

Hydro hypocrisy in the Lomond and Trossachs National Park

Description



I enjoyed the Highlad, but this is yet another unlawful access sign in our National Parks

Yesterday, on way up to the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority meeting on the Cononish goldmine, I stopped off to take another look at the Derrydarroch hydro scheme in Glen Falloch – I had not been to the powerhouse area for over a year. I don't recall seeing the top sign on the gate before and it appears new.



The gate to the road, which leads past the power house to a new bridge over the river Falloch, is locked and there is no stile. That probably hasn't changed, but what's clear now is the locked gate and absence of a stile are deliberate, Glen Falloch Estate wants to stop people from exercising their access rights here. This also happens to contravene the planning consent granted by the Scottish Government in 2009 and Clarification Note 3 Public Access and Recreation in Glen Falloch ([see here](#)) which states:

“Once operational, the scheme will place no restriction on access for the public.”



Derrydarroch power house and access tracks. To the right and behind the powerhouse is the track leading to the A82 and the gate with the sign can just be made out behind the trees. On the far side of the track in the foreground – the West Highland Way – is the area planted by trees which is surrounded by a deer fence.

The Derrydarroch powerhouse is served by intakes on both the north and south side of Glen Falloch. Water from the Eas Eonan scheme to the north is piped across the river before joining the other intakes and crossing the river again in the pipe bridge in the photo above. Glen Falloch Estate was allowed to keep the new vehicle bridge – which as the photo shows has less landscape impact than the pipe bridge (being positioned lower) – and from this it was then a short step to them asking to retain the access tracks to all the intakes which now scar the Glen. The vehicle bridge in the photo is therefore crucial to enable the estate to make full use of this track network. The scandal is that what they want for themselves they are now trying to deny the public.

In order to screen the development – which is a pluke on the landscape and is the least well designed of all the four Falloch power houses – the LLTNPA required trees to be planted on the south side of the river to screen it. These are surrounded by a deer fence without a crossing point.





The padlocked gate

This is clearly a deliberate attempt to block access to both the West Highland Way and the hill. I am opposed to all the new hydro scheme related tracks in Glen Fallocha because of the impact they have had on the landscape but ,after consenting to them, the LLTNPA should be ensuring they are accessible to the public. The two new vehicle bridge crossing of the Falloch – the other is below the Falls Falloch – offer the opportunity for more people to take more short walks by the river. The LLTNPA should be requiring Glen Falloch Estate to promote this but instead their planners have allowed a significant chunk of land to be fenced off denying access.

The landscape impact of the hydro penstock

I had not stopped with the intention of looking at access but rather to check if there had been any further progress in painting the penstocks used in the Derrydarroch hydro schemes. Last year, after

parkswatch had highlighted back in July 2016 how LLTNPA policy is that all penstock should be in “natural” colours but that those in Glen Falloch were all “Lomond Blue” ([see here](#)), the one just above the A82 had been painted:



Before



After

While I had glimpsed some of the other penstock from the road, my visit confirmed that NONE of the other penstock have been painted as required.



The Eas Eonan penstock below the A82, Ben Glas behind



Allt Chuilinn penstock – according to Park guidance this should have been hidden UNDER the bridge



Close up of Derrydarroch Pipe bridge – the suburban power house is bad enough but the pipe bridge monstrosity which should never have been agreed

The failure of the LLTNPA to ensure that Glen Falloch Estate has painted these bridges while requiring that most visible from the A82 betrays their mindset. What is important to the LLTNPA is people in cars should enjoy the landscape – the scenic routes initiative – but what walkers see (and all this penstock is clearly visible to the 50,000 odd walkers who complete the West Highland Way each year) comes right down their priority list. The LLTNPA is both cynical – we will only fix stuff that Scottish Ministers might see from their cars – and got its priorities wrong.

None of these failures prevented Stuart Mearns, Director of Rural Development and Planning, from having the brass neck to make two claims to the Board at the Cononish Hearing. The first was that the Board have nothing to fear about the risks associated with the Cononish tailings dump as the LLTNPA has got better at restoring the landscape as a result of all the hydro schemes they have been involved in. In the Glen Falloch and many other hydro schemes the LLTNPA haven't restored the landscape,

they have permanently scarred it because they have allowed tracks to remain:



The Eas Eonan penstock and access trackscar which penetrates into the Ben Lui Wild Land Area

Mr Mearns was presumably referring to attempts to revegetate the sides of these tracks and the land above the buried pipelines. This is a much easier process than trying to revegetate compressed heaps of tailings that may well be toxic which is what was being proposed for Cononish and, while the LLTNPA may have got slightly better at this because of all the adverse publicity they have received, there is lots of evidence that they have a long long way to go before they get schemes to comply with basic standards. (I will cover the evidence from the Auchessan hydro schemes in Glen Dochart, which I visited after the Board Meeting, in another post).

But the second claim, that if any problems happen at Cononish, LLTNPA will take effective enforcement action is even more hypocritical. Any Board Member worth their salt should have asked why then is it the case that all these blue penstock still remain in Glen Falloch? I will be writing to Mr Mearns to find out.

Meantime, for those uncritical advocates of hydro – and lots of the problems of the LLTNPA stem from the fact that they decided to process as many hydro schemes quickly as they could so landowners and financiers could benefit from the subsidy – this relatively large hydro scheme (2 MW generating capacity) was not generating any electricity when it is most needed, in cold spells, due to the low level of water the burns:



This was not chance, neither of the Auchessan Schemes was operating either. I am in favour of hydro schemes but not at any price: the price in Glen Falloch has been far too high.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

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2. hill tracks
3. landed estates

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Author

nickkempe

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