

Camping, the Duke of Buccleuch and land reform

Description

I have long wondered why Scottish Land and Estates, the organisation representing landowners, was so vocal in its support for camping bye-laws. After all Forestry Commission Scotland is by far the largest landowner in the National Park and the voluntary sector, including the Woodland Trust, NTS, RSPB and Royal Scottish Forestry Society also own sizeable chunks. Yes, there are a few private estates such as Glen Falloch and Ardvorlich but Loch Lomond and the Trossachs is hardly a stronghold for the SLE. Moreover, local landowners were not even united in their views on camping: while Luss Estates strongly supported the byelaws, there was a lot of concern from riparian landowners in the Trossachs because of the importance of income from fishing. Drummond Estates expressed serious concerns about the byelaws (which of course the Park failed to acknowledge). My conclusion for some time has been that SLE was vociferous in its support for the byelaws because they wanted a precedent that would open up the possibility of landowners reversing access rights all over Scotland.

I do not think therefore that the timing of the announcement by the Duke of Buccleuch that he had decided to charge for access at Dalkeith Country Park, just six weeks after the byelaws were approved, was entirely a coincidence <https://www.commonspace.scot/articles/3657/exclusive-land-reformers-launch-19th-march-protest-to-target-duke-of-buccleuch-s-estate>. That the two issues are linked was confirmed by the SLE in a letter which appeared in the Herald on Monday. This claimed the proposed charge “is an attempt to manage anti-social behaviour and vandalism”. It went on “This is not so dissimilar to the situation in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park where the Park is unfairly being accused of acting against the spirit of the access legislation by introducing camping restrictions”. The parallels are actually even stronger. The Duke, through his access charge is in effect copying the National Park Authority which wishes to charge people for permits to camp in places with NO facilities. The camping byelaws have opened a can of worms.

It Is good to see political campaigners from the SNP, RISE and the Greens reacting to the Duke of Buccleuch’s decision to try and charge for access at Dalkeith Country Park and about his land being held in a tax haven <https://www.commonspace.scot/articles/3678/revealed-scotland-s-largest-aristocratic-landowner-holds-land-in-offshore-tax-haven> . But they do not seem to have made the connection yet with the LLTNPA’s camping byelaws. I hope they will. Perhaps some of the MSPs who are committed to land reform will start asking questions to Aileen McLeod, Minister for the Environment, about the camping byelaws. Perhaps some of the activists will now consider demonstrating out the Park HQ in Balloch. The Duke, for all his wealth, has far less power than the National Park to prevent people taking access.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

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