

The Lomond and Trossachs National Park's war on campers

Description

In the Battle for Scotland's Countryside last week ([see here](#)), David Hayman presented a brief history of the struggle for access rights leading up to our access legislation and then looked at three subsequent access disputes. On first viewing, I was a bit disappointed with how these were covered: the film of David Hayman entering Stagecoach Owner Ann Gloag's grounds did not show the land which was in dispute but instead focussed on an area close to the house; and both Paul Lister and the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority were given lots of time to present their case, in the LLTNPA's case without critical questioning, although Cameron McNeish subsequently effectively demolished the Park's rationale for restricting camping.

On second viewing (and the relevant bit starts at 43 mins on iplayer), after exposing the LLTNPA's oft repeated that the camping byelaws only cover 4% (it used to be 3.8%) of the National Park by simply saying the byelaws apply "*in the most popular 4% of the Park*", David Hayman referred to access to the land as being a birthright and then let the LLTNPA hang themselves.

"We weren't winning the battle"

The section of the programme on the Lomond and Trossachs National Park started with a statistic, that there are 4 million visitors a year (and 7 million visitor days after taking overnight stays into account). This sounds a lot of people until you start to consider the figure in context:

- c1.3m of these visitors are to Loch Lomond Shores at Balloch, which is – amazingly enough as it seems deserted most of the times I have been there – apparently one of Scotland's top visitor attractions
- the population of the Clyde conurbation is c1.5 million and Scotland c5.12 million – in any one year the majority of people on the Clyde almost certainly never visit the National Park which was supposed to be the green lungs for the area
- the Lake District National Park has 18.41 million visitors a year (Source: STEAM 2016 – Cumbria Tourism) and covers 2362 square kilometres compared to the LLTNP's 4 m visitors and 1865 square Kms

It was in the context of discussing visitor numbers and the need for the byelaws that Simon Jones, the LLTNPA Director of Conservation, stated that "*we weren't winning the battle*" – confirmation, if one was ever needed, that the LLTNPA sees itself as waging war on campers. This is at heart a war against access rights – the right of people to enjoy the countryside through camping – and like in any war, where the belligerent is concerned, truth goes out the window and is replaced by secrecy, propaganda and lies. There was plenty of evidence of that in the statement which followed:

"The key thing is its not just about the actions of a tiny minority but actually its the sheer volume of people. Even if everybody acted responsibly in some of these places the sheer footfall of the amount

of camping and footfall and vehicles just means the environment, you know the ground, the vegetation, the trees, the litter bins in the area can be inundated so its about trying to find a way that people can still enjoy and have a great experience here.” (transliteration of what was said)

Its hard to justify a war of course because of the actions of a tiny minority, although Chief Executive, Gordon Watson had tried to do this during the byelaws consultation when he kept repeating the statistic that there had been an 81.5% reduction in Anti Social Behaviour on East Loch Lomond after the byelaws came into place. It turned out there has been a 42.4% drop in ASB across the Stirling area during this period and on east Loch Lomond there had been a reduction in incidents from 27 to 5, many of which had nothing to do with antisocial campers. East Loch Lomond, even before the drop, had far fewer anti social behaviour incidents than most of Scotland per 1000 population yet the threat of ASB was used to inflame the local population and remove access rights.

Now the justification for the byelaws is the *“the sheer volume of people”*. In ignoring our access legislation, its as if the LLTNPA had ignored all international treaties on the conduct of war. Our access legislation gave us a right to access, with separate clauses saying both visitors and landowners had duties to act responsibly, but nowhere in it there provision to restrict access due to the numbers visiting the countryside. Yet that, now, apparently is the justification for restricting where people can camp – however responsible you are, access is perceived by the LLTNPA, which was set up to promote enjoyment of the countryside, as a problem even if you leave no trace of your visit. The implications of this position for access rights are horrendous – walkers beware!

The LLTNPA position, however is far from coherent – just like in most wars! If numbers are a problem, why did the LLTNPA not propose restrictions on day visitors to the lochs? Why has the LLTNPA now abandoned trying to enforce the byelaws against campervans when campervan numbers are increasing and do more damage to the ground than tents (I am not saying it matters) when they park on vegetation at the edge of the road (“you know, the ground” Mr Jones)? Why has the LLTNPA never produced clear figures showing the total number of campers compared to total number of visitors to the Park or provided an analysis of the number of campers which used to camp in each place where camping is now banned? The reasons I think are clear, if the LLTNPA produced figures, it would show their war on campers was totally unjustified.

The mindset of the Park’s senior management, is well demonstrated by Simon Jones’ comments of litter bins being inundated. This is NOT a problem caused by visitors but by a failure of our public authorities to provide basic infrastructure but despite this the LLTNPA keeps blaming the public for its own failures. The final Orwellian twist was that Simon Jones’ description of the problem caused by visitor numbers followed his head ranger’s claim that *“we want more people to come”*. Whatever the original justification, the sad thing is the LLTNPA don’t even know why they are still fighting this war.

The war on the ground



Unfortunately, the evidence on the

ground (following that at the last Board Meeting ([see here](#))) is that the LLTNPA is trying to strengthen its positions.

Along West Loch Lomond the LLTNPA have been busy installing expensive “repeater” signs – I counted five at pulling off points between Inverarnan and Inveruglas – to make sure that people who try to stop overnight there know they are in a camping management zone. The signs give no indication of where the permit areas are and the lack of telephone reception here means some people will probably still risk the threat of a £200 fine.

West Loch Lomond, north of Inveruglas though, provides proof that the claim that the camping byelaws are about the “sheer volume” of people is a lie. There might be high numbers of campers at times on places like the south shore of Loch Earn, but here, as in many other places where camping is now completely banned, the Park’s own statistics show there were very few campers ([see here](#)). The LLTNPA’s war on the west shore of Loch Lomond north of Inveruglas is directed against anglers and people like cycle tourers who stop off overnight – happen to be an angler with a van, however, and you

are fine (note how there is no campervan symbol on the sign).

Firkin Point – again!

Following my complaint about the toilets at Firkin Point being locked ([see here](#)) I had had a further response from the LLTNPA about the paper to the Board stating the disabled toilet would be open from 1st March claiming this was a matter of detail. I decided to leave that issue at that but, last Saturday, returning from Glen Coe, I thought I would check again whether the disabled toilet was open just in case.....



It was after 5pm and I was amazed to find ALL the toilets open (the first response to my complaint had

said the main toilets closed at 4pm). If the LLTNPA has had a change of heart, rather than the open toilets being a consequence of their toilet security guards being late (its a war remember), I'd welcome that. However, I was even more incredulous when I realised that a NO CAMPING HERE sign (a lot more threatening than the repeater sign featured above) had been erected by the toilet doors and a big patch of brambles.

So, here we are, the LLTNPA are promoting Firkin Point as having four camping permit areas and the first sign you see says NO CAMPING in a place where no-one could conceivably want to camp. I would guess people who had forked out £3 for a permit here might on reading this sign assume they had made a mistake and depart. I wondered if I had missed something – behind the scenes the LLTNPA constantly changes where permit areas are – and went to check the camping permit areas were still there. They are but talk about mixed messages! Its so bad, one wonders if staff or a contractor were giving a target of erecting so many signs and, for want of somewhere better, just stuck this outside the toilet.

This is, however, not the only objectionable and incoherent sign at Firkin Point.



The LLTNPA is also waging a war against visitors being able to enjoy the National Park in the evenings – hence all the locked car parks even though access rights exist 24 hours a day. While the locked

gates at Firkin were removed last year to allow access to the permit zone the LLTNPA is still trying to stop other visitors, despite the car parking having lots of space for all and without any regard to people wanting to stop to use the toilet. Its hard to tell if this is war without reason or just plain incompetence.

And evidence for incompetence is not hard to find:

Firkin Point B / Rubha Firkin B

Firkin Point permit areas A, B and C provide the opportunity to camp adjacent to the Firkin Point visitor site, which is a lovely place to camp and is also popular with day visitors. There are some bays for motorhomes too.

Permit areas don't have set pitches; you choose where you want to camp within the area. This permit area has a maximum of 2 spaces available. Firkin Point Permit Area B sits on a raised open spot overlooking Loch Lomond with stunning views north up the Loch and east to Ben Lomond. The permit area consist of a small grassy area with picnic tables and a mix of sloped and flat ground that would be suited to smaller tents. Click on the thumbnails below the map for photos of the area.

Getting there:	This permit area is reached directly from the Firkin Point visitor site, which is approximately 3.5km north of Inverbeg on the A82. It is accessible from the West Loch Lomond Cycle Path.
Grid reference:	NN339007
View in Google maps:	https://goo.gl/2E7xps
Grade & terrain:	Moderate. There is a small steep gravel path down to the permit area which sits on the shoreline.
Toilets nearby:	Yes. There are public toilets on site (open 9am – 5pm April – October, closed November – March).
Drinking water available:	No.
Parking facilities nearby:	Limited parking available on site.
Fishing permit information:	Available at www.lochlomond-trossachs.org/angling

Screenshot 22/03/18

Despite the decision reported to the Board that the Firkin disabled toilet would be open from 1st March the LLTNPA's website is unchanged and says they will open from 1st April – enough to put some people off from booking – though I would recommend anyone interested in the camping here to take a look at the camping photos for Permit Zone D which allegedly offers 9 places to camp ([see here](#)). I would love to see Simon Jones bring 8 Board Members to spend a night camping here, in the places pictured, and in his words *“have a great experience”*.

What needs to happen

Unfortunately truth and reason is the first casualty in war and that continues to be the case in the LLTNPA's war against campers.

Those who care about access rights need to respond to this war on camping as any anti-war movement worth its name does and that is expose what's going on and join with others to campaign. The LLTNPA will not stop waging its war on campers – it will claim its listening and try to avoid atrocities – until forced to do so.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

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2. camping
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Date Created

March 22, 2018

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