

The camping byelaws – a tale of duplicity and incompetence from the Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority

Description



Caravan on South Loch Earn Road 14th April 2017

One of primary justifications the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority made for camping byelaws was that they were needed to address the problem of encampments on laybys by caravans and motorhomes over the summer.



Some of the most scenic laybys or old sections of road on our busiest A-roads are being used as summer-long encampments full of caravans and campervans preventing them being used by daytime visitors.



Issues faced in all three proposed Management Zones

- ▶ Dangerous and excessive parking on road verges and
- ▶ Summer-long caravan encampments in the area's
- ▶ Litter and entire abandoned campsites

Extracts from Your Park consultation on the camping byelaws

In their news release ([see here](#)) about the approval of the camping byelaws the LLTNPA included the following statement:

New [seasonal camping management byelaws](#) (which come into force in March 2017 and will apply 1 March – 30 September each year) to regulate camping, tackle antisocial behaviour and make it an offence to cause damage to the Park's natural environment. They will also prevent inappropriate use of public laybys as encampments by caravans and campervans; (my emphasis).

This point was repeated, word for word, in the news release that followed the LLTNPA Board's approval of their so-called camping "strategy" last October which included provision for just 20 campervan permits.

Its fair to conclude from this that part of the purpose of the camping byelaws was to prevent campervans and caravans using laybys in the four camping management zones. Now, a caravan, like a campervan, is classified as a type of vehicle under the Roads Traffic Act and, as I have previously pointed out on parkswatch, since its not an offence to sleep overnight in a vehicle on a road within the camping management zones, the camping byelaws are in effect unenforceable as far as campervans are concerned ([see here](#)). I had not considered the case of caravans but exactly the same considerations should apply.

I was surprised to discover therefore on my trip round Loch Earn on 15th April that the LLTNPA appeared to be treating caravans completely different to campervans and in effect had told their staff to tell people with caravans that the byelaws do not apply to them.

The evidence from Loch Earn

When I met up with fellow campaigner Dave Morris on the south Loch Earn Rd on 14th April ([see here](#)) there was a caravan parked on the verge of the road (top photo) and, after spending a couple of happy minutes pushing one of their children who was swinging from a rope (cut off far right of photo!), we went over and asked the occupants if they knew about the camping byelaws and had had any hassle from Park Rangers. They told us that they had been coming to Ardvorlich for years but we were slightly surprised when they said that estate staff had informed them the byelaws did not affect them. Both Dave and I thought this must have been some local arrangement due to the good offices of the Ardvorlich estate.



One of the laybys with caravans on North Loch Earn

We only realised what was going on when, after visiting a number of the laybys on the north side of Loch Earn which had caravans parked in them, we spoke to a family in the last caravan in permit zone D who were about to have their tea.



After telling us that the camping byelaws did not apply to caravans they also told us that the campervan parked next door to them had to get a permit, while their son, who was camping in a tent by the loch shore, had also been forced to buy a permit. They seemed as bemused as us by how the LLTNPA was applying the byelaws but very happy with their good fortune..

Last week Nick Halls, during a visit to the Loch Chon campsite, spoke to a Ranger who said to him *“that the people who park their caravans in lay-bys and then occupy the space throughout the summer, could not be required to pay for a permit because the management zones can not include stopping on a highway”*. Official confirmation of my view, that the byelaws are unenforceable against people staying overnight in vehicles. **So why then are the LLTNPA still insisting that campervans apply for permits when they accept the same byelaws cannot be used control caravans?**

Such discrimination is obviously wrong – though the absence of moral scruples on the part of the LLTNPA will not surprise regular readers – but the reason this farce is continuing is that if the LLTNPA were to admit publicly that the byelaws could not be used to control either caravans or campervans, they would lose all credibility not just with the public but with Scottish Ministers.

Misinformation, incompetence and squandering of public resources



Judging by how the byelaws are being applied on North Loch Earn, it

will not be long before they unravel completely.

The first layby is described as Permit Zone A and is for tents only (see tents symbol left). Why the Park has made no provisions for campervans, when it now appears to be allowing caravans to stay here for free (we saw one) is something that Gordon Watson, the Park Chief Executive, should be asked to explain before a Committee of the Scottish Parliament.



The second layby, Zone B, is a permit zone for campervans (photo right). We came across a man standing outside a campervan who had flown across from Germany, hired the vehicle, arrived at the layby, seen the sign and had tried to book online only to find no permits were available. The layby was almost empty and he did not know what to do. What type of tourist message is this? We told him that

in our view as the layby form
explain rights to a foreigner, or
wondering what to do. If he



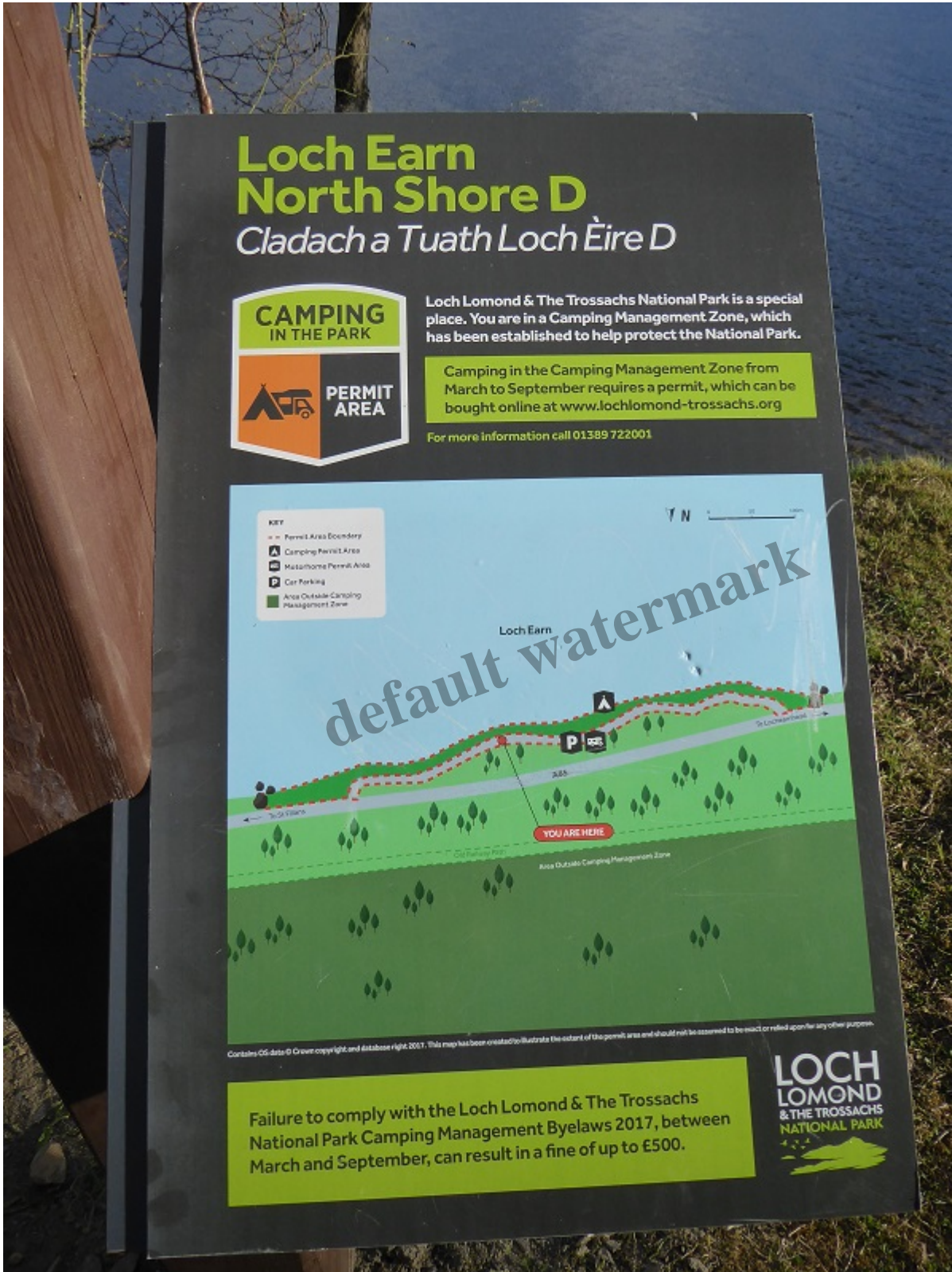
uld stay there overnight – but trying to
lent is not that easy and we left him
before (Zone A) or after (Zone C) (photo

below) he would have never

known he needed a permit because the

signs say nothing about campervans. It would be hard to invent such a shambles or a more disastrous message for tourism in Scotland.

What is not clear at present is what action the Park is taking against campervanners who try to spend the night on roads outwith the two official permit areas on Loch Earn, zones B and D, or what would happen if a campervan staying in a permit zone, insisted that like the caravans they should be able to stay there without a permit for free.



The wording on the signage, which cost the LLTNPA according to its figures £100,000, is wrong. Its not true that people in campervans require a permit if they wish to sleep overnight in a vehicle in a

permit area in the camping management zone. There is no need to take my word for this. If caravans, are exempt from the byelaws, because they are vehicles (so long as they are on a road) so should campervans, whether they stop off within a permit zone or outside it. Any campervan owner who has paid for a permit should try asking the LLTPNA for their money back.

The bigger problem though is the information on the National Park website for campervans ([see here](#)). The introductory part of the information sheet has not been changed DESPITE Rangers being told the byelaws cannot be applied to caravans:

On 1st March 2017 new byelaws are being introduced to manage the environmental impact of camping on some of the busiest lochshores in the National Park. These byelaws will affect those wanting to stay on and around some lochshores during the summer season in the National Park, whether they are in a tent, motorhome, campervan or caravan.

The Q and A information goes on to say:

Some of these permit areas allow for motorhomes and campervans to stop off overnight in the Camping Management Zones with a motorhome permit.

The clear implication is you can only stop off in a campervan in a permit area – this is wrong and totally hypocritical of the LLTNPA who are not applying this to caravans. The LLTNPA is clearly trying to direct campervans to formal campsites and permit areas:

11.

Where can I go in Camping Management Zones with a motorhome or campervan?

Certain sites within the Camping Management Zones are well suited to providing places for visitors in motorhomes to stop overnight. There are both campsite locations and permit areas within the Trossachs North and West Loch Lomond Camping Management Zones, with suitable off-road locations to accommodate motorhomes. (See map below.)

There are plenty of places within the National Park to stop and rest on your journey. These are unaffected by the new camping byelaws.

Only the last sentence hints at the truth – note it uses the words “you can stop and rest”, though this includes sleeping overnight, because if it explained where the plenty of places were that you could sleep overnight in a campervan, no-one would book a permit.

So what is the explanation for this farce?

It appears the LLTNPA senior management they failed to consider the implications of people being allowed to sleep in vehicles overnight – a basic safety requirement – and thought they could still ban caravans and campervans. However, at a late stage, perhaps even after the byelaws commenced – and after these issues were raised on parkswatch? – the LLTNPA appear to have decided that they could not apply the byelaws to caravans, hence the instruction to staff. The LLTNPA have consistently refused to provide any information about enforcement about the byelaws, saying to do so would prejudice their operation. That is clearly nonsense and the LLTNPA now needs to explain publicly why it has abandoned trying to enforce the byelaws against caravans but is still suggesting to campervans that they need to apply for permits like campers.

My fear though is that the LLTNPA is desperately trying to retrieve the ban on caravans and campervans by getting Transport Scotland to ban vehicles from stopping off overnight in laybys on trunk roads and possibly by turning all the main roads in the camping management zones into clearways. The only way Transport Scotland could do this however is if they could prove that overnight stops were creating safety issues while any new clearways would, as on east Loch Lomond, also impact on the ability of day visitors to stop off. Transport Scotland should resist any pressure from the LLTNPA – its not their job to sort out the shambles the LLTNPA has created.

The LLTNPA also needs to apologise to local communities – NOW!

The main reason why so many community councils supported the byelaws is they were told by the LLTNPA that these were necessary to stop caravans being parked for the whole summer in laybys: the worst area for this was the north Loch Earn Rd. Here are some examples:

Response 399) BLS Community Council. *“there seems to be a misconception, amongst a minority of visitors, that they can bring a caravan to the lochside and leave it parked up for the whole ‘fishing season’. This ruins the opportunity for other genuine visitors.....”*

Response 460) East Strathearn Community Council *“We absolutely support any measures that will discourage any semi-permanent occupation of our loch shores”.*

Response 394) Crieff Community Council *“we are aware of the problems and difficulties caused at St Fillans and the adjacent area of Loch Earn by rogue campers and caravaners, anti-social behaviour and rowdyism, and drink related problems and litter” and “ask if the proposed changes will tackle the particular and regular problems of caravans being left in lay-bys and authorised parking places for weeks at a time”.*

395) St Fillan’s Community Council. Referred to a meeting August 2014 90 people re anti-social behaviour, litter and obstruction of lay-bys: *“something needed to be done to address the problems” “With this in mind the Community Council.....supports the proposals of the National Park”.*

A number of us told the LLTNPA at the time that byelaws were not needed to address encampment by caravans because this was covered by Section 61 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. Guess what signs appear at the start of each layby on north Loch Earn?

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Note the absence of LLTNPA livery and that the signs, while claiming to be a joint initiative, were clearly put up by Drummond Estates

So when is the LLTNPA going to come clean on this with local communities and admit it was wrong?

As those of us who were involved in negotiating access rights have always said, the camping byelaws were never necessary as there are alternative solutions to all the problems they claim to address. What we could never have predicted is the resources that a NIMBY National Park Authority would devote to conning local people and the Minister that byelaws were the answer to problems or the resources that they are now wasting on trying to enforce the unenforceable. The LLTNPA should stop trying to enforce the byelaws now, before the situation unravels further, and instead invest resources where they are needed such as public toilets, litter bins and litter collection.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

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