

Charging for access is part of the commercial agenda of the LLTNPA

Description



The new car parking meters at Inveruglas carpark – it appears these are about to be scrapped in favour of a new automated number plate recognition system

At the end of last week, while the National had an excellent article by Lesley Riddoch and follow up letter by James Cassidy on access to the countryside, the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority was advertising its latest plans to charge for access. The contrast between what is needed and the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park is doing could not be greater.

I would urge you to read the Lesley Riddoch article in full if you have not already done so – and don't be put off about it starting on the Olympics, its all about why access to the countryside is more

important.

“Norway has sorted two big structural problems Scots have yet to really address; access to the Great Outdoors and access to excellent, affordable outdoor early years care. Looking first at outdoor access, the two countries have had very different sporting histories. Norway has 43 national parks – the first established in 1962. Scotland has two national parks – the first established in 2002 and neither is a wilderness area owned by the government as national parks are in Norway. Indeed, across the piece, formal rights of access to the outdoors in Scotland have typically occurred half a century later than Norway, have been less far-reaching and have not changed or challenged the dominance of private, sporting estates. Outdoor experience begins almost at birth in Norway – informally in near universally available family weekend cabins (hytter) and formally in kindergarten. Children in Norway not only have the right to affordable childcare between the ages of one and six, they also have the right to be outdoors at least one day per week.”

James Cassidy's response, headed "Privatisation by Stealth, is equally good and makes the link with how the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority have been undermining access rights.

What we are seeing in LLTNP is the privatisation by stealth of a healthy and growing outdoors lifestyle, and if there's anything more likely to deter ordinary people from accessing the outdoors it's by pricing it out of their reach, and all under the threat of a £500 fine if you so much as camp where you shouldn't. In the 1920s and 30s many people from the industrial heartlands of Scotland, such as the iconic outdoorsman Tom Weir, would take to the hills of Loch Lomond and Arrochar, camping by loch-sides, sheltering in caves and under old army capes, trying to escape the horrendous conditions and grinding poverty of the cities.

The LLTNPA's privatisation by stealth

At the end of last week the LLTNPA advertised a tender for an [Automated Number Plate Recognition system](#) for three car parks it owns, Millarochy, Tarbert and Inveruglas. So what, you might ask? Well the tender document tells you a little about where commercialisation in the National Park is going.

The idea is not just to charge for carparking but to raise the maximum amount of money possible:

“2.17.1 The proposed system must:

2.17.1.2 Maximise the revenue achieved via all car parks across stated NPA sites

2.17.1.3 Minimise any restriction to the flow of traffic on NPA sites.

2.17.1.4 Maximise overall parking occupancy”

and,

“The service must be able to operate 24 hours per day per year on a planned and adhoc basis. The NPA however will determine at what times charges will apply. For example charges might not be made on Christmas Day.”

It will be hard for any contractor to influence occupancy, as the LLTNPA sets the charges but its clear the LLTNPA is determined that no-one will escape without paying.

It is also clear this is intended as only the start of a process of introducing carparking charges across the National Park – I suspect how far this goes will depend on how much they can get away with:

“The NPA plans to enter into an agreement with the successful contractor, offering exclusive rights to introduce and operate an ANPR car park management system at sites of the NPA choosing, subject to agreement.

The contract will initially be for the three NPA’s sites quoted herein with the possibility of further sites being added or subtracted during the duration of the contract subject to suitability.”

Not for the first time, poorly thought out proposals by the LLTNPA will result in the squandering of public money. The tender makes clear this includes provision of Payment machines – which will replace the Pay and Display machines the LLTNPA has just installed at Inveruglas! (see photo above) :

“The successful contractor will be responsible, at their cost, to purchase, install and maintain all necessary equipment required to fulfil the contract.”

“2.20 The contractor if required must ensure any car park is adequately covered with ticket issuing machines to ensure minimal walking distance from any car parking space to ticket machine.

2.21 The contractor if required must also provide an alternative machine immediately available in case of breakdown within a minimal walking distance. Proposed number and location of machines will be agreed with the NPA.”

What’s wrong with the proposed car parking charges

- They appear to have been developed in secret just like the camping byelaws. There have been no papers in public board meetings about this.
- There has been no open public consultation about whether the LLTNPA should try to make as much money as possible out of the assets it owns nor whether this is right in our National Parks. There are plenty of other ways to fund our National Parks. This is commercialisation by stealth, motivated by neo-liberal thinking.
- The LLTNPA has made clear in its tender that charging has nothing to do with encouraging people to stop coming to the National Park by car or adopt sustainable transport- its about maximising the number of cars and therefore its own income.
- Encouraging people to visit a place – as has happened at Inveruglas where a new viewing tower to look out over Loch Lomond was built as part of the new Scenic Routes initiative – and then 18 months later to sting them for the privilege strikes me as being both immoral and maladroit. Is the Park trying to destroy tourism?
- Forcing people to pay car parking charges at important places for outdoor recreation – Inveruglas is the most popular starting point for Ben Vane and Ben Vorlich while Millarochy has long been an important launching point for canoes and dinghies – is basically a charge for access. The LLTNPA has a statutory duty to promote enjoyment of the countryside and is tasked by Ministers with encouraging physical activity but is proposing car parking charges which will penalise the people who want to get out and into the countryside and be active most. If the LLTNPA want to know why this is plain stupid, they should just read Lesley Riddoch.
- The proposal is clearly linked to the proposed camping byelaws. The tender document which states the successful bidder will “If required report on any NPA byelaw violations.” (para 2.30.6). The proposed camping byelaws would make it an offence to sleep in a vehicle overnight – almost impossible to enforce when Ranger Patrols stop at 10pm but if you have video cameras in carparks this becomes much easier to enforce. No wonder the tender says the successful bidder may be asked to extend the system to other carparks in future. Where will this stop?
- The charges are likely to destroy local tourism or create problems elsewhere because they will deter people from using the carparks. They will either go elsewhere or find other places to park. This could be on verges, forcing the Park to cordon off even more areas, or in settlements like Tarbert people will find other places to park, to the inconvenience of local residents. Where people go elsewhere this will be to the detriment of the local economy, directly in some cases such as the cafe situated in the Inveruglas car park and the hotel at Tarbert.
- The introduction of car parking charges at Millarochy will remove the last significant free stopping

off point along east Loch Lomond between Balmaha and Rowardennan. James Cassidy in his letter wrote eloquently about the impact of the existing camping byelaws on walkers of the West Highland Way, but day visitors are now being squeezed out. There is no bus and the creation of an urban clearway reduced the number of potential stopping off points. The Rowardennan hotel offered free parking on its land along the shore – because it knew this was good for business – but the LLTNPA’s response to this has been to try and extend the clearway to the FCS carpark forcing people to use this. In this context, charging for cars at Millarochy seems like part of a plan to deter people from visiting east Loch Lomond completely. Was this what we created National Parks for?

Category

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