



## INVERNESS BACKCOUNTRY SNOWSPORTS CLUB

Dear Sir/Madam,

We are writing to you to inform you of our proposal to construct and operate a mountain hut on Aonach Mòr. We would also like to consult a wide range of stakeholders, including yourselves, on our proposal and gather views on the project.

Inverness Backcountry Snowsports Club (see Appendix for more details) propose to build a mountain hut in Coire Choille-rai on Aonach Mòr. The hut would be built in line with the new Scottish Government guidance on recreational huts, provide sleeping space for 8-16 people, and feature a wood-stove for heating and gas for cooking. Waste disposal will be carried out to the highest standards.

IBSC hut - proposed location



We intend that the hut would be located at NN202742, to the immediate north of and adjacent to the small lochan. This is approximately 175 metres from the bottom of the Braveheart Chairlift and within the ski area boundary. It also places the site out with the Ben Nevis Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and inside the Ben Nevis Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the Ben Nevis and Glen Coe National Scenic Area (NSA).

The most up to date and comprehensive information can be found on our website at <http://www.ibsc.org.uk/club-matters/ibsc-mountain-hut> and we will update this as the project progresses. I draw your attention to the short slide show (YouTube video) on the web page which shows the proposed location at various times of year and gives an overview of the general area.

#### **Benefits:**

- Accommodation for skiers, climbers and others
- Economic benefit to Nevis Range
- Example of sustainable and environmentally sensitive accommodation
- Unique accommodation offering for Lochaber, and financially sustainable for the Club

#### **Users:**

We propose that the club hut be available for:

- Members of Snowsport Scotland affiliated clubs
- Mountaineering Scotland members & clubs
- Guides and instructor-led groups
- Educational groups and supervised youth-groups

The design specifications would follow the new Scottish Government recreational huts guidance, with a focus on:

- Exceptional insulation, for ease of heating;
- Environmental sensitivity, so as to preserve the nature of the land and to model best-practice in mountain hutting;
- Robustness, being able to withstand the worst of the elements in a place which "enjoys" some of the most ferocious weather in Scotland
- Visually subtle, such as to have a design which blends in with the landscape when viewed from above (e.g. turf roof, natural materials etc.) whilst still being findable in case of storms;

Two potential design routes have been suggested:

- A modular design, built as pre-produced parts, manufactured elsewhere in the Highlands, driven to the ski area, and helicoptered in, to be assembled over a few days at the site;
- A log building, built from logs harvested from forestry, built off-site and once again helicoptered in for re-construction in situ.

Initial proposals for design brief include:

- Gas hobs, for clean cooking in the hut;
- Wood-burning stove, for clean and sustainable heating, drying gear etc;
- Sleeping surfaces for 8-16 people;
- All rubbish to be carried out – leave no trace, groups responsible for packing out all litter;
- Environmentally friendly toilet, as easy to maintain as possible, and not polluting surroundings;
- Space for drying equipment etc.;
- Storage space and preparation area for food.

#### **Current Status**

We have made significant progress so far although we have not approached Highland Council, the planning authority, but intend to do so over the coming weeks.

We have obtained permission to construct the hut from the landowner, Jahama Highland Estates, and from Nevis Range. We have conducted various site visits, including an informal one with an officer from Scottish Natural Heritage, obtained a wind turbine, formed a working group and are developing plans to allow the project to progress.

### **Consultation**

We have identified a range of stakeholders and wish to gather views on the proposal and proceed in a spirit of openness and partnership. Our list of consultees includes Reforesting Scotland, Lochaber High School, local councillors and Community Council, Scottish Avalanche Information Service, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, The Highland Council, Mountaineering Scotland, Scottish Mountaineering Club, Lochaber Mountain Rescue Team, Police Scotland, John Muir Trust, local Mountain Guides, Glenmore Lodge – and any others as appropriate.

To submit your views, please do so by email to [secretary@ibsc.org.uk](mailto:secretary@ibsc.org.uk)

Faithfully,

Mike Cawthorne  
Club President

### **Appendix:**

The Inverness Backcountry Snowsports Club emerged out of the club which was originally the Inverness Nordic Ski Club, and has a long history of running trips around the Highlands for enthusiasts of winter sports beyond the piste. As the normal snow-line through an average Highland winter has risen, opportunities for cross-country skiing from road/valley floor have diminished, but the club has broadened and adapted. With the improvements of diverse off-piste snowsports equipment (cheaper, lighter and more effective than previously), the club has evolved to include all different types of winter recreational activities, including ski-touring, ski mountaineering, telemark skiing, cross-country skiing, snow-kiting, igloo-camping and split boarding. Over the past 5 years, the club has had somewhat of a renaissance, with average annual membership climbing to 100+.

The club's calendar is full throughout the winter, with trips scheduled fortnightly. Overnight trips have proved peerless for building community out of those with different ideas/plans for winter days out, but a shared passion for wild, winter mountain spaces. Thus far, the club has visited bothies, used the CIC Hut under the North Face of Ben Nevis, stayed in stalking-lodges and camped with tents and full (heavy) winter gear. Wonderful experiences, but each has inherent challenges which restrict access to the sports / club to a hard-core, committed few. The club supports the objectives of the MBA, as well as supporting the CIC Hut, wild camping and is appreciative of the estates which have welcomed us. As the club member grows, interest in off-piste skiing grows and the scene develops, it is felt that a dedicated Club hut is a logical and desirable progression which will allow more people to enjoy the snow and wild spaces whilst being a good example of sympathetic and appropriate accommodation in the mountains.