



Ski Areas – for downhill skiers only?

By Heather Morning

FOR many readers of Scottish Mountaineer, probably the last place you want to be is anywhere near one of the Scottish downhill ski resorts in winter, preferring instead the quietness and solitude of mountains less travelled. However, there are valid reasons why you may want to journey through a ski area as part of your day on the hill.

Perhaps it's the shorter daylight hours in winter when driving to a high point on the road at Glenshee or Cairngorm, for ease of access leaves more time on the hill. Perhaps it's the novelty of travelling on the Nevis Range gondola when heading onto the Aonachs, with the added bonus of morning coffee at the top and saving the knees on the way down? Or, it might simply be that the particular mountain you wish to climb is most sensibly accessed through one of the ski areas (Meall a' Bhuiridh and Creise above Glencoe would be a classic example). Or you may be one of our many members who takes others out in winter, either formally or informally, and you are looking for a short walk-in so you can focus on some winter skills. Others may be drawn to ski areas because of access to car parks, toilet facilities, alternative uplift and cafes, doggie walking, sledging, bird watching etc. The list is endless.

Last winter was particularly poor, with snow

NATURAL RETREATS
CAIRNGORM
MOUNTAIN

SAFETY ADVICE FOR ALL MOUNTAIN USERS DURING WINTER OPERATIONS

During winter operation of snowsports, snow grooming machines operate day & night. Often some of the machines are connected to an anchor point with a winch cable. This cable can be hidden in the snow, but can move across the slope without warning.

We would appreciate vigilance when visiting the area, day or night to stay clear of these areas while machines are operational and adhere to any warning signs.

We wish everyone a safe visit to Cairn Gorm and your co-operation is greatly appreciated.



SHOWS THE MACHINES OPERATES FROM ANCHOR POINTS MARKETS





PistenBully 600 Winch



PistenBully 600 Parbully

We ask hillwalkers and mountaineers to walk at the side of the pistes and tow tracks at all times and avoid the practice of digging snow holes / anchors / bucket seats / bollards / ice axe areas and descending in survival bags or other sledge type activities on any designated ski pistes on the adjacent map.

We ask that ski tourists avoid skiing pistes out of hours that have been prepared for the following days ski operations. However, you are welcome to ski open pistes during opening hours.

For more information please see the website
www.mountaineering.scot/snowsports-touring-code

Please follow the international recognised rules in the FIS code of conduct.

barely guaranteed on the highest tops, let alone anywhere else, leaving few options for those of us looking for snow. Sadly, there were a few conflicts of interest between skiers and other mountain users. With awesome snow cover becoming an increasingly rare commodity, mountain users are drawn to the

same geographical area of limited resource, resulting in increased potential for problems. This is the reason for the publication by Mountaineering Scotland last winter of the leaflet 'Snowsports Touring & Managed Resorts in Scotland'. This leaflet is available to view at www.mountaineering.scot/activities/



Pin Ball Alley emergency shelters



Igloo on the piste,
Nevis Range

snowsports-touring/code or contact me for a hard copy (heather@mountaineering.scot)

So what's all the fuss about? Resorts have reported some decidedly dodgy behaviour, including digging snowholes and building igloos on a downhill piste, digging avalanche pits on the piste, and walking or skinning

up pistes and uplift facilities. It's all about common sense and awareness of the fact that one mountain may mean different things to different people and for all our activities to be sustainable and harmonious we need to be aware of and work with other user groups, respecting their needs and expectations.

As Mountain Safety Advisor, myself and James Orpwood, our then Access Officer, worked with the five Scottish ski areas to explore ways in which (even when snow is scarce) we can all work together to ensure a positive and happy day out for all mountain users.

As outlined in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, access rights exist only if exercised responsibly. Access rights do not apply to land that has been developed or set out for a recreational purpose, while in use and where your exercise of access rights would interfere with the recreational use intended for that land. The key word here is 'interfere', so no skinning up the piste! Please think about whether what you are about to do is going to interfere with the operations of the managed ski resort, and if so, think again. To help you, the following advice should be adhered to.

How can you help?

1) Digging holes: Remember a piste isn't necessarily a groomed piste between ski fences. Over the back of Nevis Range for example, the Home Run cuts and weaves through rocky outcrops and is only marked intermittently, so it's easy to see folk getting confused as to what is on or off piste. Check out the photo from Nevis Range – an igloo built on the Home Run. Worth checking out the

piste map before setting off, and make sure your 'creations' are well away from a downhill skiing route! Last season one of the Pisten Bullys (piste machines) fell into a snowhole dug in the side of a piste on the zigzags at Cairngorm. The driver had to be rescued as he was unable to open the door of the machine, and the machine had to be dug out. Fortunately, no one was in the snowhole at the time.

2) Avalanche Pits: Yes, a great thing to do to increase your knowledge of the snowpack, but do it well away from a piste and fill it in again when you have finished so other users don't ski or fall into it in poor visibility.

3) Walking up/down a piste: This is dangerous. Remember a downhill skier may not have the necessary skill to avoid you, particularly if the skier is a novice approaching at speed in poor visibility. In addition, you will leave a line of footprints in the snow (post holes) which may be dangerous and unsightly for those who have paid to use the piste. Stay off the piste when on foot.

4) Skinning up the piste: This is just downright rude, as well as posing a danger to yourself and downhill skiers. Either skin in single file off the side of the piste or if that's just not practical, keep as close to the edge as possible and go in single file.

5) Walking or skinning up the line of an uplift facility: Clearly when the lift is in use this is dangerous for you and the lift



▶
Millie with her Injured leg

user. If the lift is not in use then skinning the line is acceptable, but walking is not. Leaving footprints has the obvious problem of damaging a piste but also in thawing conditions will create pools of water and increase the thaw rate with the potential economic impact on the ski area. You will create postholes which are (a) dangerous and (b) create irrevocable damage to the lift line. As Andy Meldrum, Director/Owner of the Glencoe Ski Area highlights: "A group walking up the Plateau Poma uptrack can cause it to melt a week earlier than it should, and this can cost the business £10,000."

6) Freeloading on the uplift: Blagging a lift, call it what you like, it's no different to walking into your local outdoor store and stealing a jacket. Enough said.

7) Dogs on the loose: Dogs not under close control could cause injury or danger to the animal and/or downhill skiers. I'm speaking from bitter experience on this one - my dog Milly (through my own stupid fault) was hit by a snowboarder and the board sliced through her leg. I was very lucky not to lose her. Never ever take your dog on the piste unless it's out of hours and there are no downhill skiers/boarders around.

8) Poo: Mainly dog poo on the piste, but human poo is also an issue. Ensure that your dog goes to the loo well away from the piste. If you are on or close to the piste carry a poo bag and carry it down. Going snowholing at Cairngorm? Then check out the Snow White initiative (formally Poo Project) at www.cairngormmountain.org/conservation/

All of the ski areas welcome non downhill skiers

What are the ski areas doing to help?

Glencoe

Free parking. Uplift on chair to 680m for £10 return can be used on foot or on ski. All mountain users welcome in the Log Cabin and Plateau Café. Check out www.glencoemountain.co.uk/winter/ for further details.

Nevis Range

Free parking. Uplift on gondola to 650m, cost £14 return (no single available), can be used on foot or with ski. Additionally the quad chair is available for use by people on ski/board and on foot for an additional £2 one way. The quad chair gives access to 910m. The Pine Marten Café at the base station and café at the top of the Gondola both welcome all mountain users. Check out www.nevisrange.co.uk for more details.

Glenshee

Free parking. To allow ski tourers access to the managed ski area, Glenshee are offering a ski tourer ticket for £12. This includes the facility of three single uses of any ski tow or chairlift. The ticket will be punched or marked when used for uplift. For ski tourers not using the uplift facility, and where necessary, main routes will be indicated for skinning up, avoiding the pistes, and these routes will be outwith the

fences. Glenshee asks any tourers not paying the ticket to avoid the piste map area. Further details available at www.ski-glenshee.co.uk

Cairngorm

Cairngorm offers free parking, but asks for donations as there are huge costs for keeping the infrastructure, roads and car parks clear, particularly in the winter. There are several donation boxes located in the car park area. One-way uplift ticket available for ski tourers, cost £12 and available to use on two drag lifts only (e.g. car park T-bar & M1 Poma). Ski tourers **cannot** access via the Funicular. Both the base station café and Ptarmigan restaurant welcome all mountain users. Cairngorm is a popular venue for out-of-hours ski touring. The Winch Cat (Pisten Bully attached to a tensioned wire) regularly operates out of hours, in poor visibility and at night. **This is dangerous and must be avoided.** When the Winch Cat is operating, a light will show on the notice outside the Ranger Base at the Base Station.

Lecht

Free parking. Uplift on the Snowy Owl chairlift is available, cost £8.50 return, last chair down at 4.30pm. Can be used on foot or with skis/snowboards. The Lecht asks any tourers still touring after the ski centre is closed to avoid the piste areas as the snow groomers work on the piste during this time. Café restaurant and bar open to all mountain users.