

Park camp speak and the need for truth

Description



The photo on the cover of the draft LLTNPA annual report, to be considered at the Board Meeting today, shows just the sort of places people would like to camp. Short turf by the loch shores where they can fish or paddle and which is exposed to the breeze – good for keeping the midges at bay. The problem is that the LLTNPA has provided hardly a single place which matches this vision under its permit scheme. Instead the permit areas are in conifer forest (eg Forest Drive), on sloping pebbly beaches (e.g Firkin Point) or in boggy ill drained fields (e.g North Loch Venachar). Indeed in its new

campsite at Loch Chon the LLTNPA has deliberately stopped people camping by the loch shore.

The photo in the annual report misrepresents the truth, because its not representative of what the Park is about. It also appears to be a lie. The tent appears posed for the camera. No-one is camping here. A Park official appears to have put the tent up for the cameras. And the location? It is on the west shore of Loch Lomond, with Ben Lomond behind. [NB this section has been updated since original post]. Having visited Suie Field a couple of times the photo bore almost no resemblance to what I had witnessed there, which was a lumpy field and some bare ground down by the shore:



I therefore wrongly assumed it could not have been taken from Suie field and that the photo must have been taken either at the mouth of the Douglas Water at Inverbeg or at Culag where camping is only allowed on the beach in which case I said Park staff would have been guilty of an Orwellian distortion of the facts. It turns out I got this wrong, for which I apologise. The photo is taken from Suie Field and if you look very carefully on far mid-left of the photo you can just see the point at Inverbeg. I am very grateful to Nick Halls who has been out to all three locations to check and has confirmed that there is indeed now an area that matches that on which the tent is photographed at Suie Field.

It did not look like that in March or April though. Two things have happened. First the area is, when the Loch is high, underwater as is evidenced by a tidemark above the sward on which the tent was pitched. Second, since the water has receded there has been a vigorous growth of grass.

That same vigorous growth has affected the area above the bank which, though lumpy before, is now almost uncampable. Nick reports that there are a couple of places where vegetation has been kept down by people regularly pitching tents there. The rest is a jungle.

So, while I was wrong about the location of the photo, I was right to say it is not representative of areas where camping is allowed in the National Park or even of Suie Field.

[end of update]

This matters, because Annual Reports are meant to be about good governance and have consequences. Board Members see the pictures presented by staff and think all is well. It matters too because the Report will land on the desk of the Minister, Roseanna Cunningham, who knows the Park has been doing very little apart from the camping laws, will see the photo, and think “isn’t this fantastic”, completely unaware about how she is being manipulated.

Deputation to the LLTNPA Board

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The Coilessan permit area is far more typical and this is probably the best place to camp there, sloping down with tree roots and all. Most of the permit area looks like the slope behind.

It was precisely because there is such a mismatch between the speak and spin put out by senior Park staff and reality, that I had asked to lead a deputation to the Board today. I had asked to speak to them all the evidence that has been published on Parkswatch about the camping permit areas and the selective application of the camping byelaws. I think the Board need to deal with truth, not spin.

On Friday however we withdrew the request for a deputation (for the timebeing) after James Stuart, the new LLTNPA convener, agreed to a meeting. The Park procedures are such that the Board needs to consider a request for a deputation at the start of the meeting and there was no guarantee I and the others on the deputation would have been heard. (Our request appeared on the agenda as "Deputation" – without giving the public any indication of what this matter about). We think its

therefore better to try talking first, something the new convener has committed to doing – a contrast to the previous convener Linda McKay.

The downside is that I am not sure any LLTNPA Board Member this afternoon will be sufficiently informed this afternoon to question either the Annual Report or the update on Your Park which is again full of parkspin and parkspeak. We will see!

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

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2. Camping bye laws
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