



THE MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL OF SCOTLAND

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29/7/11

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Dear Ms Sweeney

MCofS Response - Cononish Gold Mine 2011/0166/MIN

Thank you for inviting the Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS) to comment on the application. As stressed in previous applications at this site, Cononish glen is very important for hill walking and climbing interests, hence conservation of the quality of the landscape and maintenance of ease and aesthetics of the access opportunities are vital. We are recognised by the Scottish Government as the Representative Body for hill walkers, climbers and ski tourers. We have nearly 11,000 members and aim to represent the interests of all the 400,000 regular Scottish mountaineers on issues relevant to access to, and conservation of, Scotland's mountaineering environment.

Recreational Access

We have some concern that the walker numbers are extrapolated from a survey conducted in mid April to mid May. Although this included Easter weekend, it is not likely that this is reflective of the likely significantly higher popularity of the Cononish Glen area in the high season of June, July and August.

The MCofS welcomes the awareness, expressed in correspondence with Dalgleish Associates, of the potential pinch point to the northern corner of the site where the proposed site deer fence meets the FCS existing deer fence, and would expect the provision of crossing points to permit ascent / descent in this vicinity between the hillside and the main track.

We also welcome the clarification given from the applicants representative that access along the main track will be maintained at all times in the immediate vicinity of the site. Also that there will be no blocking of the car park at Dalrigh or access to the main Cononish Glen track, albeit with approximately 2 week disruption when use of a ford or temporary bridge may be necessary.

On-site signs and warning sounds are sufficient for walkers, as blasting operations will only be a temporary interruption to their enjoyment of the walk. The situation for ice climbers is however different due to the restricted locations where this activity can be enjoyed, and the potential extra danger if blasting occurs mid-climb. Ice climbers may travel considerable distances to reach the falls for climbing, and therefore knowledge of blasting probability may need to be included in trip planning prior to the day of departure. For this reason signs in the glen are insufficient to avoid causing considerable inconvenience. These signs would need to indicate whether blasting is likely to happen that day rather than just times of day during which it may occur. MCofS would be happy to notify access users in advance of likely blasting days if we were warned in advance we would be able to use our contact networks to warn climbers in advance for input to trip planning. Once a

climber has embarked on the route, the effectiveness of sounding a warning will depend upon the time gap between warning and blasting. The Eas Anie waterfall is about 150 metres hence could easily over 3 hours for a pair to climb, and rapid retreat is not possible.

The commitment to an access management plan with prioritising walkers through a driver Code of Practice is very much welcomed.

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

The TMF remains the element of the development of greatest concern. The MCoFS welcomes that the TMF restoration will take place progressively from year 8 and the methods have been shown to be successful in practice at other locations. We also welcome the efforts to screen the TMF by tree planting. The screening however would have no affect on oblique views from the hillsides at a higher altitude, mainly only horizontal views. The MCoFSs main concern remains the views from higher altitude as screening and ongoing embankment restoration works during the operational period only really address the views from further down the glen. The significant affect on Viewpoint 4 is not restricted to ice climbers, but the main route up Beinn Chuirn passes close to the waterfall also, so the number of likely viewers from here has been underestimated.

We remain concerned about these impacts in the upper parts of a relatively wild glen like Cononish.

Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely

Hebe Carus (Ms)
Access & Conservation Officer