

Three Lochs Forest Drive Zone - another failure, 9 pitches and parking that just doesn't exist.

Description

By Ross MacBeath

Camping provision without parking spaces, pitches you can't find never mind camp on, and camping permit zones comprising bogs, scrub, briar, rough heath and felled forest all add to the growing list of failures in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority's claim to have provided new camping places, not just in Forest Drive but Park wide ([as illustrated in Nick Kempe's post yesterday on Firkin Point](#))



Then consider if Forest Drive is suitable at all as a location

for 72 of the 300 camping pitches the Park promised to provide when the gates are locked at 4 pm and don't open again until 9 am the following morning. In effect none of these pitches are available to anyone who has not taken an extra half or full days leave on the first day of their holiday or weekend.

This is repeated at Loch Chon and other gated sites where the very few toilets available in the Park are locked when Rangers go home in the evening if there have been no bookings. This can be as early as 4pm, forcing all visitors to go in the bushes, a criminal offense if they are not in possession of a trowel.

**** Currently 26 Forest Drive pitches are missing from the booking system!**

Forest Drive Zone L, replacing a desirable loch shore as a place to camp



In past years, before access rights, the Forestry

Commission provided an excellent permit zone for a number of tents just opposite what is now Permit Zone L

The grassy loch shore was perfect for camping and suitable for families and multiple groups. A small portion of it is shown here.

That is all gone as far as camping is concerned â?? camping along the shore is now banned, though there is a bay for a motorhome on the shore side of the road, and has been replaced by a zone located within the forest.

The First view of Zone L is not really encouraging with rough ground and slopes

The LLTNPA claimed 9 places were available to camp here from 1st March.



Large areas of debris cover the forest floor, steep slopes and rough ground with thick vegetation, all make this area unsuitable for camping. As hard to believe as it might be, this is an accurate description of the entire zone ??Lâ??

It would appear already that some disgruntled visitor has taken offence at being duped by the LLTNPA into paying for this site and took it out on the sign.

[Click here to review the full image set](#)

Misleading maps, poor parking provision and no where to go



The map shows a large camping area which one might have

thought offers plenty of places to camp but this bears no resemblance to the truth. The 9 pitches claimed simply do not exist, and the motor home space at the parking opposite takes up to 8 meters of the lay by, allowing space for a further 2 cars, 3 at a push if one noses in off road.

The shore frontage here is popular with Forest Drive day visitors and fishermen so it and the layby fills up quickly. Quite where the additional 9 cars that campers require are going to park is a mystery..

Apart from [lack of parking](#) at this site, if nine camping groups ever did book permits, forced to come here by the National Park, they would be driven onto the lochshores as the camping zone itself provides no incentive to remain in forest after perhaps an initial exploration or search for somewhere to go to the toilet.

New disruption to the forest is likely to worsen if operations continue



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The tracks are an unsightly muddy mess that can be crossed with care you would not really want to get this mess on your feet before entering your tent.

While the forestry felling operations are a noisy and destructive intrusion when in progress, they are not really any cause for concern at Zone 1, other than the aftermath of churned up ground, felled wood and trimmings cumulatively denying access to the zone over time as well as other multiple issues with the site:

Forest floors in commercial forests are not suitable locations for camping

This zone, being part of an active forest, is affected by the usual rotating pattern of felling, self seeding and natural regeneration which takes place over many years. This has resulted in a rough inaccessible forest floor across the entire area, often hazardous and strewn with debris from the tree felling and trimming operations.



Hill side locations often hold little camping pitch gems, but not this one

Being a hill side location above the loch means the area is predominantly sloping northwards meaning any sun entering has to filter through the canopy. The slopes themselves are unsuitably steep with the areas below them generally wetter with standing water and mosses due to run off from the slopes.



Click on images to zoom

Again the question of why these areas are included in a camping zone can only be explained by the Park's need to deceive the public and other stakeholders into believing that they have delivered sizable camping provision when in fact the total size of the permit zones in general is much much larger than the miniscule areas in the zones which are suitable for pitching tents (and in this particular zone, which the Park claims provides for 9 tents, has nowhere suitable).

Flatter areas are unsuitable with standing water or dense vegetation

The slope levels out a bit towards the forestry track, the southerly border of the zone. with some more areas just to the top of the slope from forest drive.



The now familiar red paint ring around trees marking them to be retained for self seeding while others are harvested. This is a very successful method of forest growth and much of the forest floor has self seeded with the result they are unsuitable for tents. This, in combination with wet mosses and other thick vegetation where sunlight penetrates the forest canopy, make the greater zone unsuitable for access, never mind camping.



Standing water and shade makes this an ideal breeding environment for midges, the dense vegetation, high humidity and detritus from trees provides insulation for the overwintering of midge larvae and nymphs ensuring a thriving population the following summer.

Popular loch shore locations are "popular" because of the short grasses and sunny aspects which in themselves give some relief from the midge during warm sunny or windy days, especially where tree cover is minimal. But the main reason they are so popular is because they are pleasant places to spend a weekend, particularly if you want to do no more than throw a Frisbee, run around the tent with the kids or cool off in the loch.

I love forests, even commercial forests such as this. To me they are as interesting as they are beautiful. What's more there are many locations throughout the country where forest camping can be enjoyed on a dry flat forest floor with a carpet of leaf or pine needles, with great views or in sunny clearings. This is just not one of them.

The LLTNPA's war against visitors continues

It seems the LLTNPA have continued to wage war against visitors by providing the most atrocious areas for pitching tents available in the National Park, claiming they match the [camping zone selection criteria](#). This zone matches a few:

1. It's Forestry Commission Land so it's available,
2. It has no adverse impact on the environment as it's a commercial forest
3. It has fishing close by as a recreational activity

It matches no other criteria. In fact the National Park doesn't even list "suitability for camping" as a prerequisite for choosing a site and that fact is aptly demonstrated by Zone L.

There are no suitable areas in this entire zone that would constitute a worthwhile camping experience. The evidence here (and at Loch Chon ([see here](#))) gives the lie to the latest [propaganda video](#) from the LLTNPA which tries to portray itself as pro-camping and doing positive things for campers. The LLTNPA appear to think by inventing their new term the **“wild camping experience”**, to further muddy the waters for Ministers, then by reclassifying abysmal provision as some sort of innovative wild challenge, that the public will accept what they are offering as an alternative to camping on the loch shores. That is just not going to happen.. Taken together with their failure to create new parking spaces for the 14 or so cars that could use this site speaks volumes for the LLTNPA’s contempt for paying customers.

In the end it’s not just Forest Drive that’s going to suffer, though the Forestry Commission Scotland is in danger of losing its reputation built up over the past 40 years. The Forest Drive permit area is starting to damage the reputation of our National Parks System and the Scottish Tourist industry itself.

It’s high time Sports Scotland, Visit Scotland and Scottish National Heritage intervened and stopped the rot.

What the National Park Authority needs to do!

Remove the zone as it stands from the booking system and let people camp once more in the original camping zone on the loch shore opposite provided by the Forestry Commission where the old signs are still in place. This has space for 3 or 4 tents to camp comfortably but needs further parking to allow campers, day visitors and fishermen to enjoy the loch shore.



Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

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