

Infrastructure for campervans and visitors in Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park

Description

There is a compelling case to establish an Outer Hebrides national park

CONGRATULATIONS are due to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar for leading local efforts to establish the long distance walking route, the Hebridean Way ("Way ahead is glorious as it lasts 156 miles through 10 islands", The Herald, April 29). At a time when most local authorities are making pathetic progress in establishing new walking and cycling routes and failing to remove obstructions to public access, it is good to know the opposite is true in the far west. Perhaps all that land now in community ownership in the Hebrides is underpinning this progress and should be a lesson for the rest of us.

Your editorial ("Getting away from it all on new island walking route", The Herald, April 29) emphasises the outstanding natural beauty of the Outer Hebrides and its significance, for both locals and visitors. Surely now is the time to ask once again if these islands deserve recognition within Scotland's national park system. As the newly elected members of the Comhairle take their seats later this



THE WAY AHEAD: Walkers on South Uist beach, part of the new Hebridean Way. Picture: Mick Blunt / Outer Hebrides Tourism

week the opportunity is there to examine the economic and environmental case for Scotland's third national park to be on their doorstep. A national park under local control and incorporating the finest scenery, historic and wildlife areas from Barra to Lewis, perhaps with the addition of St Kilda, would be of global significance, fully justifying world heritage status. It would immediately register on the

tick list of all visitors to the UK who were seeking out our best areas of nature and culture. As a value-for-money public investment it would be unbeatable, as any economist or tourism operator, from ferry owner to bed and breakfast provider will confirm.

An Outer Hebrides national park could also benefit from the experiences of our first two national parks, in the Cairngorms and in

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs. This should include learning from the mistakes, such as the secretive purchase by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS), using £7.4 million of public funds, of a privately owned native woodland in the Cairngorms, when that woodland was under no threat and, in the Loch Lomond park, the disastrous camping by-laws project. This publicly funded attack on our statutory rights of access to Scotland's land and water is delivering nothing more than camping sites in places where nobody wants to camp, the threat of criminal conviction to anyone camping responsibly and a ranger service that has not yet learnt how to deal with litter. Perhaps Scottish ministers would make more progress if they slashed the budgets of FCS and Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, transferred all the money saved to the Comhairle and asked it to continue its good work in the far west.

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By a happy coincidence, just as Dave Morris' fine letter about how investment in the outdoors can benefit landscapes, people and the local economy appeared in the Herald, I received [EIR 2017-037 Response Chemical Disposal points](#) from the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. From the sublime to the ridiculous – but it's an indication of just how far the LLTNPA are failing to provide basic infrastructure for visitors compared to Councils who have far fewer resources.

If you apply for a campervan permit you have to agree to the LLTNPA's permit terms and conditions [MHome-permit-Ts-and-Cs-07.03.17](#). This includes the following clause:

"Toilet waste cassettes or grey water tanks must not be emptied within the permit area other than at authorised disposal points".








I think it's fair to say anyone reading this might expect there to be a number of chemical disposal points in the National Park – hence my information request – but it turns out there is just ONE, at Loch Lubnaig, and the LLTNPA does not even know if there are any others which might be available for use by campervans. I'd describe this as a disgrace.

I have been out and about in the National Park a number of times recently and what is blindingly obvious is the large number of campervans staying in the camping management zones, lots of people out enjoying our countryside. The fact that the LLTNPA has created just 20 permit places for campervans across its four camping management zones is I think totally now totally irrelevant, its basically being ignored, but what does matter is there is nowhere for all those people to dispose of their waste.

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4.1 West Loch Lomond Camping Manager

Table 2: West Loch Lomond camping provision 2017

Site		Tents
Permit area		
	Coilessan	8
	Tarbet Isle	3
	Suie field	4
	Culag (beach)	4
	Tarbet	
Permit area with services		
	Inveruglas	5
	Firkin Point	15
TOTAL		39
Existing privately operated campsites in the West Loch Lomond Management Zone also provide a total of 208 pitches		

The LLTNPA has so far completely failed to install the basic infrastructure that is needed to support people in campervans. On West Loch Lomond, it has missed an obvious opportunity as all three of the campervan permit areas on West Loch Lomond already have public toilets (even if these are shut for

much of the time year) with the infrastructure for disposal of sewerage already in place. .



At Inveruglas there are toilets at the back of the cafe which currently can only be accessed when the cafe is open. This means they are shut for much of the year and during the evenings.



The toilets are located at the back of the building by the far window. It should not be difficult to add a chemical disposal point outside and even better, the LLTNPA could create an external entrance allowing campers and other visitors to access the toilets when the cafe is closed.

Last week I went to check the site and the toilets could easily be made available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year through a few basic alterations to the building (which the LLTNPA owns).



Having gone out of its way to attract more visitors to the site through

the Scottish Scenic Routes Initiative, the aim of which was “to **enhance the visitor experience of Scotland’s landscape**: by creating innovatively designed viewpoints in selected locations in areas of outstanding scenery;” the LLTNPA has done nothing to enhance visitor facilities. Instead its wanting to raise the amount of income it gets from the site by introducing an Automated Number Plate Recognition system ([see here](#)). The LLTNPA spent over £8k installing the current parking ticket machines at Inveruglas ([see here](#)) – that amount of money would have gone a long way to adding, or might have even paid for, a new chemical disposal point and 24 hour entrance to the toilets.

The LLTNPA’s priorities are all wrong. It need to devote its resources to providing for people instead of trying to control them and making money out of this. There is some excellent advice available on how to do this for campervans – http://www.all-the-aires.com/aire_construction.shtml – and a good starting point for the LLTNPA Board at its next public meeting would be to discuss how to develop such facilities in the National Park.

The current state of the camping and campervan permit area at Inveruglas



Motorhome permit place – you can see the sign on the right behind the mound of gravel

Meanwhile, the permit places at Inveruglas share uncanny similarities with those at Forest Drive albeit in a different environment. Is this what the LLTNPA calls a quality visitor experience? For anyone unwise enough to book for a campervan permit, I would ask for my money back.



Most of the camping permit area which lies behind the campervan in the first photo looks like this – completely unfit for camping.



The LLTNPA have, however, just like at Forest Drive, strimmed an area (below) which back in March ([see here](#)) was covered in brambles.



Its unclear if the LLTNPA expect people to pitch tents between the trees or whether this is their attempt to improve the amenity of the site for anyone camping in the foreground. I walked all over the site and there was space at most for two tents. The LLTNPA has totally failed to provide the number of camping places it said it would, but far more important the way its selected and is managing those places tells you that as a body its totally unfit to manage campers or indeed any other type of visitors.

What needs to be done

The Scottish Government need to appoint someone to the LLTNPA Board who has an understanding

of the basic needs of visitors and is committed to providing these. It should also ask all current Board Members and members of their senior management team to go out and spend a night in a tent in a permit zone and report on the experience and then publish this. It would make interesting reading.

The Scottish Government also need to tell the LLTNPA Board that they need to stop wasting money on policing the unenforceable and start investing that money in basic visitor infrastructure which is worthy of a National Park.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs
2. National Parks

Tags

1. camping
2. Litter
3. LLTNPA
4. visitor management

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