



National  
Training Awards  
2006



# CAIRNGORM MOUNTAIN

03/01/2006

George Hogg  
SNH  
East Highland area  
Fodderty Way  
Dingwall Business Park  
IV15 9XB

Dear George,

## Request to amend the Cairngorm Visitor Management Plan

### Re: Clause 9, Section 50

The purpose of this letter is to confirm CML's request to make further changes to the VMP. CML believes the changes proposed can be achieved without compromising the objectives of the s50 Agreement or VMP. These changes are requested primarily to improve visitor satisfaction.

I know you are aware that the VMP has already been successfully updated without going through the full public consultation process, in addition the precedent has also been set of allowing changes for a trial period.( ie the walkers entrance) . In this instance and having taken due consideration, CML would accept the public consultation option if SNH believes this is appropriate. We understand that this is an internal matter for SNH to consider on the basis of whether or not the proposed changes are significant enough to warrant the time and effort of a full public consultation. From our own perspective there are advantages and disadvantages in both options. We believe that we have consistently demonstrated our commitment to the management of the environment over the first 4 years of operating the funicular and public consultation could offer a valuable opportunity to reinforce this commitment. On the other hand we are aware of the time and effort involved in public consultation , we already spend considerable resources on monitoring and reporting and we would prefer to concentrate our efforts towards improving interpretation and the opportunity to educate our visitors. We believe what is being proposed will have no real impact on the integrity of the EU sites. We also believe that any perceived risk can be addressed if what is being requested is operated on a trail basis.

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There are two specific changes being proposed on this occasion:

1. To add the Windy Ridge path to the list of preferred paths in 10.8.1 of the VMP.
2. To allow walkers who enter the Ptarmigan building the option to purchase a one way ticket back to the Base Station.

#### **Case for the Windy Ridge path addition -**

As access to Cairn Gorm summit now starts from the Car Park at Cairngorm, there is intense demand for good walking routes through the ski area to Cairn Gorm. This is clear from evidence from the detailed monitoring scheme (DMS) and inquiries at the Ranger Base and visitor information facilities.

The VMP provides for the promotion of the Coire Cas trail as a walking route to absorb demand from visitors and relieve pressure on the Northern Corries path and the Natura sites. In 2005, we constructed an additional leg of this trail to provide a shorter loop trail at the lower end of Coire Cas.

This trail does not, however, satisfy demand for a route to Cairn Gorm. Information given verbally by the Ranger Service and depicted on a drawing in the Ranger Base (copy enclosed) indicates two routes which are suitable for this purpose: The main track (intended for emergency vehicle access to the Ptarmigan) and the Windy Ridge path. The latter is the preferred route for those wishing a hill experience, and is generally recommended in publications by third parties (such as Cameron MacNeish and Lonely Planet).

In view of the manageable nature of this path as an ascent route, we wish to propose that the Windy Ridge path be added to the paths listed as preferred in 10.8.1 of the VMP and to the paths as E9 on the Footpath map in the Appendix. The proposed map is appended. It would also be relevant to add, as section 6.2.2 to Appendix 6 the following paragraph:

#### *Windy Ridge Path (Footpath Map Ref E9)*

*This path is recognised as the ascent route of choice for visitors wishing to climb Cairn Gorm by a hill path. Repairs to the lowest 400 metres have stabilised an excessively steep section and allowed regeneration of surrounding vegetation. Further repairs are planned for the sections leading onto and along An t-Aonach as far as the Ptarmigan building.*

*Length: 2km.*

*Character: A steep constructed hill path leading to a less steep unconstructed hill path through the edge of the ski area.*

*Construction: Aggregate and stone pitching 400m, natural development on peat, gravel and stones beyond.*

*Suitability: Strenuous ascent. Those descending need to pay close attention to choice of route, and for this reason it is recommended as being more suitable for ascent than descent.*

*Potential for interpretation: Excellent views of Coire Cas and further Northern Corries. Close views of heath which becomes steadily more montane in character as the route ascends.*

We also consider that it would be beneficial to mark the start of this route with a small sign with the text "Windy Ridge Path" and to reproduce the drawing in the Ranger Base for distribution, on request, to walkers.

### **The case for the option to offer walkers the opportunity to purchase a one way ticket from the Ptarmigan**

The walkers' entrance (allowing walkers into the Ptarmigan building) has been successfully managed for 4 years. The number of walkers entering the building is around 5,000 a year. This additional facility for walkers has been welcomed by visitors, but a common complaint is that there is no option to purchase a one way ticket back down to the Base Station. CML is therefore satisfied that a demand for this ticket now exists and is willing to invest in the necessary management arrangements to provide this additional service.

CML believes that this additional service will not compromise the objectives of the Section 50 agreement but rather the proposed changes will have a positive impact for the following reasons:

1. **Reducing the number of visitors who enter the Natura site:** Currently some visitors choose to walk directly into the Natura site (Coire an t-Sneachda) along the Northern Corries path, as one of the easy walking options. Adding the option of walking up and getting a train down will displace some of these visitors, and therefore it is reasonable to conclude that this will have the impact of reducing numbers entering the Natura site directly from the car park.
2. **Offering an important opportunity to educate walking visitors about the Natura site:** CML provides several opportunities for visitors who choose to walk to the Ptarmigan and return by Funicular to be exposed to relevant interpretation about the management of the mountain and Natura sites. These include the Ranger Base, Base station, exhibition in the Ptarmigan building and the return train journey (audio interpretation). Therefore this presents a very important opportunity to inform and educate walking visitors who would otherwise not necessarily be exposed to this information.
3. **Reducing damage by walkers returning via the main exit track.** The ADAS report dated 27<sup>th</sup> Sept 2005 (already circulated to SNH) refers to the majority of damage being caused on the downward walk particularly under wet and slippery conditions. Therefore the option to allow walkers to use the railway to return to the Car park will reduce the damage to the access footpath within

the ski area and it would be reasonable to assume this would also reduce the impact on other descent paths to a lesser degree.

4. **Walkers behaviour:** Although the opportunity to purchase a downhill ticket from the Ptarmigan top station may be taken up by walkers who have come from the Natura site, it is highly unlikely to affect their decisions in terms of walking destination. While a few may be tempted to traverse Cairn Gorm summit to access the funicular, most will choose to descend via 1141m and the Fiacail a'Choire Chais. The numbers involved are likely to be far fewer than those encouraged to remain within the ski area rather than taking a walk along the Northern Corries path.

#### **Proposed addition to the VMP**

##### *Appendix 4- Terms and conditions of Carriage- non skiing tickets*

*Ticket type- Funicular one way*

*User – Non skiing – walkers*

*Condition of sale-*

1. *This ticket is not transferable*
2. *Non refundable*
3. *The company reserves the right to change prices and services at any time and without notification*
4. *The company retains the right to close the funicular at anytime, for any reason*
5. *The company facilities are used at the ticket holder's own risk. The company accept no responsibility for injury, loss or damage unless as a direct result of its negligence.*
6. *The ticket entitles the holder to use the funicular for one single journey from the top station to the Base station*
7. *Failure to comply with the above conditions will result in forfeiture of this ticket*

Information will be available about this ticket option at the Ranger Base and Base station. Tickets will be on sale at the Base station and at the retail outlet in the Ptarmigan building.

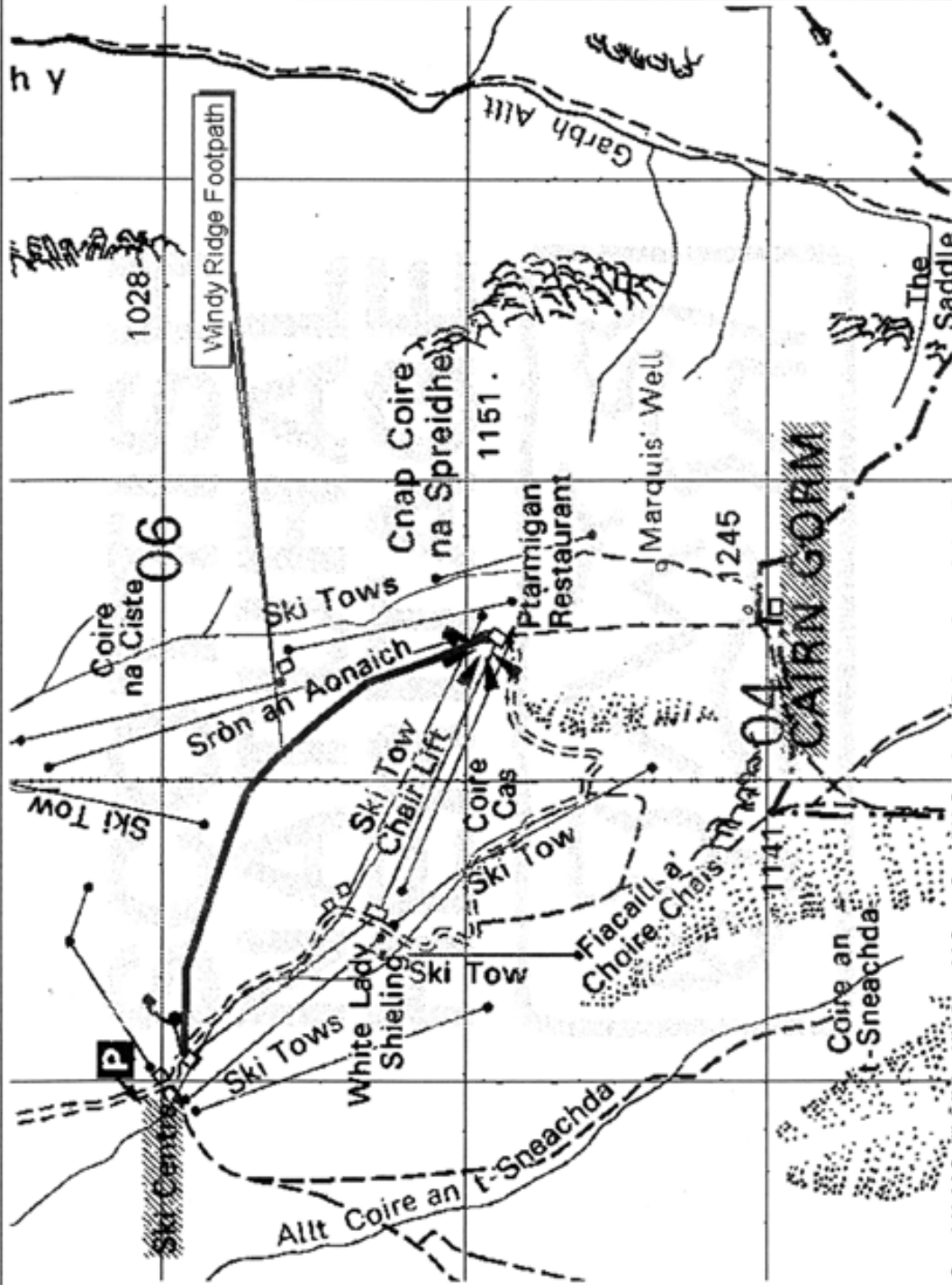
I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely



R. J. Kinnaird  
CEO CML

# Windy Ridge Footpath. Cairn Gorm



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