

Why are National Parks a higher political priority in England than Scotland?

Description

Last week, the Tory Government at Westminster published an 8-Point Plan for National Parks in England <http://www.cnp.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploadsfiles/National%20Parks%20Plan.pdf>

In the introduction it states the Government has an ambition to put National Parks at the heart of the way we think about the environment.

Contrast this level of interest with this week's Political Hustings in the Sunday Herald which gave the political parties a chance to consider all things environmental. Aileen McLeod, the Environment Minister, wrote the SNP contribution which was limited to repeating what the Government has done so far on climate change (no new commitments) and a statement a future SNP Government would increase the Climate Justice fund to £3m a year. Her poverty of imagination is illustrated by the issues mentioned by Mark Ruskell for the Greens: sea and air pollution, including pesticides; warm homes; fracking; environmental jobs; greener farming through changing subsidies and land reform; food poverty; green spaces and wildlife persecution. Sarah Boyack said Labour would protect air, water and food but spent most of her piece attacking the SNP record on fracking rather than saying what Labour would do. Only RISE mentioned re-wilding and only the Tories mentioned landscape, two issues which should be central to the future of our National Parks.

The Scottish Tories, in line with their party south of the border, are even calling for an extension of National Parks, something that the SNP Government included in their last election manifesto but have never progressed. While some of the ideology behind the Tories 8-Point Action Plan makes me cringe, National Parks are the soul of Britain. They are the centre of our imagination. When people think of Britain, wherever they are, they imagine these landscapes; they have picked up on something, that landscapes are very important to people. The other political parties in Scotland have missed this almost completely. Our politicians have been treating the performance of our existing National Parks as a management, not an environmental or political issue.

While I am not advocating an English model for our National Parks, our politicians could still learn something from the 8-Point Action Plan, for example:

- * that our National Parks have a role in preventing flooding - think of the Cairngorms, intensive moorland management and the floods on Deeside
- * that our National Parks have a key role to play in outdoor education and the commitment to increase this - think of the closure of Outdoor Education centres for young people in our National Parks as a result of Local Authority cuts
- * that the diversity of people visiting the National Parks should be increased - think of the proposed camping ban and its impact on people from the Clyde conurbation being able to enjoy the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park.

While the action plan is full of positive aspirations, some of the proposed targets are far from meeting those aspirations and I find that some of the means of getting there are quite sinister. For example, Westminster wants to connect every young person with nature and is aiming to ensure that 60,000 young people a year experience the Parks through the National Citizens Service. NCS brings together young people from different backgrounds to learn about responsibility and serving their communities not, you may note to enjoy the outdoors or learn about the natural environment. The Action Plan therefore is far from a suitable blue-print for Scotland but should be a wake-up call to the next Scottish Government.

In order to try and promote some debate about National Parks in the lead up to the Scottish Elections and what a Scottish Action Plan for our existing National Parks might look like Parkswatch hopes to feature some articles from different authors over the next few weeks.

Category

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Date Created

March 29, 2016

Author

nickkempe