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Ecosophy and tourism: Rethinking a mountain resort

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how an ecosophically inspired tourism strategy could enhance a Scottish mountain recreational site threatened by climate change. Drawing on qualitative data, the paper focuses on three research questions concerning: the impact of current infrastructure and management strategies on tourist experiences; tourists' current interpretations and desires; and how the notion of an ecosophically informed tourist attraction might be realised in the light of these experiences, interpretations and desires. Conclusions indicate that the site is a long way from being an ecosophically inspired tourism resort which might foster an engagement with nature. Insights are provided as to how this might be achieved. Critical to the paper is a consideration of how the 'packaging' of tourist experiences militates against a meaningful personal connection with the mountain environment.

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1. Introduction

This paper examines how an ecosophically informed strategy may serve to change the nature of tourism in a mountain recreational site in Scotland currently managed by Cairngorm Mountain Limited (or CML, www.cairngormmountain.co.uk). The site is centered around a funicular railway (opened in 2001) and associated infrastructure built to support the ski industry. It is located in the newly created Cairngorms National Park – the largest in the UK (www.cairngorms.co.uk). The impetus for change arises from an almost 80 per cent decline of skier days in Scotland in recent years, from 366,000 in the 2000–01 season to 78,700 in 2006–07 (Williams, 2008). This is largely due to the effects of climate change over the last two decades, which means there are currently less than six solid weeks of skiing on Cairngorm in most years. Other factors, such as the growth of cheap flights to ski resorts in continental Europe, have played their part in the decline of the Scottish ski industry. This leaves a situation in which a high maintenance, ski-oriented infrastructure, with its attendant costs, sits astride a delicate mountain environment and protected E.U. Natura 2000 site (see www.ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000 for further details) struggling to generate sufficient visitor numbers to sustain local communities dependent on tourist revenue. In this instance, the attraction of numbers of tourists outwith the ski

season becomes economically critical, and new strategies for the site were sought in 2005 by the managing organisation CML.

The situation described creates a familiar and awkward irony, in that whilst more tourists may increase income, they also raise the potential for environmental damage to the mountain site for which CML holds stewardship. In a move to begin to balance these economic and environmental tensions, CML, in consultation with a human ecologist, produced a report: *A Vision for the Future of Cairngorm Mountain Ltd.* (Key, 2006). This document suggests that the existing CML site might be transformed into *The National Centre for the Mountain Environment* – a year-round ecotourism centre for Scotland, which, via seasonal smoothing strategies would be less susceptible to the economic uncertainties of snow-dependent tourism.

Central to this idea is the creation of a place where visitors can learn to appreciate, understand and (in doing so) protect the mountains and wild lands which surround them: "Wild mountain environments offer a powerful means to inspire people to want to live in more ecologically sustainable ways – through a sensed connection with nature" (Key, 2006, p. 5). The document suggests that "The facility will be akin to an 'Eden Project of the North' where the primary offering is about learning to appreciate, understand, protect and be inspired by mountains and everything they represent in human culture" (Key, 2006, p. 3).

In essence, much of what the Vision proposes is a resolution of the existing conflict of visitors *versus* environmental protection. It is proposed that this is done by shifting thinking towards encouraging visitors to recognise themselves *as part of* the environment. In doing this, there are not only implicit suggestions of an ecotourism

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approach to site management (i.e. shallow ecology), but also hints of an overarching ecosophical thrust, which would foster ‘more harmonious relationships between place, self, community [which might include tourists] and the natural world’ (i.e. deep ecology) (Drengson, 1999). That said, this ecosophical stance is never properly articulated or examined in the Vision document. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to explore the viability of applying the concept of ecosophy in reformulating the tourist experience on Cairngorm. The term ecosophy (a shorthand for ‘eco-philosophy’) stems from the lifework of Arne Næss (1912–2009), and was coined by him in a conference talk in 1972. Næss is considered the intellectual founder of the deep ecology movement, although he himself attributes Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) as marking its beginning.

The main section of the paper begins with an identification of ‘the problem’ in terms of climate change and its effects in the study area. Literature surrounding the concepts of ecotourism, ecosophy, and embodied tourist experiences is then critically explored. In particular, the seminal work of Næss is drawn upon in the exploration of ecosophy. Following this, details of the methodological approach are presented, before engaging in analysis and discussion of the key findings. Conclusions are drawn concerning the implications of the findings, not only for the study area, but also recreational mountain environments beyond the study location.

2. Repositioning a mountain resort

2.1. Climate change, winter sports and tourism

The effects of climate change on winter sports resorts receive considerable attention in the literature. The most detailed studies cover areas such as the European Alps (Breiling & Charamza, 1999; Elsasser & Buerki, 2002; Elsasser & Messerli, 2001; Fazzinni, Fratianni, Biancotti, Biscu, & Zasso, 2003; König & Abegg, 1997), North America (Brotton & Wall, 1993; Hamilton, Rohall, Brown, Hayward, & Keim, 2003; Harrison, Kinnaird, McBoyle, Quinlan, & Wall, 1986; Lipski & McBoyle, 1991; Lynch, McBoyle, & Wall, 1981; McBoyle & Wall, 1986, 1987, 1992; Ordower, 1995; Scott, McBoyle, & Mills, 2003; Scott, McBoyle, Mills, & Minogue, 2004) and the Antipodes (Barringer, 1989; Galloway, 1988; König, 1998). The effects of climate change in a Scottish winter sports context also feature in the literature, (Perry, 1971, 1972), but much of this work is set within broader discussions about climate change effects year-round in Scotland (Harrison, Winterbottom, & Sheppard, 1999). Yeoman and McMahan-Beattie (2006, p. 375) note that: “Winter sports in Scotland will be increasingly at risk from shorter seasons and even more unreliable snow cover.” These kinds of predictions are echoed by a recent report commissioned by the Scottish Executive (2006, p. 99), which notes that winters in Scotland will become “wetter and... snow may decline by up to 90%”.

Beyond the obvious loss of snow cover, there may be significant environmental and social effects of such climatic change in winter sports resorts. Indeed, an earlier Scottish Executive publication (Harrison, Winterbottom, & Johnson, 2001) suggested that the reduction of snowfall in Scotland represents a considerable threat to the winter sports industry “resulting in the closure of some ski centres, with further impact on retailing and accommodation sectors and employment opportunities” (2001, p. 36). As such, Yeoman and McMahan-Beattie (2006) suggest that adaptation strategies need to be developed to combat the negative implications of Scottish climatic change, although in line with much of the literature in this area no such strategies are forthcoming. Nevertheless, Yeoman and McMahan-Beattie’s (2006) comments echo those in a 2005 paper by Gómez Martín. He recognizes the need for tourism planning to include more than general descriptions of the

climate and to incorporate elements such as the modification of the tourist setting, season and activities to deal with such climatic change. By exploring the potential for ecosophically informed tourism to address the challenges presented by climatic change, this paper delivers precisely the focus which Gómez Martín (2005) argues is lacking in much of the work cited above.

2.2. Ecotourism, ecosophy and embodied tourist experiences

Official, organisational definitions of ecotourism exist with such bodies as the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) and the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) (Bishop, Kapila, Hicks, Mitchell, & Vorhies, 2008). There are also academic definitions of ecotourism (Blamey, 1997; Weaver, 2001; Weaver & Lawton, 2007). Overall, whilst there are some differences between such definitions, agreement does seem to be emerging about the key criteria of ecotourism. Three core elements which recur in most accounts are i) a nature-based element, ii) an educational/transformational component and iii) a requirement of sustainability (Blamey 1997). Rather than rigidly defining the ecotourism concept, Weaver and Lawton (2002, p. 272) indicate that a more workable approach may be to consider the idea of ecotourism as one of hard and soft market segment types spread along an imagined continuum. They argue that tourists towards the ‘harder’ end of this continuum are likely to favour less structure, less support, and may be more biocentric/environmentally committed. Conversely, tourists at the ‘softer’ end of the continuum will expect more services, increased comfort levels and passive interpretation experiences.

In this paper, however, the authors adopt the critical stance that much ecotourism is embedded within what those coming from an ecosophical perspective would term a reformist, or *shallow ecology* (Devall, 2001; Næss, 1973). In such cases, the central focus of ecotourism is typically tied up with notions of fighting against pollution and resource depletion of the natural world so as to improve “the health and affluence of people in developed countries” (Næss, 1995a, p. 3); an approach which typifies mainstream political green agendas in the West. Næss proposed an alternative, ‘long-range’ approach (deep ecology), which recognised the importance of a search for ecologically wise and harmonious living, acknowledging human beings as just one part of an interrelated system in which place, community and self are intertwined with the natural world. Such a position is in line with the central tenets of the ecophilosophical movement (Næss, 1993), in which human beings feel spiritually part of nature and landscape, as opposed to being *apart* from (and dominant over) it.

In line with these views, Capra (1996) writes:

Shallow ecology is anthropocentric, or human-centered. It views humans as above or outside of nature, as the source of all value, and ascribes only instrumental, or “use,” value to nature. Deep ecology does not separate humans – or anything else – from the natural environment. It sees the world not as a collection of isolated objects, but as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent. Deep ecology recognizes the intrinsic value of all living beings and views humans as just one particular strand in the web of life. (1996, p. 7)

An ecosophical approach to tourism also confronts what some see as elitist constructs of Western eco-imperialism (Cater, 2006). This concerns the various stakeholders and gatekeepers who wield power and control over the use and management of a landscape. In this regard, the tourist’s desire to engage with natural and wild spaces as a contrast to their everyday experiences is often compromised by

'managing' organisations, which might instead favour the careful nurturing of fern A or mammal B (Hall & Lew, 1998) and, therefore, restrict tourist access. Such 'cultural hegemony' tends to ignore the local impact of those restrictions on tourism-dependent communities, including loss of income, small business failure and job losses.

More importantly, this brings into play a seeming paradox of ecosophical tourism; specifically, the idea that encouraging tourists to visit natural places without the forms of strict managerialist intervention described above will itself result in a further increase in the tourist impact on these visited sites. Yet an ecosophical approach might actually argue that it is only by allowing people to appreciate and 'belong' in such environments that they will begin to understand their duty of care for them, which, in time, should help reduce tourist impact rather than increase it. Næss sums this position up most succinctly with his contention that: "The requisite care flows naturally if the 'self' is widened and deepened so that protection of free Nature is felt and conceived as protection of ourselves." (Næss, 1995b, p. 26).

Linked to this is an ongoing debate about the unequal significance of nature in daily lives (Macnaghten & Urry, 2000). This argument is well illustrated by Lewis (2000) as he contrasts the Victorian industrial ideals of exploiting and dominating nature, with the reactions of the Romantic Movement who felt this diminished the liberty of the traveller. Similarly, Heywood's (1994) work demonstrates how the unpredictability and ruggedness of nature's wild spaces can be managed out and rationalised as nature's unwelcome discomforts, thus removing the invigorating unfamiliarity that wild places in the raw can offer. Others suggest that it is the interventions of commercial tourism, such as tour operators and management organisations like CML, that contribute to this 'packaging' of nature's wildness (see Markwell, 2001, also Binkhorst & van der Duim, 1995; Norton, 1996). Such disembodied experiences are arguably what occur in many recreational mountain areas, where management interventions cocoon tourists and numb their senses. This echoes Simmel's fears, aptly summated by Lewis (2000), that modernity threatens an irredeemable rupture for the embodied experience of nature.

In line with this, there is a large body of literature urging tourist experiences of nature to be acknowledged as corporeal (Clope & Perkins, 1998; Crouch, 2000; Crouch & Desforges, 2003; Markwell, 2001; Thrift, 2000). Extending these concerns, Obrador-Pons (2003) suggests that tourism be perceived as a 'practical and embodied way through which we are involved in the world', which he parallels with the Heideggerian concept of *dwelling* in places as a way of knowing and being (for an excellent overview of similar ideas see Clope & Jones, 2001). Echoing Lewis' (2000) concerns, Waitt and Cook (2007) imply that the tourists themselves may be socially conditioned towards a largely ocular sensibility and may struggle to embrace the embodied possibilities of encounters with nature.

3. Method

Inspired by the Vision document (Key, 2006), the research undertaken for this paper involved three key questions:

- What is the observed impact of the funicular railway, associated infrastructure and management strategies on the tourist experience at the CML site?
- What are tourists' current interpretations and desires in relation to the Cairngorm mountain environment?
- How could the notion of an ecosophically informed tourist attraction (as implied by the Vision document) be realised (and received) in the light of these experiences, interpretations and desires?

In seeking answers to these questions, conclusions are drawn concerning the potential for a remodelled tourism strategy for the CML site. These conclusions also critically address the Vision document. Overall, lessons might be learnt from this research process for other mountain recreation areas faced with climate change and altered demand patterns.

In undertaking the research, the authors maintained the fortuitous objectivity of 'strangers' to the site (Prus, 1998). The lens of someone visiting the area as a stranger is helpful for seeing beyond the viewpoints of those living and working there, who might take for granted significant phenomena that occur (Fetterman, 1998; Schutz, 1964). The research data were gathered over three week-long visits to the Aviemore and Cairngorm area from October to December 2006. Much of the research was concerned with the practice of consumer observation and the question of how tourists 'do' being on the mountain. Adopting the tourist role, researchers walked through the woods from Glenmore to the CML site. This experience was contrasted with the more usual journey to the site by car. Introspective impressions were independently recorded in note form about these journeys by the researchers, attempting to capture descriptions, comparisons and feelings. Overall, these research tactics served to enhance the authors' attentiveness to conditions and experiences on site. In essence, this aspect of the research shifted towards auto-ethnography and follows Obrador-Pons' (2003) call to apprehend tourist practice as dwelling.

In line with Crouch's exhortation to focus on leisure practices that "pay attention to what people 'do'" (2000, p. 66), the next part of the empirical work involved an ethnographic enquiry into the context and setting of the CML site, and into the behaviours and reactions of tourists to the CML experience (Palmer, 2001). This research effort comprised the techniques of participant observation, note taking and the recording of eight group interviews (comprising family parties and couples). These interviews occurred with CML tourists prior to (and following) their journeys by funicular railway to the CML top station, just below the summit of Cairngorm. In these interviews respondents were encouraged to speak for themselves, rather than being confined to closed questioning (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Brewer, 2000). The resultant 23 pages of ethnographic notes, based on researcher observations, and approximately three hours of recorded interviews help to contextualise the CML site and the tourist experience.

Being in and around Aviemore also afforded four additional key-informant interviews with tourism stakeholders (a shop owner, restaurateur, accommodation proprietor and mountain ranger) about the delicate issue of the declining ski-related business. This further underlined the value of the researcher as stranger: people are often more comfortable in sharing ideas and concerns with a visitor than with locals and neighbours (Davies, 1999; Prus, 1998; Schutz, 1964).

The audio data from the group and key-informant interviews were transcribed and, along with the notes taken, were subjected to a rigorous routine of theme and content analysis, involving reading through transcripts and notes and identifying emergent themes using a process of distillation. This analysis technique involved several iterations, each one condensing the level of meaning in the textual data. The authors maintained the richness inherent in the messy texts and situated knowledges captured, whilst collapsing themes into workable categories (Jamal & Hollingshead, 2001). This process enabled a move towards hermeneutic integrity.

4. Findings

4.1. Cairngorm and its hinterland

Visitors to the CML site typically arrive by car from the town of Aviemore, the growth of which has been strongly dependent on the

ski industry. Here, hotels, restaurants and shops are set within a 1970s architectural landscape in which concrete predominates. During the road journey from Aviemore to the site, visitors enter the Glenmore Forest corridor and the view softens as more trees, rivers and glimpses of the Cairngorm mountains come into view. Many of the buildings here are older, and the developments blend with the landscape of ancient Caledonian pine forest, with natural building materials (e.g. wood) being more prevalent. As one passes through Glenmore village, almost at the foot of Cairngorm itself, there are outdoor centres, a youth hostel, a campsite and a few scattered houses. Unlike the buildings of Aviemore, these are all spaced well apart, giving the impression that this is a community nestling in, rather than dominating, the forested landscape. As the road climbs the view opens up, and the edges of the Cairngorm massif form the backdrop to the Scots pines and a fast-flowing river that borders the road. With the tree line breached, the outlook is much bleaker. A ski road winds its way up the mountain and across barren moorland until the car parks of the CML base station (the start of the funicular railway) and the surrounding Coire Cas area can be seen ahead.

An alternative journey can be made to the base station by taking the footpaths up from Glenmore to the CML site. This is captured in one author's auto-ethnographic notes:

...a walk up to the base station is possible along clearly defined paths. Here the earthy, musty smells of pine needles, moss and peat bogs invade the senses. Underfoot, there is the softness of fallen vegetation, and the last autumn berries scattered around amongst ferns, mushrooms and bilberry bushes. Gazing around there are solitary dead pine trees and larger stands of healthy living ones. During the walk a dipper worked its way up a rushing stream, and a young eagle flapped unhurriedly away from a tree about half a mile across the valley.

Such episodes emphasise the multisensual and embodied experience of walking up through this area. This contrasts sharply with the journey that tourists taking the more convenient approach to the CML site by car might have:

From the road, there is a much more industrial character in the final approach to the base station... around the car parking area one is confronted by various buildings, steel winches and pulleys, huts and sheds that comprise the infrastructure of the funicular railway and the associated skiing industry on the mountain. The contrast from the earlier part of the walk is marked. Instead of trees, wildlife and other natural phenomena, this area seems more like a mine, or a factory.

The sum effect of the walk from a research perspective is that it affords contextual comparison. It brings the ski operation at CML into stark relief against the verdant forest and wild mountain scenery.

4.2. *Impact of infrastructure and management on the tourist experience*

As the above section demonstrates, the car parks (the first part of the CML infrastructure that tourists encounter) appear stark, sterile and industrial. It is important to emphasise that notions about wilderness and mountains are often wrapped up in ideas of escape, of difference, and the possibility for an enchanting experience of nature (Cohen & Taylor, 1992; Rojek, 1995; Urry, 1997). Approaching the CML site dispels many of these imaginings as, after travelling through the natural wooded areas, tourists are faced with lines of road-signs, so that the feeling of being anywhere out of the ordinary and natural is hard to sustain. Ethnographic notes capture

this intrusion of the built environment into the mountain landscape and its implications for the tourist experience:

Collapsed ski fences lie everywhere. Tourists' cars huddle around the buildings in serried ranks. Four or five motorway-style signs give the place a solidly urban, everyday feel. From the car park, at least nine large shed-like buildings can be counted, adding to the 'industrial' image. These lie alongside the funicular track, which climbs sharply from the base station car park to the top station. Mountaineers leave their cars and disappear quickly into the wilds; they are able to ascend Cairngorm for free and wander as they choose. By contrast, CML tourists (i.e. those going up to the top station by train) rapidly move to the base station. Wind and horizontal rain regularly scour across the parking areas, often causing visitors to keep their heads low and sprint for the nearest door.

The contrast between the more embodied experiences of the mountaineer and that of the CML tourist are marked here (for an insight into this distinction see the video at [Youtube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ucWY79t2cc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ucWY79t2cc)). From the car park, CML tourists pass through the wide double doors of the base station into a concrete stairwell leading up to a ticket office. The funicular train journey itself continues the ongoing theme of disembodiment as CML tourists are insulated from mountain environment and fed recorded narratives about the natural surroundings:

The assembled tourists choose their train compartment and sit on wooden benches. Announcements are made by the members of staff on the train, emphasising the notion that tourists must not go outside of the building once they are in the top station – the announcers go on to explain the conservation/regeneration issues at the heart of this rule. Some murmur to one another about this restriction – quietly. [Perhaps not wishing to make it seem that they do not care about 'the environment?'] As the train moves up the mountainside, they are rewarded with ever-widening views of the surrounding country. In the middle distance, and all the way up the mountain, the considerable infrastructure of the skiing industry continues to intrude into the mountain landscape, but gazing further afield, the craggy aspect of the wilder Cairngorm mountain region is now visible. Back down the valley, tourists may be rewarded with views of a distant coastal estuary and mountain ranges to the north and west.

Where the train slows in the top station tunnel, there is no view. In the exhibition, again there are no windows, but at interactive points around the room tourists can listen to tapes about the weather, the human impact on the area, the wildlife and the dangers of the mountain environment. Observations identified some tourists ignoring such attractions and immediately heading upstairs, past a gift shop, to the combined restaurant and viewing area:

In the restaurant itself, many tourists end up turning their back on the views, pausing to look up from their meals only to chat to other members of the party. Others huddle at a particular window and try to spot places that they know. From the lower mezzanine there is an exit to the viewing terrace. This is a small platform offering panoramic views across the valleys and mountains northwards. It is not possible to look up the mountain from here – the building itself blocks that aspect. Lots of looking and pointing goes on, and children burn off pent-up energy running from one side to the other, or sliding on the ice when conditions will allow. Back inside, people settle down to drinking or eating again, or else engage in further exploration of the building.

Eventually, tourists make the decision to head back down the mountain. There is no great hurry, as there is little to do at the base station; but some have stayed long enough, and for others their children may be getting bored (indeed, there also seemed to be a short wear-out time for the adults in this regard).

Once back down at the base station, tourists clatter off down flights of stairs and out into the car park. Some will go the Cas bar and shop, but most head straight for their cars.

In summary, whilst the mountain area occupied by CML is arguably not the most spectacular part of the Cairngorm Mountains, it does potentially afford the tourist an opportunity to interact with many of the features which make mountain environments dramatic and exciting: not just views, but sensing the landscape in the round (the feel of weather, the smell of plants etc). However, from the base station onwards the CML tourist experience is cocooned from nature's inclemencies, as visitors can be transported up to this great high place with little physical effort or discomfort, and no requirement or opportunity to engage with the mountain on its own terms. Indeed, tourists are prevented from doing so as they are not allowed to leave the building and explore the summit area. This management strategy, the creation of a 'closed loop' of touristic containment within the Cairngorm mountain environment, fits with earlier references to eco-imperialism in relation to fragile natural settings (Cater, 2006). The inference of this policy is that tourists visiting the site, and specifically those who choose to take the funicular rather than hike to the summit, lack the necessary cultural capital to treat the surrounding area with empathy and understanding. By contrast, proponents of an ecosophical approach argue that the possession of cultural capital should not determine opportunities for spiritual connection with wild places.

Undoubtedly, the non-skiing tourist experience is also adversely affected by the presence of the ski business's buildings and structures. Indeed, a mountain ranger, one of the study's key-informant interviewees, noted that the Coire Cas area of the mountain, where this infrastructure is situated, is sometimes sarcastically referred to as 'Quarry Cas' due to its industrial and fiercely un-natural appearance. Contextual descriptions of the site (above) support such sentiments. Clearly, a major challenge to the Vision document's objectives will be to move perceptions away from the 'Quarry Cas' image towards one in which the presence of human-kind is part of a *being-with* nature as opposed to the current modernist challenge-and-domination of it.

4.3. Interpretations and desires of tourists

4.3.1. The view

Tourists interviewed stated that the purpose of their visit was to enjoy the view. Yet, observational research showed that many, whilst enthusiastically looking around as the train climbed up the mountainside, simply glimpsed quickly out of the windows once in the restaurant and then settled down to eat. This emphasizes the point that a 'view' in itself is relatively uninvolved. Moreover, in this setting customers are dependent upon the weather for the view, and even as the commentary tape on the train explains about the wonderful natural space that is Cairngorm, the immediate outlook is still one of ski pulleys, winches and sheds.

A key problem here, is that the *sight* of the mountains is not augmented by the tourists' other senses. Being in a restaurant surrounded by windows onto a mountain landscape may result in a restrained sensory experience and feelings of frustration for those who want to feel something as basic as weather on their faces or heather underfoot. The small terrace area is currently the only place in this closed system where people may attempt to do this.

4.3.2. Freedom and constraint

Tourists participating in interviews expressed disappointment that they could not wander around at the top of the mountain if they paid to take the train up. It seemed odd to some that the fact that they had paid actually restricted them, whilst those who walked up the mountain for free could wander as they pleased. The messages in the exhibition and on the train linked to the ideas of a wild and natural landscape. Yet the emotions connected with the experience of being in these vast open areas seemed to conflict with the restrained experience of the tourists. They were told that they should appreciate this environment, yet were prohibited from *feeling* it. This harks back to earlier discussed notions of the tourist experience of nature being mediated and managed by the interventions of commercial producers (Markwell, 2001, also Binkhorst & van der Duim, 1995; Norton, 1996).

Some CML tourists accommodated their disappointment at not being able to sensually engage with the natural environment by adopting the stance of moral guardians of mountain places. For example, one woman, after her initial frustration at not being permitted onto the mountain, said she had been persuaded in the exhibition of the notion that this was probably wise, and that people should *not* be allowed outside because "they don't respect these places enough".

This type of reaction arose on a couple of occasions as a result of the 'biocentric' messages disseminated via taped narratives on the train and displays in the exhibition centre. Whilst for some, this engendered an elitist, almost evangelical attitude to the exclusion of all outside influences on the mountain environment (see above), others commented that they would like to go to the summit if allowed, even if guided or accompanied by a member of staff:

I understand why you can't walk about up there, but it's still disappointing – we would go to the top on a guided walk, instead of being cooped up in a building. (Mother, group interview 4).

Children in particular hankered to go outside. Even under the current restrictive environment they were regularly found out on the terrace of the top station; touching the cold stone, looking at (and catching) the drips coming from the roof, shouting and laughing. This echoes Næss' conviction that as children, unperturbed by the mores of society and socialisation, we have a more acute awareness of nature and a closer connection with it such that "a butterfly could be regarded as a brother or sister" (Schwartz, 2009). As Næss puts it:

When I was nine or ten, I learned to enjoy the high mountains where my mother had a cottage. Because I had no father, the mountain somehow became my father, as a friendly, immensely powerful being, perfect and extremely tranquil. Later, pressures from school, from society, from the man-made world, made me happy to be where nothing pressured me into behaving or evaluating in any particular way... nature is overwhelmingly rich and good and does not impose anything upon us.' (Næss, in Bodian, 1995, p. 26).

During the group interviews, the theme of *freedom* as an imagined ideal that might be felt at the top of a wild Scottish mountain was commonly raised – this is one of the things that tourists felt would make the experience different from 'the everyday' and more mountain-like. Yet because little at the CML site allowed them to closely interact with the landscape and to become corporeally and spiritually connected with it, the experience was effectively limited. Nonetheless, encounters with the mountain environment still gave rise to a range of emotions.

4.3.3. Emotions

Amongst interviewees, statements that alluded to positive emotional engagements with the mountain tended to be closely linked to the idea of mountains imagined as the 'top of the world'. In particular, there were many statements of wonder and awe at being so high up and so remote from mundane cares:

It's just an escape from everyday life; spirituality, release from humdrum, stress and hassle. (Male partner, group interview 2).
It's the feeling; taking it all in. (Female partner, group interview 2).

In some cases, these kinds of emotions also spilled over into expressions of a spiritual connection with 'wild nature' and its freedoms:

We just like it up here. Colder the better – nature at its wildest and rawest. (Grandfather, group interview 5).
I've bought some pictures – so that I can dream when I'm back home about the freedom of being up here... the peace and tranquility. (Mother, group interview 5).

4.3.4. Embodied experience

Much of the evidence here points towards the desire for a more encompassing, multisensual tourist experience. Indications of this come from interviewees' calls for guided or limited access to the summit areas:

It's nice to experience that sense of scale, where other people aren't... but it isn't set up for people going all around the building... I've not learnt much. I don't feel I'm 'out there' doing it. (Woman, group interview 6).
Perhaps we could do a bit more on the mountain... Children need hands-on experiences that give them lasting ideas. (Mother, group interview 4).
What about a more directly involving experience for visitors – like some of the plants that you could touch, smell and feel. (Female partner, group interview 8).

4.3.5. Commerce

Apart from critical comments concerning access to the mountain top, the 'cynical' channeling of visitors through the retail area also received criticism. Informants regarded this 'commercialism' as being very much at odds with some of the eco-messages that they had picked up during their visit. As one respondent noted:

I didn't like the shop... it just leaves a weird taste in your mouth after you come to somewhere so natural and have all of this unbridled commercialism thrown at you. (Female partner, group interview 8).

Obliquely referring to 'greenwashing', she added:

You shouldn't have to walk past it in order to get to the mountain. If you're promoting conservation and then selling items that consume non-renewable resources... that makes it a commercial venture with 'environment only in mind'. (Næss, in Bodian, 1995, p. 26).

The shop itself is stocked with a contrived Scottish retail mix of whisky marmalade and tartan-packaged shortbread, with only a nod to environmental awareness, ecological sustainability and so on. By contrast, many tourists suggested that this retail facility should encourage people to think about the environment and their role in its preservation. In short, they wanted more from the experience, and to go away with an improved understanding of the mountain area, rather than having been encouraged to *consume* more.

4.4. Tourism and the Vision document

The key proposal of the Vision document is that tourists should be enabled to feel responsible for and in awe of the fragile, natural surroundings of Cairngorm (Key, 2006). Such ideals have obvious connections to ecosophical thinking, yet as evidenced above, tourists are prevented from fully 'feeling' the mountain due to the contained experience of the built environment. Further, quasi-industrial ski paraphernalia around the site militates against the themes of 'Wilderness Scotland' promoted during the train journey and in the exhibition. An additional point is that consumers are paying to get to the top of the mountain for the view, yet that is where the distractions of the retail, restaurant and exhibition materials are.

Constructed versus natural environments, convenience versus effort – such dualisms sum up the current tensions. The sense of connectedness with the natural environment is arguably hard to feel unless tourists are allowed direct sensory interaction with the mountain. Instead, the opportunities for any degree of tourist engagement are largely through a simulacrum of the mountain wilderness, conveyed indoors via a media (bri)collage of poster displays, film and recorded lectures. This first encourages an idealised expectation of nature by the tourist. Thus, the spectacularisation of nature in the reportage of exhibition and display, where, in particular, nature's visual high points are compressed into hyper-real time and space, presents the real natural environment with a difficult challenge to live up to. In a similar vein, Quinn and Scott (1997) suggested that the understandings and expectations of the natural world learnt through TV documentaries contrasted sharply to their experiences on a trip down the Mississippi which was devoid of such 'shockingly dramatic events':

We witnessed no devouring 'cunning carnivore', no narrow escape of an 'innocent furry critter' from the jaws of death, and no grand sexual display from a testosterone-empowered buck. In sum, what we experienced would end up on the cutting room floor in the making of a documentary. (Quinn & Scott, 1997, p. 4)

Instead, they go on to explain, that their immersion in the minutiae of the natural setting was what characterised the journey and rendered it an ultimately enriching experience compared to nature 'as seen on TV'. For the management of the Cairngorm site, therefore, the challenge is not to present every visitor with an opportunity to spot a golden eagle tearing at its prey, but to encourage the tourists to engage multisensually with the landscape as it is: shrouded in fog, or covered with mosses, ferns and grasses, or buzzing with insects beside a roaring stream.

A second point about how the Cairngorm mountain wilderness is currently conveyed to CML tourists (i.e. largely indoors and via exhibition and display) is that it accentuates tourists' disconnectedness from the landscape. The mountain environment of Cairngorm becomes something looked in upon, in some cases literally as tourists observe the view through windows of the top station. This emphasizes a layered juxtaposition of externality and internality. At one level the tourists look at the *outside* environment from *inside* a building with an arguably objectified and romantiscised gaze. At the same time they remain outsiders, removed from the environment; *looking in upon* it rather than *observing from within*. Næss, also conceptualises this disconnectedness and focus on ocularity in terms of a 'postcard' understanding of the environment and nature – necessarily two dimensional. Again, the importance of 'effort', and specifically a tourist's effortful endeavour vs. their lack of effort, comes to the fore here in realising how greater connectedness might be achieved. As Næss puts it:

When you take a helicopter to the summit of a mountain, the view looks like a postcard, and, if there's a restaurant on top, you might complain that the food is not properly made. But if you struggle up from the bottom, you have this deep feeling of satisfaction and even the sandwiches... taste fantastic. (Næss, in Bodian, 1995, p. 36)

In summary, if the Vision is to guide CML's future strategy towards a more ecosophical understanding, the current tactics are obviously at odds with this. Day-to-day operations seem focused on numbers and profit-maximisation. By contrast, the approach hinted at by the Vision document is one aimed at evolving ecological understanding, sustainability and the long-term survival of the operation via the year-round delivery of immersive wild mountain encounters. To achieve this, there must be a move away from the 'McDisneyfied' (Ritzer & Liska, 1997), fairground-ride mindset of the funicular and top station, towards the ideals of physical and spiritual connection to Scottish wild places. In the following conclusion ideas are presented as to how this might be achieved for Cairngorm, coupled with a deeper discussion about the intellectual and practical viability of an ecosophical approach to tourism in such settings.

5. Conclusion

This paper explains that recreational activity on Cairngorm is under pressure to adjust due to the challenges presented by climatic change. Most notably, an infrastructure built to support a burgeoning ski industry from the 1970s onwards has become increasingly threatened by reduced snowfall and a dramatic reduction in viable skiing days. As a response to this, the Vision document, produced in 2006, suggested how the Cairngorm site might be repositioned as The National Centre for the Mountain Environment. At the core of the Vision strategy is the contention that non-skiing activities should shift from the current cocooned and largely ocular experience to one which is more multi-sensual and transformative, echoing some of the key tenets of an ecosophical approach to our understandings and relationships with nature.

A key criticism of the Vision document is that its recommendations lack more detailed suggestions for management interventions which might directly engender a more ecosophically informed tourist experience. By contrast, the research undertaken for this paper, which centres more closely on tourists' interpretations and desires, gives insight to the ways in which initial moves towards ecosophical tourism might be best achieved, some of these being via a series of shared natural encounters on and around Cairngorm.

First, much of the expectation setting and interpretive work about the Cairngorm mountain environment could be provided as part of a tourist experience which begins by leaving private transport behind at Aviemore and taking a low-carbon-emission bus as the sole motorised means of reaching the base station. Such an approach is also in line with the Vision document, which suggests that the funicular railway should be tied to "a sustainable transit system that links visitor attractions, community services, accommodation, transit interchanges and access points together" (Key, 2006). However, much more could be made of this aspect of the journey by allowing tourists to alight from the closed environment of the bus and explore the wild areas of the Glenmore Forest along the way. This could be orchestrated as a facilitated priming session to heighten awareness of nature in the forest and later, at the base station, the extraordinary realm of the mountain at a personal level.

On arrival at the base station, time spent 'dwelling' or being on the mountain could be afforded the participants in an effort to

allow meaningful re-connection with themselves and the wild mountainscapes. Stronger personal feelings and a natural sense of stewardship for the landscape will come if tourists are allowed to critically examine their place in these mountains and develop their own feelings of belonging and care. This is in stark contrast to the current exhibitions which objectify human relationships with the mountain and provide instructions on how to behave on it, even though egress from the top station is not permitted. The above ideals can only be achieved if tourists are encouraged beyond the boundaries of the CML built environment, rather than being imprisoned within it – smelling the air, touching the stone and the plants, tasting the rain in the cold wind, walking to the summit of the mountain. Such a tactic may also go some way towards healing the rupture in the possibilities for a truly embodied experience of nature, currently denied to many tourists due to the rationalisations of modernity and the distancing of nature's rugged discomforts (Lewis, 2000, p. 65) via an enclosed and desensitising touristic encounter.

Second, more timely and meaningful touristic experiences, such as those described above, might be achieved through the use of wilderness guides. Rather than wielding the hegemonic cultural capital of the expert guardian, the guides could instead encourage the playful discovery of the childlike explorer, echoing Næss' notion of the instinctive deep ecological connections in childhood which are 'unlearned' through socialisation. The use of empathetic facilitators acting as mentors might allow tourists to develop and share their own interpretations of their mountain journey, thereby affording a potentially transformative experience of nature. This echoes the ideas of Stringer and McAvoy (1992) who argue that having other people to share experiences and opinions with enhances the impact of the tourist experience itself. Such an approach is in line with the facilitated learning provided in other ecosophically informed tourist experiences involving sensitive wilderness environments. A good example would be the Puglia Imperiale Tourism Agency in the heel of southern Italy, which offers ecosophical walks as a sustainable form of tourism and a philosophical journey:

Observing a farmstead, a rock church, listening to live music, travelling around on foot or by bicycle: this is what lies at the heart of so-called "ecosophical walks"... a desire to walk exchanging thoughts, reflections and emotions about nature. (Puglia Imperiale Tourism Agency, 2009)

The key idea here is that this exchanging or sharing of emotions about nature puts equal emphasis on the connections made by all who visit these special places, thereby challenging traditional, expert-led and top-down routes to understanding.

Of course, derestricting the boundaries of the CML site for more meaningful tourist encounters with nature may have deleterious effects on the mountain environment and a protected EU Natura 2000 site. This revisits a seeming paradox of ecosophical tourism mentioned earlier. Markwell (2001) widens this out as:

...an irony inherent in nature-based and ecotourism: that in attempting to transcend the boundaries between the tourist and nature, and thus perhaps have a more 'authentic' experience, ecotourists may be unwittingly contributing to greater environmental damage than other tourists who are content to 'stay within the boundaries' provided. (Markwell, 2001, p. 55)

However, for ecosophical tourism it can be reiterated that such a paradox or irony does not necessarily adhere. Specifically, if human beings can move towards recognising wild places as their original home, as the ecosophical approaches outlined above propose, then their care for it should be a natural consequence of

their being in it (Næss, 1995b). In addition, concerns that this move will increase tourist footfall pressure on a protected and environmentally sensitive area could be countered through the use of the low-carbon-emission buses, outlined above, as the only means of access to the CML site. This would manage visitor numbers and at the same time reduce dependence on private vehicles and their associated pollution.

The above argument does, however, raise a deeper question concerning the very notion of ecosophical tourism, for the two words are strange bedfellows. Tourism, or at least the tourist industry, often involves extracting value and profit from place products, in this case Cairngorm. As such, there is an hegemonic relationship between the tourist industry and place, whereby the financial goals and targets drive the way in which the landscape is managed and used. This clearly does not sit well alongside the core ideas of ecosophy. Indeed, one might argue that the only true form of ecosophical tourism for places such as Cairngorm is where the notion of a tourist industry, exploiting the resources of that place for commercial gain, does not really exist. Instead, (deep) ecosophical tourism might be a more personal and inward journey into such a wilderness, devoid of the trappings of an 'industry' or any other aspects of overt management; like being an explorer before the notion of tourism existed.

The reality is that pure ecosophical tourism is unlikely to occur in the near future due to the change in mindset and approach that would be required by the current tourist industry. In this regard, Næss himself argued that whilst he was pessimistic for the 21st Century where his ecosophy was concerned, he remained "an optimist for the 22nd Century" (Devall, 2001, p. 33). The strategies suggested above, therefore, represent the beginning of a move towards a more ecosophical understanding of the relationship between tourism and nature, and not the end. Such strategies would render the tourist's time on the mountain as a personal and co-creational journey of emerging understanding, learning and passion for wild places. These kinds of proposals are much in line with the literature on the contested subject of touristic authenticity. The narratives, videos and other information currently provided about the fragility, climatic extremes and dangers of the mountain environment are part of the narrow, objectively authentic experience; typifying the concept of nature as an authoritatively constructed and mediated form (Markwell, 2001). By contrast, the contemplative possibilities of 'being' on and with the mountain clearly accord with the search for more existentially authentic touristic experiences of nature and self.

Third, and in line with the above, significant revisions to the appearance and use of the built environment would chime better with the theme of environmental sustainability within the Vision report. The built fabric of the CML site, including aspects such as road signage, could make better use of natural, local building materials such as stone and wood rather than concrete and metal. Redundant ski paraphernalia could also be removed. Ultimately of course, the plan might be as radical as to remove the entire built infrastructure from the mountainside, including the funicular railway itself, perhaps allowing only the use of temporary and semi-temporary structures, such as yurts and dry-stone, turf-roofed shelters, for gathering tourists and facilitators. These low impact structures, a result of local natural materials and human effort, would help emphasise the connection between people and land. However, the removal of the funicular railway is a subject of contestation on several counts:

At the most simple level of analysis, the railway was only completed in 2001 at a cost of £15m. It still needs to recoup these costs through continued operation. For this reason its removal would seem financially unrealistic at present, especially as the EU, which co-funded the building of the funicular, demands that it

operates for 25 years (see Cairngorms Campaign, http://www.cairngormscampaign.org.uk/content/news.php?news_id=30).

More significantly in terms of this research, the removal of the railway could have the paradoxical effect of actually reducing the chance for some tourists to engage with the mountain environment. Rather than a hindrance to a fully ecosophical approach to tourism, it can be argued that in the long run the funicular is actually a step towards a genuinely inclusive mountain experience. This is because it provides access to Cairngorm for tourists with a far wider range of physical and cultural capital. Without the funicular, therefore, the strategies suggested might instead simply become another instance of eco-imperialism (Cater, 2006), favouring the able mountaineer. In essence, the prospects of promoting a more democratised ecosophical engagement amongst tourists are arguably greater with the railway in place.

Another area of contestation concerns arguments put forward by CML and Highlands and Islands Enterprise; namely, that the funicular and associated skiing on Cairngorm underpins over 2000 jobs in the area – although financial and economic evidence to prove this has never been produced (Cairngorms Campaign, 2009). What is clear is that any repositioning of the CML site away from a ski-oriented focus is likely to send shockwaves through the interdependent trading community of ski-related businesses in Aviemore. Indeed, talk in the commercial hinterland tends to be weather and, in particular, snow obsessed. One key-informant interviewee characterised this thus:

Each year a kind of stoical 'resort inertia' seems to kick in. Our local industries become poised for this declining and unpredictable natural bounty [i.e. the snow] that has been delivering less for us each year. (Shop owner, Aviemore).

This situation is further exacerbated by the advent of cheaper flights to more reliable snow conditions abroad. Expectations of high ski tourist numbers keep staffing levels and stocks of ski-apparel high, whilst actual economic growth is low. Thus, a fourth element of the ecosophically informed strategy for the CML site could encompass a degree of local stakeholder engagement in terms of what the site is hoping to achieve. This might involve consultation with, and possible retraining of, those individuals currently employed in the ski industry to become facilitators and guides on the mountain. It might also involve the development of an understanding amongst the local community that visitor motivations and their service provision requirements are likely to demand a refocus of the wider commercial infrastructure, perhaps taking issues such as sustainable consumption into account.

A final point concerns what lessons might be taken from the CML case in relation to other recreational mountain areas faced by climatic change; an issue faced in many other parts of the world as the literature above illustrates. It is clear that places suffering reduced snowfall such as Cairngorm are finding it increasingly difficult to run a sustainable tourist industry based on winter sports. Rather than being viewed as a simple problem of a shrinking market and associated economic turmoil, this is an ideal opportunity to rethink the ethos of mountain tourism and to extend its demand beyond the short winter sports season. The proposed scenario for Cairngorm hints at what might be achieved here: a more inclusive, embodied touristic encounter based around the sympathetic presentation/removal of the built environment and sensitive interpretation of the tourist experience. This could be rooted in the principles of ecosophy and foster enhanced understandings of human beings as part of nature rather than exploitative of it. These ideals would not go amiss for mountain recreation areas elsewhere. Many (though not all) ski resorts are still typified by a built environment and visitor experience centered upon conquering and dominating the mountain and delivering comfort and convenience. Part of this new approach may

also require a revision of the attitudes implicit in ski-resort culture (and arguably post-industrial culture in general), which appear to take much from the mountain wilderness with little recognition of our place in it.

Beyond these mountain settings, there is perhaps a wider role for ecosophical tourism in comparison to other approaches. Certainly, allowing tourists an informed exploration of places, cultures and natural environments starts to question notions of the managed tourist site, typically bound up in rules and regulations about permission to roam which compromise freedom. Instead, the ecosophical stance outlined above serves to democratise access to the transformative potential of wilderness environments and demonstrates a lighter touch to tourism management involving shared dialogues and experiences and unconstrained opportunities to explore. If this increases the sense of connectedness for tourists (and those communities that receive them) and enriches their experience, whilst at the same time improving their level of care, it may in turn help reduce concerns relating to tourism impact. An obstacle to all of this may be convincing those organisations and stakeholders who manage tourist sites that the removal of any gatekeeping activities and allowing tourists to self-regulate their relationship with the environment is a viable way forward.

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