

Accommodating the needs of visitors in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park ??? by Nick Halls

Description

On the way to pick up Nick Kempe from Balloch Station to look at proposed Trossachs Camping Management Zones I passed Duck Bay picnic area at about 09.30 on Monday 17/05/2016, after a very pleasant and presumably busy weekend.

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Photo credit Nick Halls

I do not know who is responsible for maintaining the picnic area, but it does represent the first public area after the entrance to the National Park.

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Photo credit Nick Halls

As the pictures show the waste bins were overflowing, litter was strewn around picnic tables, together with tin foil disposable barbecues and old coals.

The surface of all the picnic tables were charred to near destruction. Visitors from England walking their dog were appalled at the condition of the area, but immediately recognised that facilities were wholly inadequate.

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Photo credit Nick Halls

I imagine that sometime during the day the garbage would be scheduled for collection, but I doubt whether this would include a thorough clean up of the area. At this time of year garbage collection probably needs to be almost daily.

What struck me was the lack of adequate facilities to accommodate the use that visitors regularly make of the area, the bins are insufficient for the quantity of garbage that is generated. The picnic tables do not seem to be fit for purpose or hygienic to use and the hardstanding area under the tables does not seem to be sufficiently extensive to accommodate the concentrated footfall of users, or allow visitors who do not wish to damage the tables with hot barbecues to use an area of hardstanding close to the table.

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Photo credit Nick Halls

My impression was that the appearance of the area was in large part due to the inadequacy of the facilities created to accommodate visitor needs. In this particular locality tables constructed of concrete, positioned on extensive areas of hard standing, with bins with a substantial capacity close by would enable visitors to both enjoy themselves, have picnics and to dispose of litter adequately.

There are no toilets, but there must have been hundreds of people.

During our subsequent exploration of the Camping Management Zones it became more evident that there does not seem to be a coherent Visitor Management Strategy that accommodates the actual behaviour of the visitors to the National Park. As an artefact of accommodating visitors in vehicles, the carparks concentrate people. This makes accumulation of litter foreseeable. At places where people congregate they commonly require toilets and if carparks are proximal to scenic visitor attractions then litter will be distributed around. Some carparks in the National Park have bins, others do not, one or two have toilets but the majority do not, some areas seem to have regular litter collection others do not. Litter & toilet paper seems to be ubiquitous.

Responsibility for facilities to accommodate vehicles & leisure activities are operated by different bodies, Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS), the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (NPA), Charitable Trusts and the Councils that provide the public services within the National Park.

The responsibility of each of the agencies that contribute to the upkeep of the National Park seem to be rigidly delineated with a division of labour that can only be counter productive. One example we witnessed on our tour (see previous post by Nick Kempe) being that although Park Rangers use an FCS carpark, they do not, even as a part of casual public responsibility for the environment, pick up litter; but 10 metres away litter is apparently their responsibility, although if a member of the public innocently makes the mistake of moving it to the FCS car park, NPA Rangers suddenly have no responsibility for it! It also emerged that NPA Rangers are not allowed to transport garbage in their vehicles, which I suppose must be a Health and Safety at Work issue.

For a visitor or resident of the National Park this apparent lack of coordinated activity of the public bodies that are responsible for the National Park is frankly shocking, and the inadequate manner in which the behaviours of visitors are managed and impacts mitigated seems almost a denial of responsibility. I am embittered by the thought that much of the employment created within the public bodies is funded from general taxation and the people involved are public servants. I took the litter away myself fuming with disgust.

It is my understanding that the trajectory of National Park Authority thinking is towards increased enforcement, with Rangers empowered to impose fines for littering. The NPA has a long way to go to demonstrate that it has done everything possible to establish the facilities the visitors need and expect to be available, and which mitigate the impacts of visitor numbers by facilitating their capacity to behave responsibly, before introducing such an expedient.

NB In spite of the imminent introduction of Bye Laws restricting camping within the Management Zones, there was no evidence of any efforts to accommodate camping within the Management Zones, even with informal provision, so walkers & cyclists will be obliged to travel considerable distances and actually leave the areas they came to experience without the option of an overnight stay. It all seems so utterly inappropriate and a denial of the purpose of the National Park.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. Forestry Commission Scotland
2. Litter
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