

National Parks – the power of the idea

Description

There was more on National Parks on Out of Doors on Saturday

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b088flk5> including an interview with Robert Maund, former chair, and Ross Anderson current chair of the Scottish Campaign for National Parks from 36mins. I am a member of the SCNP Executive Committee.

The interview focussed on the economic arguments for National Parks. This is because the current view of the Scottish Government is that further National Parks are unaffordable, as expressed recently in the Scottish Parliament by Roseanna Cunningham, Minister for the Environment:

19/12/16 SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

ORAL ANSWER

15 December 2016

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Index Heading: *Economy*

*Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party)
To ask the Scottish Government what impact the establishment of a new national park would have on tourism and conservation.*

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Roseanna Cunningham:

While the Scottish Government recognises the important contribution our existing National Parks make to tourism, conservation and the wider Scottish economy, any new national parks would incur significant costs. At a time of pressures on public finances, we do not believe that it is right to raise expectations regarding the designation of new national parks. We will therefore continue to focus our support on our existing Parks so that they can continue their track record of success.

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

Now while the SCNP has produced a number of reports on National Parks, which illustrate the benefits they can bring ([see here](#)), in my view those benefits ultimately are attributable to the power of the idea. National Parks conjure up the idea of special places. So, if you are visiting a country and want

to see special places, there is fair chance you will choose a National Park. If you have lots of National Parks, then you are a country really worth visiting. Its not surprising they bring economic benefits

That same idea though has implications for the way the land is managed. People don't choose to go to National Parks because they want to visit a theme park – that's why 33,000 odd people signed a petition against Flamingo Land within a few days – they understood, a gut response determined somewhere in the collective unconcious, but very real, that this is not what National Parks should be for. Conversely, people instinctively understand that National Parks should be about wildlife and that there is something very wrong when our National Parks are unable to protect raptors and other species from persecution.

I set up Parkswatch because our National Parks weren't living up to the idea, the ideal, and needed watching. The reasons for this are complex, and worth analysing – indeed much of parkswatch is about why things are going so wrong in our National Parks – and Roseanna Cunningham's claims that our two existing National Parks have "a track record of success" is in my view a long long way from the truth. There are people I respect, who think our current National Parks have so tainted the ideal that they are opposed to any further National Parks in Scotland. There are other people, who I also respect, who are loathe to criticise our two National Parks but who are trying to work behind the scenes to remedy their faults. My own view, is different. I don't think there is anything inconsistent in using the power of the idea to criticise our existing National Parks – and prevent the idea and ideal being eroded – and to argue that Scotland needs more National Parks. That's why I will be helping at the SCNP stall in the Scottish Parliament this week, putting the case for new National Parks, while continuing to criticise our existing ones.

What I'd say to Roseanna Cunningham, if I get to meet her, is cost should not be the primary consideration when it comes to National Parks. What should come first is protecting land and nature for people to enjoy and the real question is does the Scottish Government wish to do that? Not cost. Indeed I might quote Mike Reynolds, head of the National Park Service in the USA, who talking about landownership near the beginning of the Out of Doors programme asked if private landowners didn't work towards National Park objectives, why wouldn't you nationalise the land? This from neo-liberal America. As long as the Scottish Government does not allow National Parks to do stupid things – such as the LLTNPA spending £345k on the Loch Lomond Campsite and deploying dozens of rangers in a quasi police force to stop innocent campers camping – National Parks will repay the investment. The Scottish Government needs to think again, both about new National Parks and how our existing National Parks have failed to deliver their potential.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs
2. National Parks

Tags

1. conservation
2. LLTNPA
3. Scottish Government

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