The camping bye-laws, Scottish culture and attitudes to the countryside

Description

I have come across a few pieces in the media over the last two weeks which I believe show just how out of touch the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority are in their attempt to stamp out camping and fires.

Beltane, fires and the Park

Beltane, one of four Gaelic seasonal festivals, was most commonly held on 1st May and marked the beginning of summer. It was celebrated with fire as described in this fine piece from earlier this week in Bella Caledonia :

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> *By now the Beltane fires lit across Scotland will be smoking ashes. In the far North of Scotland the last two weeks of April were like the first two week of January, so a celebration of the beginning of Summer, of the coming colours â??of the land of joyâ?• as the old Gaelic â??Beltane Blessingâ?• puts it, was especially welcome. Traditionally, on May Day, all the fires in the houses throughout the district were extinguished and the tein eigin, the need fire, was produced on the nearest hillock. This fire was divided into two and the people would drive their cattle and themselves between the two fires for purification and safekeeping against any future ailment during the coming year. The people then obtained fires for their homes from the tein eigin. It was bad luck not to do this. At Beltane we are all creatairean, or â??creaturesâ?• as it translates into English. The ritual, after all, is for everyone or it is for no-one. From where I work I can see Ben Dorrery. Up until the outbreak of World War One the Beltane fire was joyously lit upon it.*

At Beltane, people started to move cattle up to their summer pastures. There are summer shielings scattered all over the National Park but you wonâ??t find any trace of the fires now on the bottom of the straths and glens, the places which are now to become camping management zones where fires are banned. The Minister for the Environment, Aileen McLeod, has agreed to a ban on fires, which were included in our access rights, because she was impressed by the â??lasting damageâ?• of a few fireplaces. I would suggest this shows neither the Park nor the Minister have much understanding of ecology â?? where is the lasting damage from the Beltane fires? â?? or appreciation of history.

The best places to wild camp in Scotland?

Two weeks ago the Sunday Herald featured an article â??Scotland the Bestâ??s Guide to wild camping in Northern Scotland by Peter Irvine. It described 10 places to wild camp, not all of them in the

north â?? Arran and Glen Etive were on the list â?? but ALL of them were by the road (there was a reference to Sandwood Bay, where you need to walk of course, in the description of camping at Oldshoremore).

What a gulf in attitude to the LLTNPA and Forestry Commission Scotland who continue to claim that roadside camping is not wild camping without any consideration to the impact on tourism of the ability of people to enjoy the countryside.

Camping and nature reserves

I was pleasantly surprised to read in Natureâ??s Home, the RSPB magazine (I am a longstanding member), that the RSPB in inviting people to â??Join the Sleepoutâ?• 30-31st July http://rspb.org.uk/sleepout:

> *â??Discover the secret world of nature by night, and join thousands of households across the UK in spending a night amid nature. Some will head to a participating nature reserveâ?¦â?¦â?¦â?¦..â?•*

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My surprise was because RSPB historically does not have a great record on encouraging access in Scotland (despite the key role that hillwalkers have played in detecting raptor persecution). It also supported the introduction of the proposed camping byelaws. Indeed, RSPB tried unsuccessfully to get the byelaws extended to their property â??Wardâ??s Farmâ?• on the southern part of the Loch Lomond National Nature reserve and was behind the extension of the byelaws to the north shore of Loch Arklet because of the alleged risk of displacement if camping was banned at Loch Chon.

I believe the UK RSPB understands something that appears beyond the comprehension of the LLTNPA, camping is one of the best ways to experience nature. One of the great joys of camping by a loch shore is peering out from under the tent flap in the morning and seeing whatâ??s about. It is therefore great RSPB are encouraging people to come and sleep out in some of their own nature reserves and a sad reflection of the â??localâ?• management in Scotland that it appears to be against this. I cannot find any sleepout events in Scotland. Its not too late for the RSPB Scotland to organise sleepouts at Wardâ??s Farm and Inversnaid, their two properties in the National Park, for later this year. Perhaps they could invite some LLTNPA Board Members to participate.

Category

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