

Trust Action

policies for sustainable mountain development and conservation. Currently, 46 countries worldwide have set up national committees to promote IYM.

The Trust has taken this call seriously and considers that IYM is an appropriate time and an apt context in which to bring people together to discuss issues in our own mountain backyard. A number of the IYM objectives and all of its suggested approaches are completely relevant to the problems we have in managing pressures we place on the Cairngorms. Even more pertinent to IYM is the imminent Cairngorms National Park and, how the Park Authority will manage recreational use.

So we have organised a great event in Ballater for the last weekend in May. It will be an activity-packed few days with lots of entertainment and walks centred around a seminar with the theme of "Recreational Management of the Cairngorms". We have attracted a number of high profile speakers for the Saturday

seminar and this will be a very interesting day on its own. We also have a Friday night slide show from Aberdeen climber Ronnie Robb followed by a Pub Quiz; a Saturday night Ceilidh with a really good band; led walks varying from young family to fitness freak level on Sunday and a walk with Adam Watson to see the issues for the management for yourself with a Cairngorms expert. Ballater is a fantastic venue, the great outdoors surrounds the town and the local community is keen to welcome us with lots of hospitality.

Conscious of the importance of IYM to local communities our event will also be the launch point for Ballater Walking Week, so we are collaborating with the local organising committee, Ballater Royal Deeside, for this week of further entertainment and led walks in the surrounding hills and mountains. Look out soon for a flyer advertising the Ballater Weekend event and book your

The Cairngorm Railway Saga

Well, it's here! Construction has finished and we now have to see what we've got to live with. One thing's for sure. The coming years are going to be eventful. There are many twists and turns to come before this particular saga is over.

How is it running? Well, commissioning problems are still ongoing. They range from minor faults to more serious events. For example, in mid-January, the carriages came to an emergency stop, throwing passengers in the ascending carriage against the front window and seats. Fortunately, injuries were limited to cuts and bruises. Another time, also in January, the power failed causing the doors to lock and trapping passengers inside for an hour and a half.

INJURIES LIMITED TO CUTS AND BRUISES

Hopefully, some of the more dire predictions will never come to pass. The similarity of the short tunnel section to the longer tunnel section on a similar railway at Kaprun in Austria where a disastrous tunnel fire occurred in late November 2000 has been commented on before. Although the detailed systems are different, the possibility of an incident occurring while a carriage was trapped inside the tunnel section due to power failure doesn't bear thinking about. As commissioning problems continue, it leads one to question the Company's ability to operate the railway safely

CAN THE COMPANY OPERATE IT SAFELY?

Ever eager for publicity, Fergus Ewing MSP has called for the closed system at the Cairngorm Funicular Railway to be scrapped (Strathspey and Badenoch Herald 31st January) and has asked "Can anyone think of anything more absurd than spending £100,000 on a path that folk are not allowed to use if they travel by the funicular railway?" Well, most of us can! The agreement is legally binding and for an MSP to be calling for it to be scrapped is strange to say the least. The cynics amongst us might wonder if he was always planning to call for the scrapping of the agreement as soon as the money was spent. Mr. Ewing's motives in trying to protect local jobs are to be praised. However, maybe he should have studied the report prepared by the opposition groups some time back. They showed how properly managed eco-tourism could create more jobs than a funicular railway and not less.

EWING WANTS THE CLOSED SYSTEM SCRAPPED

The Company is in difficulty and appears to be looking to get out of the agreement. The trouble is that it would almost certainly have to go to court.

COMPANY CAN'T BUY DRINKS Unfortunately, it's broke and probably would have difficulty affording a round of drinks in the Clachaig Inn. Opponents of the funicular, denied their opportunity of a free drink, will be watching closely to ensure that there is no public money put into helping the Company's court case.

In addition, the cost of breaking the EU conditions has to be considered. The EU funding of £2.7M is conditional on maintaining the legally binding agreement. If this is broken, the UK government has to pay back the full amount. The taxpayers among us need to remain vigilant to ensure that our money is not used to subsidise either lazy access for walkers and climbers to the northern corries or the environmental rape of the summit plateau as too many people trample over too much of it.

**SHOULD TAXPAYERS
SUBSIDISE
ENVIRONMENTAL
RAPE?**

Where do we go from here? The commissioning faults will eventually be sorted out and attention will shift to whether the Company is maintaining both the system and the necessary safety procedures properly. The North East Mountain Trust has always opposed this development and will continue to oppose it. Together with other groups, we will monitor and publicise any attempts to either break the closed system agreement or obtain more government subsidy. We will update you in the next Newsletter.

David Windle, 18 Feb 2002

[Ed: Mike Dales gave us some pictures of the area, but frankly we've had pictures of spoil-heaps, bulldozers, Keep Out notices in all the recent issues, so we didn't put them in]