof of the house of Mrs Bain, the last person reasonably fluent in Deeside Gaelic thus left with nobody to speak to in that ancient tongue, he hears her voice echo up the chimney as she speaks to herself in Gaelic. For those with a broad interest in the Cairngorms, it is an interesting read, rich in human interest.

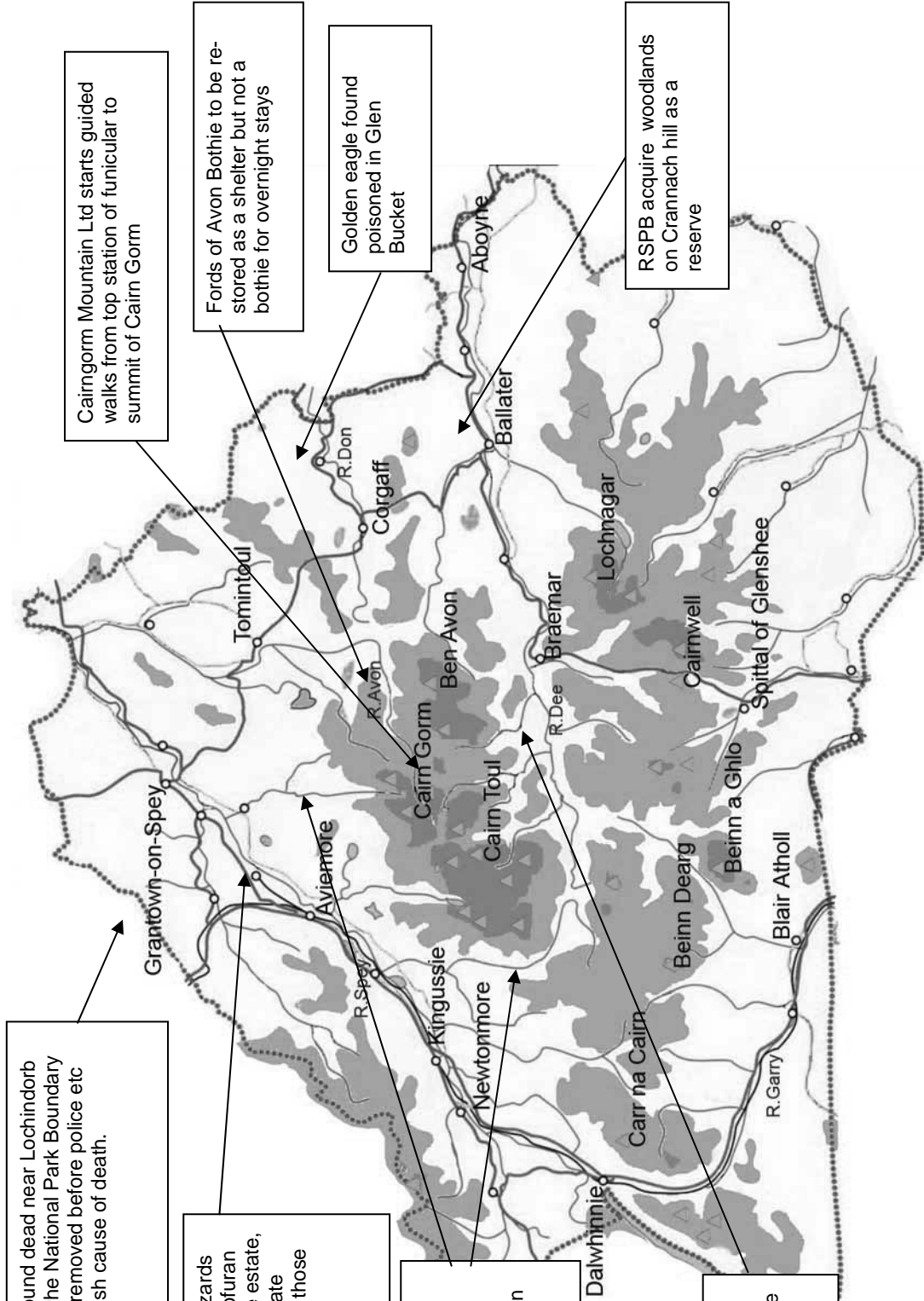
AROUND THE CAIRNGORMS

Sea eagle found dead near Lochindorb just outwith the National Park Boundary but carcass removed before police etc could establish cause of death.

Seafield Estate staff report two buzzards killed by the banned pesticide carbofuran found near a poisoned rabbit on the estate, near Boat of Garten. Police and estate staff have appeal for help in tracing those responsible for the birds' deaths.

Glenfeshie and Abernethy (RSPB) Estates both develop long-term plans for re-establishment of native woodlands, including tree-lines and montane scrub, mainly by reductions in deer numbers.

National Trust for Scotland sets up "independent" review panel on its deer management policy in response to local criticism



Cairngorm Mountain Ltd starts guided walks from top station of funicular to summit of Cairn Gorm

Fords of Avon Bothie to be re-stored as a shelter but not a bothie for overnight stays

Golden eagle found poisoned in Glen Bucket

RSPB acquire woodlands on Crannach hill as a reserve

Book Reviews

***Cool Britannia – Snowier Times in 1580-1930 Than Since* by Adam Watson and Iain Cameron,**

Published by Paragon Publishing 2010 ISBN 978-1-907611-46-9, £12.99

Earth's climate has always varied – sometimes dramatically. One of the problems of studying human induced climate change is distinguishing that phenomenon from this background natural variability. This is an account of evidence indicating climate change in recent centuries by investigating a wide range of historical accounts by travellers and others. The authors found a surprising amount of such evidence and weigh it up critically, focusing on observations of snowfall as indicators of severity of the winter and intensity of snowfall. In separate chapters, they consider various parts of the Scottish Highlands including the Cairngorms, the Scottish Lowlands, and England and Wales. In a very brief concluding chapter of 2 paragraphs, they conclude, "To sum up, it is reasonable to conclude that more snow lay on the hills of Britain during the 1580s to the early 1900s than in decades since 1930." This is not really a book for the general reader perhaps but it will certainly be the authoritative account of such evidence for those sharing an interest in climate change.

QUICK QUOTES

The Birch Was Sent to Charm Us

"We cannot leave a discussion about the forests of the Cairngorms without mention of the birch woodlands. If the Scots pine was made to impress us, then the birch was made to charm us. Where the pine is stern and sturdy, the birch is delicate and subtle, giving an impression of fragility that belies its toughness. With its shapely hanging fronds, its silver bark and deep pink twigs strikingly exposed in winter, the marvellous spring flush of green leaves that cast a light shade in summer and turn to fiery autumn tints, there is not a season of the year when the silver birch does not give depth and charm to the landscape. In the pale northern light, its striking range of textures and hues are enhanced so that it enriches many an otherwise unremarkable scene. The common birch shares less of these visual attractions, but in spring, its scent perfumes the air of woodland walks."

From "A Hillman Looks at the Conservation of the Cairngorms" by R D Watson in "Caring for the High Mountains – Conservation of the Cairngorms" Ed J W H Conroy, Adam Watson, A R Gunson

Cairngorm Stories

Lonavey's Gun and Dirk and the Hidden Cave

When landowners asserted the exclusive rights to shooting game like deer and grouse and taking salmon, not everyone accepted the moral basis of this claim. Indeed even to this day, many old highlanders hold to such a view. In the 18th and 19th centuries, some highlanders achieved considerable fame, or notoriety, depending on your view, for their freeranging poaching of game over the Cairngorms in the Forests of Atholl and Mar. They called themselves the "freeforesters." Several of the most famous were Mackerachers, that is MacFarquharsons or Farquharsons, once a locally powerful clan. Among them, in the 18th century, was Donald Mackeracher of Braemar, known as Rhuad, that is the Red Mackeracher or more simply Roy. Another was Ian, that is John, Mackeracher from Atholl. He was known as Lonavey, after the Gaelic "lonach" meaning greedy and "fiadh" meaning deer, reflecting his keenness for hunting deer. He was a famous marksman. The two men hunted together until, one day, when hunting a famous great stag, Ruadh approached it thinking he had

felled it with his shot. Instead, he found himself engaged in a desperate fight with the wounded beast and was himself killed when the stag gored him with its antlers ere it died from a thrust by his dirk.

Lonavey's "poaching" exploits were known to the Duke of Atholl. The same Duke annually brought a team of agricultural mowers up from England to work for him and also organised a shooting competition with them. Several years running, to the Duke's chagrin, they won! He sought someone who could win against them. Despite Lonavey's transgressions among the deer of Atholl, his name was urged upon the Duke. So keen was the Duke to win the competition, he agreed. The English mowers proved as good shots as ever and things looked bad for the Duke. Only when he moved forward to shoot last did his English opponents realise Lonavey had only one hand. The other had been cut off for killing deer in the then Royal Forest of Atholl. Lonavey's shot found the target exactly, saving the day and winning the Duke the competition.

Cairngorm Stories continued



Photo Iain Robertson

Cloud inversion on Carrn Liath of Beinn a'Ghlo in Lonavey's country

When pursued by keepers and forest rangers, if there were no snow on the ground that would permit them to be tracked, Lonavey and Rhuad would head for Carr an Righ and mysteriously disappear near a particular rocky face leaving their pursuers baffled. They had discovered a secret, hidden cave. After the death of Ruadh, Lonavey continued to hunt alone. After Lonavey won the shooting match for the grateful Duke, a blind eye was turned on his illegal exploits with deer until a new Duke arose who showed no such tolerance. Lonavey knew that, one day, he would likely be captured. So, thinking that if he were imprisoned for his "crimes" his famous gun would be confiscated, he left it along with his dirk in the cave. He was indeed imprisoned, but expected to be released after a short period. It did not happen and, as the weeks and months rolled on, he confided his story of the cave and the gun to another prisoner who carried the tale on his release. Men such as Lonavey are men of the open hills. Prison is a death to them and Lonavey died there, leaving his story behind but no clue as to the whereabouts of the cave.

Down the generations the story was told, of the gun and the dirk lying in the hidden cave in a position where, once a year, the sun shone through an overhead opening onto them. Many searched for the cave but none found it. With time it was uncertain if it was all fact or fable. However, there came another Mackeracher, also an Ian (that is John) Mackeracher or Farquharson, an admirer of his famous namesake and who also shot

deer as a freeforester over the Forest of Atholl. In the 1870s, when shooting deer in the Forest of Atholl, he was about to gralloch a stag he had just shot when he saw three men coming after him swiftly. He ran off round the hill towards a rocky face and finally hid behind large boulders. Lying there, he saw a rocky overhang near him with a space underneath which he squeezed into for concealment. There he found himself in a wide chimney which he climbed up to ensure his feet could not be seen by his pursuers. To his astonishment, he found an opening that led off into a substantial cave.

As he lay there, he could hear the voices of the baffled pursuers as their search of the rocks proved fruitless. Slowly, John Farquarson began to wonder, "Have I found Lonavey's cave and, if so, are the gun and the dirk here?" He spotted light coming in through a small slit high up in the cave face. Could this be the light that lit upon the gun and the dirk at the right time of year? A slow search of the cave using lit matches revealed the remains of the gun and dirk, lying where Lonavey had left them, untouched and unseen by any in over 150 years. Farquharson took the rusted remains home with him where they were kept in his family until accidentally thrown out one day. The cave however remains.

These and other exploits of the freeforesters are described in W McCombie Smith's long out of print book, "The Romance of Poaching in the Highlands" from which this tale is drawn.