

Forest Drive and the camping zone that never was

Description

By Ross MacBeath



Entrance to Forest Drive Zones B and C

Forest Drive

In order to stop people from camping by the loch shores and to meet their commitment to Scottish Ministers to deliver 300 “new” camping pitches, the LLTNPA had to find somewhere else for people to camp – so they leaned on Forestry Commission Scotland to use their land and have “created” no less than 76 permit places (just four of which are for campervans) along Forest Drive north of Aberfoyle. In the past, the camping here has been mainly by Loch Drunkie, which has a few places close to the loch side which are good for camping, and the south shore of Loch Achray. I went to have a look at the “new” areas and this post focuses on “Zone C” so readers can understand the implications of what the LLTNPA is doing to campers.

Forest Drive Camping Zone C



The National Parks new maps of Zone 'C' indicate large expanses of open ground in a woodland locations with what looks like ample opportunity to choose a camping place by the waters edge or in among the trees.

Arriving just after 4 PM I found locked gates, a now common occurrence in part of a park wide policy of denying access to visitors outside office hours. Worse, it seems the code for exit is only granted if payment has been made through their permit booking system, effectively making access to our National Park on a pay as you go basis. Information on the [Three Lochs Forest Drive page](#) states that “*The drive is open to vehicles from Easter to October, daily from 9am*” The byelaws however started on of 1st March so this means there is a denial of access to 72 camping and 4 motorhome places until the 16th of April this year. Surely not! Or maybe the LLTNPA just need more time to get some camping provision in place at Forest Drive.

Access to Forest Drive and other gated facilities is in disarray

The Three Lochs Forest Drive page tells us access will be available until 4 pm and the exit gate locked at 5 pm after which a code is required to exit. Other locations have different opening and closing times and the T&Cs for Loch Chon contradicts itself. Confusion reigns and the National Park and Forestry Commission need to get their act together because at the moment it is the visiting public that is suffering through wasted journeys and uncertainties. It is unacceptable to lock out visitors after encouraging them to drive for an hour and a half gain access to forest drive only to be turned away by a locked gate. Quite clearly visitors are being excluded from this area of the National Park at a time when access is most desirable, in the evening after work or as in this case, Sunday afternoon.

Camping Zone C

A Camping Zone without camping pitches

Camping Zone C is a short distance along a wider than expected compacted hard core road, not what the the term “Forest Drive” conjures up, more of a superhighway. The vista beyond the boundary sign, though beautiful, was clearly not the camping ground expected. The description on the LLTNPA booking site warns of some “uneven terrain in places” but nothing like this. In point of fact the entire zone is uneven in the extreme, except for a path that’s not indicated on their map. It’s is not an area one would choose to enter or cross if it could be avoided never mind to search out and use a camping pitch. A clear case of false advertising and LLTNPA will find themselves challenged legally about this and many similar misrepresentations that comprise their so called “camping provision”.



First view of Camping Zone C – a shocking place to camp

This entire zone is unsuitable for recreational camping

Not seeing anything that resembles a camping place from the road, I walked around the perimeter marked out by a line of yellow topped wooden posts. This gives a view from the perimeter in to the Camping Zone and I hoped I would be able to identify potential camping places along the way. You can view progress by clicking on the grid below and scroll/ click through the gallery to view each image in turn.



No natural pitches and the two created are not suitable as they stand

In the absence of any natural pitches big enough to take a tent, the National Park Authority have been forced into a botched attempt to create them to meet their requirements to deliver at least two pitches in permit zone C. From a visitor perspective, you would expect to have a choice of at least 6 to 10 prime locations in a zone of this size



Camping Zone C showing location of two pitches in green

The National Park Authorities [Camping Permit Conditions](#) state:

- “Avoid pitching your tent on ground that is already trampled or has dying vegetation cover. Pitch on durable surfaces, such as gravel, and grasses.
- Choose a safe place to pitch your tent. Your choice of where to pitch your tent is at your own risk.”

Zone C – camping pitch 1

Pitch 1 is a semi natural pitch on at a loch side location. The pitch is bounded by the loch to the south, a bog to the west and a slope to all other aspects. The area is constrained and was too small for a tent.



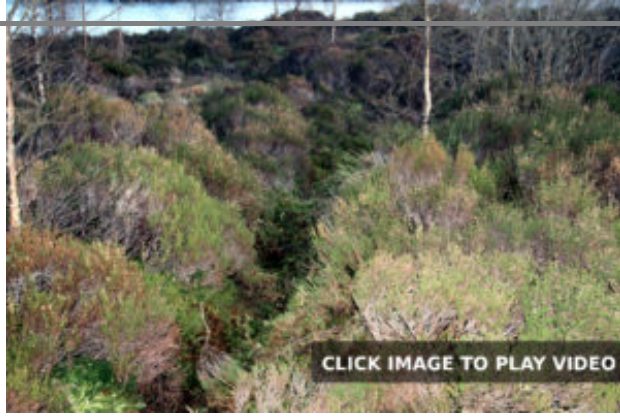
Ground work in the form of cutting away a heather patch has been required to increase the area to allow pitching a small tent. The works have been botched insofar as they have not removed the heather roots so regrowth will occur this season but more importantly, in cutting back the heather, the Park Authority have left sharp heather stalks which will hole any tent floor pitched upon it, not to mention the possibility of stabbing injuries to humans. The site slopes to the loch and is waterlogged.



The water level is 2 inches below the camping surface making it wet and the shore line is soft and in danger of collapsing under human loads at the edge. The loch is deep at this location and this poses a threat especially to children. The lack of level space to manoeuvre around any camping pitch is a issue. This pitch is just not suitable for recreational camping except perhaps for the smallest of tents in dry weather and if ground cover issues were resolved. However this camping pitch breaches advice in the Camping Permit Conditions insofar as it does not constitute a safe area to camp.

Zone C – Camping pitch 2

It's hard to understand who would believe the mere strimming of an area in this location would result in a serviceable camping pitch. The Park Authority have chosen an area beside the existing path down towards the loch shore view point just off the main track.



They have cut a the heather back to form line through the dense vegetation which its easy to walk past. It is not a path with a hard surface nor is it a typical worn path only a gap in the vegetation, it's



On reaching the end in this short 'path' there is a second area that has been trimmed back to reduce the height of vegetation in the mass of moss, heather and thick grasses that blanket the zone. It remains 6 – 8 inches thick and is not a suitable surface for pitching a tent and securing tent pegs to the ground is problematic. As before, the cut heather stalks have been left 4 to 6 inches long which would cause injury to any person and tent using this site. The site is small and there is nowhere to erect a



Cooking, even with a stove would pose a real fire risk and without firm ground as as stated in their own Camping Permit Conditions, recreational camping cannot take place.

Tick and Midge Haven



The nature of the vegetation cover interspaced with standing water makes this Zone an ideal breeding ground for midges and ticks, the dense vegetation provides an insulated layer at root level that allows insect eggs, larvae, pupae, nymphs, or adults to overwinter in all but the severest conditions thus guaranteeing large insect populations in the summer months. Not a place you would want to spend time.

Spectacularly failed, even when doing nothing.

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority and their board are responsible for misleading the public and other agencies on a massive scale. It is clear they have failed to provide equivalent camping pitches for those camping out of cars. The very campers they have banned from all their management zones. Its hard to imagine camping of any type being viable anywhere in Zone C.

Besides double counting existing pitches as new provision (Loch Lubnaig and Sallochry to meet their target of 300 new places) the LLTNPA are trying to muddy the waters by renaming out of car camping style as a wild camping experience both at Loch Chon and elsewhere. They are doing this so they can justify the poor provision at Loch Chon, their failure to provide new facilities and for doing absolutely nothing to ensure there are viable places to camp in the locations they have decided to allow camping by permit. We can see this from the images for zone C and the many other camping zones that are devoid of any places which it is feasible let alone good to camp.

It's time for the Scottish Government to scrap these byelaws, the LLTNPA have spectacularly failed to meet their commitments and are not competent to manage camping.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. access rights
2. camping
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4. LLTNPA
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