

THE CAIRNGORMS CAMPAIGNER

Autumn 2009

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ORGANISED OUTDOOR EVENTS, CHARITY FUNDRAISING AND THE CAIRNGORMS

Four years ago, a proposal for a sponsored challenge hike in the high Cairngorms in aid of Aid International came to the attention of the Cairngorms Campaign. Criticising people who organise events like this is, on the face of it, like criticising people who help old ladies across the road. Nonetheless, the

we would firmly oppose the use of the High Cairngorms for such an event.."

WHY?

Charity fundraising in mountains has quite a long history but seems to have been increasing in recent times. One member recently completing the climb of Tower

Ridge on Ben Nevis arrived at the summit to find several thousand people supporting the Marie Curie Foundation. The latest issue of The Scottish Mountaineer invites 100 people to high tea on the same summit, each raising £100 in sponsorship to raise funds for the charity Mountain Aid that wants to help injured hillwalkers and promoting mountain safety. There are also an increasing number of "challenge" events. It's all commendable, but there are issues that need dealt with.



View across the Cairn Gorm MacDui plateau towards Beinn Mheadhoin showing the thin patchy vegetation.

Campaign's letter stated, "The work of organisations like yours providing funds for international aid is clearly important, as events in southeast Asia have starkly demonstrated, and are of a kind that everyone would want to support. The preparations you make in briefing participants and overseeing the event with local guides also demonstrate the care with which you plan such events. It is with reluctance therefore that I have to say that



Erosion on footpath on Cairngorm MacDui plateau showing broad devegetated band due to foot traffic.

Organised Outdoor Events, Charity Fundraising and the Cairngorms continued

These issues associated with charitable, other mass access events and promotion of mass recreation are arising increasingly in the Cairngorms. For example, an event called "The Real Three Peaks Challenge" proposed to use a route taking in the summits of, MacDui, Braeriach and Cairn Toul. The trend has induced the Cairngorms National Park Authority to propose a new policy on promoting recreation in the Park. The Campaign responded to the consultation in an unusually tough manner.

In the case of the above Real Three Peaks proposal, some of the key issues emerge. The high plateaux of the Cairngorms are not only of high value for wildlife and for "wilderness" experience. They are also extremely vulnerable to the impacts of human use. The rock is granitic and the soils derived from it thin and infertile, especially at high altitude. Up there, the growing season is short and there are many freeze-thaw cycles which increase the vulnerability of soils and plants. Scotland's oceanic climate is one of the world's windiest, particularly at these altitudes and this exposure further limits plant growth. The passage of feet soon kills plant cover leaving bare ground along pathways created. The frequent high winds pick up mineral particles from the bare ground exposed and hurl them downwind like a sandblasting of plants. Damage to vegetation near footpaths through this can be measured 50 metres downwind!

When the old chairlift in Coire Cas permitted many people to ride to near the summit of Cairngorm, counts showed the number of people on the Cairngorm – MacDui plateau increased a hundredfold. The spread of bare ground there through these impacts was measured. This evidence was scrutinised at a six week public inquiry in 1981. When European Union aid was sought to construct the funicular railway, the EU imposed a condition that nobody be allowed out of the top station to walk to the summit of Cairn Gorm. Subsequently, slow recovery of plant/soil systems has been recorded on the plateau. Globally it is perhaps the best-researched and well-established example of the damaging impacts of mass recreational access on tundra and it has shaped planning decisions.

When the Real Three Peaks proposal emerged, landowners affected pressed the Park Authority to provide leadership by stating there should be no mass organised events on the Cairngorms Plateaux but were disappointed and finally opposed it themselves. If the Park Authority will not stand up and say, the Cairngorms plateaux are not the place for mass recreational events, then where are we?

At a seminar on Developing Guidance for Outdoor Access Events at the Lecht Centre 26 Nov 2007, participants'

answer to question 2 on the role of the Cairngorms National Park Authority was, "*CNPA is viewed as playing a co-ordinating and signposting role rather than having a specific managerial or decision-taking function. The Authority would be valued primarily as a host, co-ordinator, adviser and facilitator, acting as a letter box and providing a monitoring function on outdoor access events within the area covered by the Park.*" But this is not adequate and it is not what the Park Authority's remit says.

The key issue for the Campaign was whether either the current Access Strategy or the proposed addition "*Promoting recreational opportunities responsibly within the Cairngorms National Park*" meet requirements and it was clear they would not.

The Authority's Cairngorms National Park Outdoor Access Strategy, aims to provide "*a strategic approach that suits the special circumstances of the Cairngorms National Park*"; "but in fact, except in extremely general terms, the guidance does not tackle these special circumstances at all. It contains statements like "*the mountain areas contain some of the most sensitive plants and animals that have adapted to live in this arctic-like climate.*" Paragraph 5.3.3 of the Park Plan commits the CNPA to "*Protect the more fragile areas of the Park from pressures arising from outdoor access and recreation.*" The proposed addition to the guidance simply states, "*significant areas of the Park are environmentally sensitive*" but there is no specific guidance. Few commercially-minded promoters of events will voluntarily seek advice that might require them to curtail or abandon them. What the guidance needs to do is be specific on such issues

It must also be remembered that the terms of the Habitats Directive, under EU law, as applied to the extensive Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas within the Park, are stringent with regard to their environmental protection and hence to a very large proportion of the Cairngorms even outwith the Park. The Park Authority is subject to EU law which overrules Scottish access and National Park legislation. Collectively, Scottish legislation on National Parks and EU environmental legislation significantly redefine "responsible access." A responsible Park Authority charged with conservation of its Park must assert the primacy of environmental values and resources that, apart from their inherent value, are the foundation of the local tourism industry and of outdoor recreation. Especially since there are powerful and emergent lobbies promoting events, sometimes in the form of local businesses and using the cache of the National Park! Failure to do so would be failure to assert statutory priorities at Scottish and EU level!

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

ACTION BY THE CAMPAIGN

Upgrading of Cairngorms Campaign Website (www.cairngormscampaign.org.uk)

Simple shortage of time when so much has been happening in the Cairngorms led to the neglect of the Campaign's website. However, after much work, the website has been upgraded and a great deal of information placed on it about the actions of the Campaign. There are still improvements to be made and these are ongoing and we are interested to hear from members about any suggested improvements. Email us at email@cairngormscampaign.org.uk

Evidence to the Public Inquiry on the Local Plan for the Cairngorms National Park.

Giving evidence directly at a public inquiry can be very time consuming and it was beyond the Campaign's resources to do this at this Inquiry. However, extensive evidence was written addressing two key issues. One was the continued loss of wild land through bulldozed tracks being built into roadless areas and the creation of tracks through the use of All Terrain Vehicles and landrovers on vulnerable soil/plant systems, especially at higher altitudes. This evidence was presented with a wide range of photographs showing the damage to landscape, soils and vegetation. The other issue was the links between the housing policies within the plan that permitted the construction of hundreds of holiday homes that then became effectively a decision on the path for tourism development without any thought through policies on tourism development. The evidence drew on research into the impacts of different approaches to tourism development in different Alpine countries like Austria, where a focus on small family hotels is favoured, against France where holiday homes were the norm, with subsequent environmental and social damage and poorer returns to local people. The evidence is viewable in full on the website under Publications.

CC's Participation in Creating a Joint Response to the Scottish Government's Consultation on Deer Management Under the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill

The Campaign participates in Scottish Environment Link's Working Party on Deer and participated in discussions that resulted in a joint response with five other voluntary organisations addressing some twenty questions posed by government. It is not possible to cover all the answers here but key ones are worth mentioning. We supported the principle that landowners with the right to kill deer should also have a legal obligations to manage them and to manage them sustainably. The introduction of a statutory code of practice was not adequate. There needed to be a statutory Deer Management Plan where voluntary approaches failed and that whatever approach was used it must take heed of both private and public interests in land as in the management of other natural resources. It

was recognised that deer management had to be collaborative between landowners but that the present voluntary system of Deer Management Groups had largely failed. Future deer management arrangements had to include the interests of local communities and other interests, not just landowners. To help achieve this, the group supported extension of the powers of the Deer Commission for Scotland and gave examples of how they should be extended. The full text is accessible on the website under News and Information.

Maintenance of Objection to Housing Application for 20 Houses in Kingussie

In our spring newsletter we reported that the Campaign had sent a general letter of concern over a proposal to construct houses on a site in Kingussie where it would not only damage protected species like the red squirrel but also remove a valued amenity for local people including some in a home for the elderly. Planning permission was refused and the developers' appeal has now brought about a Public Inquiry. The Campaign has maintained its stance.

Letter of Concern Sent to Ramblers Association

The Ramblers Association (RA) HQ in England, having recently encountered financial difficulties related to the financial crisis, suddenly announced a drastic reduction in its staff in Scotland. Although Scotland has only a tenth of the UK's population, it was where many people from England come to do extensive walking. During a recent ascent of Ben MacDui from the Coire Cas carpark via the Northern Corries on a fine day, one committee member counted some fifty people along the way. About 90% were on holiday from England, almost all were regular visitors to the Cairngorms, and most were well informed about the environment around them. The RA in Scotland was also a major factor in obtaining the freedom of access these walkers were using. Letters pointing these things out were therefore sent to the Ramblers Chairman and Chief Executive expressing concern at the scale of redundancies of RA staff in Scotland the consequent reduction in RA's activities. A polite response was received from the chairman saying basically that the financial situation forced it on them but being uninformative on the reasoning that led to such large scale cuts in funding to the RA's Scottish office. The letter is viewable on the website under News and Information.

Finalisation of Business Plan and Funding Application to Esme Fairbairn

Following finalisation of the Business Plan, a two page summary of the funding proposal had to be prepared for the funding application to Esme Fairbairn Foundation to get us past stage one is a two stage process. This had to be carefully worded and a second draft prepared after discussion with committee members and has been submitted with the funding application.

ACTION BY THE CAMPAIGN

Withdrawal of CC's Objections to the National Parks Core Paths Plan

The CNPA is required to produce a Core Paths plan that will provide a diversity of recreational opportunities in each locale. The CC responded to consultations on the draft framework of plans and policies supporting many of the proposals but raising objections on certain issues. A meeting was held between CC a management committee member and the relevant CNPA staff member to resolve these matters. CC's objections chiefly concerned the interpretation of some key terms in the framework like "reasonable". For example CC felt "high quality path" should not basically mean "highly engineered". Paths should provide a high quality experience, and that might mean leaving them challenging or rather wild. There was an implied assumption in the wording that paths could only be upgraded, whereas there were some circumstances when paths needed downgraded or removed from the list. Taking a broad view, the CC felt there was a need to ensure that there was provision for the different types of users over a wide area and that, at present, the plan for core paths provision was not well

integrated with the protection of wild areas. After negotiations about rewording of the plan to meet most of these points, the CC felt able to withdraw its objection and did so.

Expanding Awareness of the Cairngorms and Issues Affecting Them

It has been arranged to enter a series of short articles in the Scottish Mountaineer, the magazine of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland discussing issues in the Cairngorms, in particular those that have implications for the broader area of the Scottish hills and mountains. The first of these, called "Trails, Tracks and Wilderness" appeared in the issue of May 2009 and it is hoped others will follow.

Campaign's Response on Additions to the Cairngorms National Park Authority's Guidance on Access

The Campaign responded to the consultation in detail and this is discussed in our lead article.

DEATH OF SIR EDWARD PECK KCMG

Diplomat, Mountaineer, Linguist, Author, Member of Cairngorms Campaign Management Committee

Ted Peck was, for many years, a member of the management committee of the Cairngorms Campaign or its predecessors. He was fluent in German and French. He had a distinguished career as a diplomat, serving in places like Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, India and Kenya (where he was the High Commissioner). He went on to serve in important positions such as Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee. He had a life long passion for mountains and mountaineering that led him to explore the Alps, the Himalayas and other ranges including the Scottish mountains, which he loved. When he retired in 1975, he and his wife Alison converted a farm steading at Easter Torrains, Tomintoul and it became their "mountain retreat." In the tradition of the "scholar mountaineer" he wrote a good guidebook to the area and a history of the Battle of Glenlivet which took place nearby. Close to the Cairngorms he naturally took a particular interest in them and through this became involved with the Campaign where he served on the management committee for many years. At his funeral in Tomintoul on 15th August, attended by the convenor and members of the management committee, one became more aware of two things. At 93 when he died, we were losing direct contact with that past of the second world war and events leading to it, as he had personally witnessed Hitler's march into Austria during the Anschluss and General Franco's army march into Barcelona, and all that followed. Second, was his capacity to convey his passion for mountains to his children, grandchildren, and even great grandchildren who held him in deep affection and respect.

What specifically was his contribution to the Campaign? It was subtle rather than high profile, but important. Anyone listening outside the door of management committee meetings during animated discussion on Cairngorms issues would not have heard Ted's voice loudly raised. He contributed the quiet voice of the good listener and the wise council of one well versed in the ways of the world. He will be remembered with respect and affection. Those attending the funeral and others made donations to the Campaign totalling nearly £1800 to date for which The Campaign is extremely grateful.

IN BRIEF

Happy Housing in Badenoch and Strathspey

In its evidence to the public inquiry into the National Park's Local Plan, the Campaign criticised the policy of accepting large scale provision of holiday homes as part not only of the housing policy but also equally as part of its tourism development policy. Below, as far as we can check in what is a changing situation, is the current status of house building in Badenoch and Strathspey, which far outstrips local needs.

| Location | No of Houses | Habitat |
|------------------|---|---|
| Nethybridge | 70 Under construction | Almost all on AWI woodland and long established meadow |
| Aviemore | 330 under construction or with planning permission | On long established native woodland and long established meadow |
| Carrbridge | About 100 with outline planning permission | On long established native woodland and long established meadow |
| Boat of Garten | Application for about 80 houses | In pine woodland containing important capercaillie population |
| Kingussie | 300 houses proposed and subject of planning appeal by developer | All in long established fields/ AWI woodland/woodland edge. |
| Grantown on Spey | Application for about 100 houses | On long established meadow |

AWI = Ancient Woodland Inventory

Collectively, this is about 1000 houses plus another 1500 included in the proposed Cambus Mor development near Aviemore and not counting a substantial number already built. It far outstrips the housing need for the area and reflects mainly a demand for holiday homes. The scientific and wildlife value of the high plateau and other famous environments of the Cairngorms are much publicised and valued, but there are other environments that are rather neglected. There is increasing evidence that the woodlands and grasslands of the straths harbour a much wider range of plant and animal species than realised. Equally importantly, this is the environment with its plants and fauna, which the people who live there and those who visit on holiday experience around them day and daily as an intimate part of their lives. Such resources are not usually lost through a few major unwise decisions damaging to them. More often they die the death of a thousand cuts and the table above could be such a story.

QUICK QUOTE

By Mr Donald Macdonald, chief executive and founder of McDonald Hotels and Resorts Ltd.

"It is time to put aside the baggage and troubles associated with this resort over the past 20 years and for all concerned to grasp the lifeline which the bank has given us."

FAREWELL AVIEMORE HIGHLAND RESORT HULLO MACDONALD AVIEMORE HIGHLAND RESORT LTD

By July this year Aviemore Highland Resort, owning hotels, leisure centre and exhibition centre in Aviemore, was £58.8 m pounds in debt, losing up to £10,000 a day and went into administration! The situation has finally been rescued by a complicated bit of "corporate restructuring" through which McDonald Hotels and Resorts Ltd, who already operated some of the facilities, bought up the complex. Local suppliers were owed over £900,000 and will be paid but others such as HBOS which was part owner of the complex, and were owed £46m, are less fortunate and also saw their 60% share in the old complex decline to 50%. The new owners have now received planning permission for an £80m redevelopment scheme including building of numerous houses (on planning condition that 25% of them are "affordable"), the refurbishment of the hotel and building of childrens' fun factory, a cinema and a club house at their golf course. Building of the houses has been delayed until the housing market revives.

In Brief continued on page 8

Talking Point

RIVERS AND LOCHS

We read mostly of the Cairngorms' mountains but less of their surely under appreciated waters: their deep lochs in the glens, high lonely lochans and wild rivers. It is their wildness, their diversity and their relatively unpolluted state that make them such a key part of the scene. At 1215m on the Braeriach plateau lies a small lochan, reputedly the highest in Britain. Ice age glaciation formed the lochs. Some sit in deeply ice-scoured trenches like Loch Muick or Loch Avon. Others, like Loch Kinnord, formed in "kettle holes" – hollows that developed as ice sheets buried below glacial moraine melted after the glaciers' retreat. Others formed behind dams of glacial moraine stretching across glens and left at the snouts of retreating glaciers.



Frog at over 800 metres on Cairn Cloise in southern Cairngorms

Like other high central mountain masses, the Cairngorms harbour the headwaters of large river systems and, through these rivers, what happens in the high Cairngorms can have impacts far outwith them. The three largest rivers of course are the Dee, Spey and Don but providing a unifying theme in many landscapes. Formed by glacial moraine stretching across glens and left at the snouts of retreating glaciers.



The Glas-Allt-Shiel Prince Albert, the largest of the Cairngorm Lochs



Damselfly nymph – a mini predator



Mayfly adult emerging

The mineral richness of water strongly influences the scenery. Cairngorms are largely made of mineral poor granite, giving the lochs and rivers a soft, milky appearance. The mineral richness of water strongly influences the scenery. Cairngorms are largely made of mineral poor granite, giving the lochs and rivers a soft, milky appearance.



Looking up the Avon towards Loch Avon

Not surprisingly, due to this, there is no great variety of flowers. UK rarities adapted to the water lily and slender leaved pondweed are characteristic of the flora, drawing water and living not only on the surface but also on the riverbank, the river flows through the mountains such as at depths of 20m in the lochs. The water is rich in minerals that is the deposits of stones, silt and sand. The water is rich in stoneflies and other insects. The water is rich in stoneflies and other insects. The water is rich in stoneflies and other insects. The water is rich in stoneflies and other insects.

Only 13 of the 55 species of British salmon are famous is the Atlantic salmon. Salmon leaving seawater yet salmon with fresh water have swum an astonishing 90km in less than two days! The brown trout, and even 843m in the Dubh Loch. That mysterious animal the eel emigrating to the Sargasso sea to spawn. Both Spey and Dee are valuable rivers. In the 1990s but the catch has since declined.

Talking Point

OF THE CAIRNGORMS



...s favourite spot, from across Lock Muick, ...chs.



The famous paternoster wells below Lochnagar. (so called because of their similarity to rosary beads.)

the catchments of the Tay and the rivers of the Angus glens are also fed giving, collectively, 5,677 km of river habitat and after the ice's retreat, they are fast flowing, turbulent, and wild in that they are largely unmanaged by man through bankside

ale and diversity of wildlife it supports. This is heavily influenced by how mineral rich are the rocks it flows over. The high living mineral - poor waters. Around these are richer rocks, from which flow more mineral rich streams. Even so, most rivers poor waters – ie oligotrophic.

recent glaciation of the area and the harsh climate, ring plants and ferns in these habitats but they e harsh mountain environment like the pillwort, least ndweed. Hardy mosses and liverworts are more ng their nutrition from the minerals dissolved in the rocks and stones and also some surprising places – high lochs. In the substratum of the rivers and lochs, t and organic matter in their beds, live the larvae of ese are an important food source for fish and other xtends well either side of the banks where the river river flows there too, in quantity. Thus, as you stand below and behind you in that substratum and thus the e too.

ish freshwater fish live in the Cairngorms. The most ealice parasitising salmon die within 48hours of the h live sealice are caught at Braemar, meaning they n against strong currents and climbed 300m in less the most widespread fish, lives at well beyond 450m hain of Beinn a'Bhuird. Lurking in many corners is ven in high lochs. Growing slowly, very slowly, before o spawn, in Loch Insh they take 25 yrs to reach 50cm, and 28 in Loch Pityoulish where one of 48 years and 87cm was found! e for salmon fishing and whitewater canoeing. Ten thousand salmon were caught annually on the Spey during 1950s and eclined, mainly due it is thought to problems at sea.



Lochnagar in the spring with the ice breaking up.

Talking Point continued

What are the threats to these lochs and rivers? Bankside trees and shrubs stabilise banks and provide a valuable food supply as foliage and insects fall into the rivers and woody debris forms important habitat for many aquatic species. Historically, highland deforestation would have reduced fish populations significantly. Given the need to control flooding and restore fisheries, we should restore such riparian woodlands. Pollution from distilleries and settlements has little impact due to good treatment of effluent and the rapid throughput in rivers, but historically other impacts are there. There is clear evidence that acid rain has damaged lochs since the mid to late 19th century. In Lochnagar, core samples show increases in mercury, lead, copper and zinc since the 1860s, stabilising about 1970. Agricultural pollution is the most likely cause of the loss of important brown trout fisheries in the Don and most of its tributaries. Another concern is bio-invasion. After the ice, the three lamprey species, the salmon, brown trout/sea trout and the eel recolonised from the sea. They migrate between salt and freshwater. But man introduced species like the pike and perch, deliberately or accidentally. Giant hogweed is invading the upper Don, and an exotic aquatic plant species of *Ranunculus* is a serious problem on the Spey.

Almost one fifth of the total flow of the Spey is diverted from its headwaters into other catchments to generate hydroelectricity, much reducing flows in a river like the Tromie. More seriously, long lengths of the Garry have been reduced to small flows among stones by other hydroschemes and there is a campaign to restore it. Extraction for domestic and industrial use is controversial on the Spey. The extraction from the mid Spey to supply northeast Scotland involved an agreement with the Spey

Fisheries Board that, if river levels fall below a certain point, Scottish Water must purchase water from the hydro companies to sustain flows. The extraction from Loch Einich to supply Badenoch and Strathspey is being abandoned in favour of a subsurface flow beside the Spey but this too is part of the Spey's flow and may affect it.

One value of these rivers and lochs that is not widely realised is their value to scientific research in helping us understand what is happening to our planet. Water quality has been monitored for many decades and these long runs of data are valuable. The low alkalinity of the water makes them sensitive to impacts of pressures like acid rain making them important indicators of long-term environmental change. As an example of their research value, Lochnagar is part of the UK Acid Waters Monitoring Network and has been included in two major European Union funded research projects and the International Surface Waters Acidification Project. Studies on whole catchments have also been done. Within eight lochs live populations of the fish the Arctic Char, whose tendency to develop different forms through evolution make it important in the study of divergent evolution. In addition, tiny radio transmitters inserted into stomachs of salmon traced the paths of these fish as they migrate.

The future has many challenges but recent protection offered Cairngorm freshwaters by catchment plans for the Dee and Spey and designations under the Habitats Directive and the Water Framework Directive for these entire catchments at least give us greater means to meet them.

IN BRIEF continued

RABBIT! RABBIT! RABBIT!

In our Spring issue we posed the question, "Where have all the rabbits gone?" Well certainly, despite a Spring resurgence of young rabbits, their populations don't seem to have returned to the normal pestilential levels, but one of our member at least is still troubled by them. Ann Keiller Greig has some 65 rabbit-infested acres (About 27 hectares for the metric among us) near Ballater. She wrote to say she had employed "Vermin Control Officers." Within a week, using ferrets, guns with silencers and nets, but no poison, traps, gas or snares, which she opposes, they had killed 900 rabbits. There were she says still hundreds left. Doubtless these are not idle and the Vermin Control Officers may have to return. That's rabbits for you. We hope she manages to control a population which must damage her land at such densities.

Planning Permission Refused for Wind Turbines

At its meeting on eighteenth August, the Marr Area committee of Aberdeenshire Council refused planning permission for the construction of seven wind turbines on Pressendye Hill, a

prominent hill whose outline is a major landscape feature from various directions. In particular, the hill stands above the Howe of Cromar and the village of Tarland. This is an interesting decision in that the hill does not lie within the Cairngorms National Park or even, except at the widest definition, within the Cairngorms, but the Cairngorms National Park Authority objected on the grounds that it was visible from the Park and was an unacceptable landscape impact.

Review of National Parks Governance

In 2008, government launched a consultation on what it described as "a strategic review of Scotland's two National Park Authorities (NPAs)" as "part of the Scottish Government's commitment to 'More Effective Government.'" The Campaign's response was covered in our previous newsletter. In reality the review was far from strategic and focused only on certain aspects of the structure and functioning of the Authorities. A key input was a commissioned review which deduced that the boards were too large and the workings "clunky" but with no real evidence to support this view. A summary of the responses states that most respondents agree the Park Authorities should stay as

IN BRIEF continued

free standing non-departmental public bodies and that a ministerially chaired National Parks Strategy Group be set up but that respondents disagreed on the reduction of the sizes of Park boards. The Government has decided to reduce the number of members on the National Park Authorities' boards, create a short life National Parks Strategy Group and retain both National Park Authorities as freestanding non-departmental public bodies. We are concerned that the reduction in board members as proposed will increase the dominance of local representatives. This means also that government will do what it originally intended to do except appointing chairmen of the Boards from on high by the Minister. It is noteworthy that this is the only one of the government's original proposals that would require amendment to the Parks Act, Schedule 1, section 11 (1) and of course the SNP couldn't guarantee to win that statutory amendment in the Parliament, especially in time for the Board changes! Now, are we being cynical? Was this consultation or insultation?

FAREWELL TO ALMA

Alma was a golden eagle, one of several birds fitted with a radio transmitter, in her case to help track and study the movement of eagles and the influence of human activity on their nesting and breeding. Her death in the Angus Glens through illegal poisoning demonstrated that influence all too clearly. She was reared in Glen Feshie and fitted with a satellite transmitter on the 2 July 2007. Her movements have been recorded on an hourly basis ever since followed by, among others, many schoolchildren interested in the project, as she wandered the length and breadth of the Eastern Highlands during her short life. Alma's poisoned corpse was of course only found because she was fitted with this transmitter. The truth is there have been many Almas of various species like sea eagle, red kites, hen harriers which were never discovered. If this blatant and widely publicised example of illegal persecution of protected species leads to effective action, Alma's death may yet bring some benefits. Further information on Alma is at www.roydennis.org and further comment on this issue at; <http://www.scottishraptorgroups.org/news.php>.



Photo Roy Dennis

Alma as a chick

HULLO STRANGER!

Aspen Returning

Much of the once wooded hill slopes behind Mar Lodge, where timber was felled during the first world war, subsequently remained denuded of tree or shrub cover, mainly through grazing pressure by deer. Control of this



Aspen colonising the hill above Mar lodge

grazing since the National Trust for Scotland took over the estate has seen widespread regeneration of trees on this ground. Naturally, this has been mainly by prolifically seed bearing species like Scots pine and particularly birch, classic pioneering species. Aspen however, is a spasmodic seeder and there are not even adult specimens within a mile of Mar Lodge. Yet, here and there on the slopes, the stranger is back and doing well. It is an indicator of the capacity of even unlikely candidates to recolonise areas at a distance.

What's a Springtail?

Hi also to *Bourletiella viridescens*, who you will probably never have heard of. *Bourletiella*, god bless it, is a springtail, and you may never have heard of them in general. Nonetheless a cubic metre of most soils apparently harbours about 100,00 of them. Springtails are tiny creatures, less than 6mm long, and are

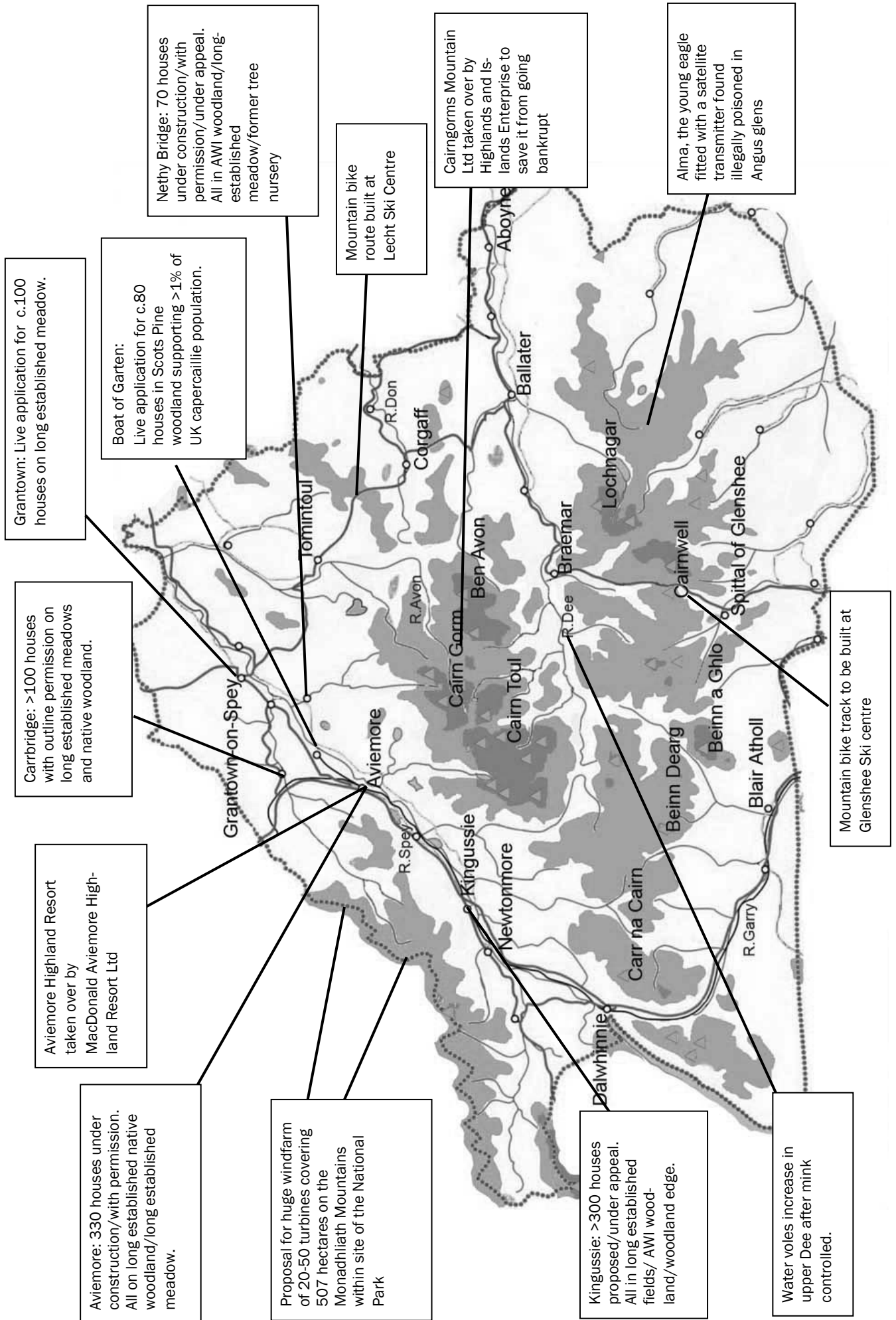
important in the processes of breaking down organic matter and probably in the distribution of microbes in soil, hence in soil fertility and therefore in all our lives. *Bourletiella viridescens* (Fred for short) was recently found at the top of



Springtail Bourletiella viridescens

Creagan Dubh in the northern Cairngorms by Tim Ransom of Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group and the Cairngorms Campaign. It is a first record of this species for the Cairngorms. Say hullo –he's in the picture. Springtails have been around for some 400 million years, have a small flap that folds underneath their bodies which they use to spring away from danger (hence their name) and, according to Wikipedia, "possess a tubular [appendage](#) (the [collophore](#) or ventral tube) with eversible vesicles, projecting ventrally from the first abdominal segment!" I bet you didn't know that either!

AROUND THE CAIRNGORMS



Cairngorm Stories

MANAGING THE FLOOD – WHO SHOULD BE FLOODED?

Where the river Feshie meets the Spey was the origin of a particularly contentious flood management scheme that became a fiasco. The Feshie can turn from a mild meandering small river into a torrent. By 1998, when in high flood, it had partially blocked the flow of the Spey by creating a wall of water that itself acted as a dam across the Spey. Also, turbulence at the confluence of their flows caused a barrier of gravel and stones to deposit across the Spey's bed. In the winters of 1998/99 and 1989/90 exceptionally heavy rainfalls caused the rivers to spate and these "dams" took effect. Upstream, the Spey's water backed up. Upstream also lie the Insh Marshes and Loch Insh, with agricultural land and buildings of an outdoor centre on its banks. As the waters rose, and as these flooded, inevitably so did the voices of the affected landowners. Banded together to form Badenoch Land Management, they proposed what they regarded as an obvious solution – to dredge a channel at the mouth of the Feshie, pointing downstream, so that its flow was diverted downstream and the barriers removed. The solution is simple they said and would cost only £6000!

Well, just hold on a minute said the then Nature Conservancy Council (NCC). The Feshie alluvial fan is in a largely natural state, rare now in the UK, and an SSSI for just that reason. Imposing a human management on these natural processes would damage its scientific value. *"The Feshie is continually reworking itself. The whole history of 10,000 years since the last ice age is visible in its features. Geomorphologists say that only in the Alps or Norway are there such features,"* Mike Matthews, then regional officer of the NCC, is quoted as saying in the Strathy of November 1990. The Insh Marshes were not only an SSSI, but also a Ramsar Site and hence internationally recognised as important wetlands. Removing the barriers and lowering flood levels in this way might also lower water levels in the marshes and damage them. The NCC opposed the dredging and battle commenced. *"Have we all got to move everything up a few feet because the NCC won't change the course of the Feshie?"* demanded a landowner in the same issue of the Strathy.

One moment said the then Highland Regional Council. What happens downstream if you remove these "plugs?" Does that mean landowners and buildings downstream are flooded instead? In other words are we solving the problem or just moving it around? Enter the consultants! The Council

commissioned civil engineers who, for a mere £80,000, drew the conclusion that removing the plugs would not cause downstream flooding – but their investigations stopped where their budget ran out downstream. In 1990, a £20,000 study by the University of Loughborough concluded that the plugs did act as a control on water levels in the Insh Marshes. Hence, their removal would have an impact on them.

In December of that year, the landowners gave notice of their intent to alter the mouth of the Feshie, but accepted a short term Management Agreement offered by NCC. This gave the NCC time to commission a study by the Institute of Hydrology which, for £100,000, developed a model of the rivers that predicted the impacts of diverting the mouth of the Feshie downstream by dredging, and removing the gravel plug in the Spey. One landowner proceeded to notify Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the successor to NCC, his intent to dredge a channel to divert the Feshie. In response, in August 1992, SNH got Ian Land, Secretary of State for Scotland, to issue the Feshie-Spey Nature Conservation Order under Section 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act preventing work! The Institute's study became available in September. It concluded that diverting the Feshie's mouth (which would clearly damage the scientific value of the alluvial fan) would not affect flood levels upstream, but removing the gravel plug in the Spey would. When negotiations to agree on solutions failed and the Nature Conservation Order ran out, a Public Inquiry followed. Its findings backed SNH's view that removal of the gravel plug would damage the Insh Marshes and their flora and fauna and that the economic gains were not outweighed by the environmental damage. *"SNH have the power to effectively destroy a rural community,"* declared Dr Williamson, a major landowner affected, as quoted in the Strathy's report on the findings.

The Nature Conservation Order remained in place, but the dredging of the Feshie fan, despite the damage to the scientific interest, was agreed to. It went ahead in October of that year, 1992. What happened? The winter floods of the following year were severe. Downstream, the river broke through previously unbreached bunds that contained it and flooded new areas. The question arose whether this was a result of the works upstream releasing higher flows. Upstream, the evidence suggested that the peaks of flooding were reduced in length but not in height. The same places flooded but not for so long.

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Meanwhile, the river went its own way. The Feshie removed much of the dredged channel in the winter of 1993 and progressively removed the rest in the next few years. Maintaining the constructed channel proved prohibitively expensive and the effort was abandoned.

So, where did it all leave us? Consultants' reports cost £180,000. The Public Inquiry could not have cost less than £30,000. £22,000 was paid to landowners in compensation, and then of course there was the cost of the £6000 engineering works plus the uncoded staff time of SNH, the then Highland Regional Council and other agencies! We

are certainly well over £300,000! It started out with a simplistic £6000 solution!

Rivers are dynamic and their behaviour difficult to predict. Between 1989 and 1993, the Spey had four flood events that would have been predicted to occur at 50 year intervals. The Spey is a dangerous river! A combination of Scotland's climate, the river's fast flow and the rapid runoff from mountains ensures it produces frequent floods and, occasionally spectacularly dangerous ones. Intervention in rivers is complicated, skilled, and needs an approach that looks at all the impacts. This river above all was not the place for engineering interventions that were the surgical equivalent of amateur brain surgery! Meanwhile, the Feshie flows on.



View from the north bank of the Spey, looking across the Feshie alluvial fan at its junction with the Spey and up the river Feshie. The Spey flows in from the right and is the main body of water seen immediately in front. Upstream, to the right, lie the Insh Marshes, out of picture. Options to relieve flooding were either to remove a barrier of gravel lying in the Spey and below water line or dig a channel through the fan on the left hand side - that is pointing downstream as it meets the Spey.



The diverting channel on the Feshie fan.



Digging the diverting channel.