

LLTNPA's treatment of campers at Forest Drive – Spirit of Scotland

Description

By Ross MacBeath

Three Lochs Forest Drive Camping Permit Zone M

Following my visit to Forest Drive and posts on [Zone B](#) and [Zone C](#), I thought I would cover zone M at the other end of Forest Drive because there was actually a family camping there when I visited on the 10th of April '17.

Misleading information about the permit area

There are according to the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority website no facilities in this permit zone, “no drinking water available” but “There are toilets half way along Three Lochs Forest Drive, up to 3km away.”



* click map to zoom

- The distance back along the drive to the toilets is 5.6 Km, if walking this would give a round trip of 11.2 km, not the maximum of 3 km implied, taking between 2.5 hrs to 4 hrs depending on pace.
- Forest drive is a one way system, therefore to drive from any camping zone on Forest Drive to the toilets and return to your permit zone is a 14.4 km round trip taking about 45 minutes drive within speed limits

A Family with young children and a dog sold a pitch for a two man tent

The family of 5, 2 adults and 3 children, with a dog, had purchased a permit for Forest Drive zone 'M': a site suitable only for a three man tent in a location wholly unsuitable for a family camp. The LLTNPA's "Get a Permit site" misled them by not explaining the nature of the site or its capacity for tent size. The result is their 8 man tent had to be shoehorned into the only level space in the entire zone leaving them precariously close to an overhanging river bank.



Pitching an 8 man tent on a 3 man pitch

Problems posed for these campers

It's impossible to tension the guys properly due to the river behind and dense vegetation to the front so with high winds the whole lot could end in the river or collapsed with pole damage. Without space between the tent and the river, the central pole hoops each side of the door could not be pegged at the river side at all, leaving the tent unstable in the 26 mph winds experienced on 10th April when this camp took place. Being so close to river, the weight of an adult on the bank fixing guy lines could cause a collapse with at best a soaking, at worst a serious injury. .

The door as you can see opens into the gap in the vegetation making entry and exit limited if not problematic, forcing entry to be made by a corridor in the vegetation. The greater area around the tent is a nightmare, it's tick heaven and puts those in this area at some risk of tick bites. The nature of the vegetation also makes it likely that adders are present and care should be take especially in April when they come out of hibernation. The use of sandals or even shorts would be ill advised due to the blanket of brambles prevalent in this area of the zone.

LLTNPA sells a product that fails to meet requirements then refuses a replacement.

The family in question were new to camping and oblivious to some of the problems they may face which could turn their first camping experience into a camping nightmare. They had identified on arrival that zone G by the loch side would have made a more suitable location for the family to camp. but there was no indication of this on the permit booking website as there are no photographs or descriptive text to the suitability of any zone.at Forest Drive.

In any case changing zones is not allowed under the parks terms and conditions, which states "Permits cannot be transferred to other permit areas..." considering they have been mis-sold the camping experience that is no more than a cynical attempt by the LLTNPA to absolve itself from the need to provide a more suitable pitch which should have been identifiable during the booking process in the first place.



The LLTNPA's map for Three Lochs Forest Drive Zone M

shows a long zone bounded by the river to the north and Forest Drive to the south. It details some

trees at the western limit of a large semi oval camping ground becoming narrower corridor as it stretches east to the wooded area just below the gate. This area is expected to provide two camping pitches with visitor choice from the greater zone area. The image of the tent is placed over a location which in reality is a sink hole that drains runoff from the road in wet weather.

LLTNPA's map fails to represent the true nature of Zone M

The Map of course does not represent what we find on the ground. The shape of the zone follows the north and south bounds of the river and road making the true area of the zone similar in size but the narrow area between each end of the zone is filled with trees and scrub. There is also a discrepancy with post position at the east end sign and yellow topped marker by the river.

The whole idea of a zone is misused here to con the public, stakeholders and ministers into believing something has been delivered when it has not. It is clear the true extent of the camping zone is virtually no larger than those areas shown in green and marked as pitch 1 and pitch 2 (on map below) and even then pitch 2 is not viable for camping due to the nature of the ground vegetation cover and it's location in surrounding vegetation.

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Vegetation is dynamic and the diagram represents summer / autumn seasons.

Pitch 1 – a Natural “found” pitch by the river bank

As stated before, good camping pitches are found not made.

Pitch 1 is the only natural camping pitch in the zone. Its a small, level, dry grassy patch to the west edge of the zone. The pitch is longer and not much than wider than the path it sits on so will only suit a 1 or 2 man oblong footprint tent. The presence of a mature fire ring indicates that this area has been used for camping in past seasons. This is not a new provision but an existing site. Being on a path into the rest of the oval area its not well situated as people and their pets pass looking for the second pitch or just exploring the area. While at present there is another route down from the road it's likely to be cutoff with brambles when the growing season begins. .



Pitch 1 Long and Narrow and suitable for a two/three person tent.

Pitch 2 is not a viable camping pitch

The second pitch is just beyond the first, on the same path. It is no more than a strimmed area of vegetation (bracken) on ground which is raised slightly above the surrounding area. It is dry, even and fairly level. The problem is the underlying vegetation has been cut back to provide the so called pitch in the middle of what is a dense patch of Bracken and Brambles. When the growing season restarts it will quickly become unusable without regular strimming and very undesirable when the surrounding vegetation reaches waist height.



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Pitch 2 is not viable as a camping pitch, the cut down vegetation will re-establish itself and its location in the middle of bracken is wholly unsuitable. The location is adjacent to brambles and will suffer encroachment if not already present on the pitch. Locating tents in .bracken is undesirable as it's a preferred habitat for ticks.

The location of two pitches such in close proximity is also undesirable with the potential for mutual disturbance and the lack of surrounding space in this side of the zone make multiple occupancy undesirable. The remainder of the half oval end of Zone M is not inaccessible to humans because of dense vegetation and brambles.

The west end of the zone is largely inaccessible.





The ground cover in the oval area of zone M, designated the camping area by the tent symbol in the Parks Map, in reality, like the rest of the area, offers nothing in the way of recreation. It is both rough and bramble filled, where access to the rest of the zone is down slopes only if they are not overgrown and so blocked by vegetation. The central section where the zone narrows to a steep slope and with an almost vertical drop to the river it is not accessible. The areas immediately to the west and east of the narrows are overgrown and bramble filled.

The Central Narrowed Portion of Zone M is Completely inaccessible

The central portion from the east of the zone to the west is impassable due to steep slope and thick vegetation. There is no connection path between the West and East side of Zone M' The Bramble and dense vegetation covers almost half of the semi oval area shown with the tent symbol.



The East end of Zone M

The east end of Zone M is somewhat inaccessible due to slopes and thick bramble entangled vegetation, There are three or so locations where access is possible down rather steep slopes there is nothing more in the area than a path through to one of the other exits.making entrance pointless as there is no viable camping locations or other reason to come into this end of the zone.other than to search fruitlessly for a camping spot or exploration.



These images were taken before the start of the growing season

The LLTNPA attitude towards visitors is shocking and their terms & conditions and regulations for the park are draconian: *“You must arrive at your permit area after 1pm on the first day of your permit and leave before 11am on the last day of your permit”* under threat of a £500 fine and a criminal conviction.

See [terms and conditions here](#)

The LLTNPA also take the view through their zero liability clause that it is your responsibility to decide on the safety of their product, that is the “camping experience” that they have sold you, which of course you can only do once you arrive on site. Then, if the location is dangerous and unsuitable as is the case above, they expect you to put up with a poor experience or cancel your weekend and return home.

Category

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Date Created

April 14, 2017

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