

The LLTNPA's two faced approach to access needs to be fixed

Description



New electricity sub-station just above the main road in Glen Dochart, at the start of the main Allt Choire Chaorach track

Just over three weeks ago, after deciding to retreat from a climb in Glencoe due to the wind, I decided to take a look at the Allt Choire Chaorach hydro scheme opposite the Auchessan schemes in Glen Dochart ([see here](#)). Within a couple of hundred metres I witnessed two extremes of how the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority manages access, one exemplifying the highest standards, the other appalling and both apparently connected with developments. This post considers how these two extremes can be allowed to happen by the LLTNPA as a Planning Authority

The new electricity substation in Glen Dochart was required because of the new hydro schemes there. While well concealed from the road, in landscape terms it could be a lot better – the expanse of gravel being needlessly large (why does the LLTNPA only care about vegetation when its campers that create bare patches?) and giving a distinctly suburban feel. However, the access provision is amazing: there is not just the one pedestrian gate you can see from the photo but another on the other side of the main gate. And this for what appears to be a little used route.

However, less than a 100m further up the main forest track which is used to access the hydro scheme I came across this:



Note the padlock and lack of any means to cross/pass through the fence

In fact just the sort of situation which their lordships in the Drumlean Case ([see here](#)) agreed presented an obstruction to the freedom of roam. And, while there is a possibility that forestry interests locked the gate above – though I do not recall the lock when I walked down the North East ridge of Ben More about three years ago – higher up there was another locked gate barring access to the new track

across the hillside to three of the hydro scheme intakes:



This gate was easier to cross through the simple expedient of standing up on the chain and easing oneself through the gap. It was only after doing so that I realised there was another gate with stile further up the hillside above which it was not possible to see from below. There either needed to be a sign to this stile or preferably another crossing stile/gate installed here.

An explanation for this contradictory approach

The LLTNPA generally â?? and perhaps always? â?? seeks advice from its access team, thatâ??s the people who led on the Drumlean case, and I believe they care passionately about access. In every hydro planning application I have read for the National Park, there are conditions included which are recommended by them to ensure that access is not obstructed during construction work and alternatives routes are created where required. Here, as an example, is what they required for the Allt Chaorach scheme:

Public Access Management Plan with additional detail on measures designed to minimise the detrimental effect on public access and to ensure public access is maintained including: warning signage content and locations (to be removed following completion of scheme); diversionary signage content and strategy; use of short / localised diversions; timing of works (vehicle movements to be restricted at weekends and bank holidays) and techniques and specifications for path reinstatement;â?•

The problem, however, what happens AFTER a development is completed. The planners do not seem to check or, if they do, simply donâ?•t notice. The consequence is the locked gate and no access sign at Derrydarroch ([see here](#)) and the locked gates at the Allt Chaorach (which I will now report to the access team as an obstruction).

Its hard to avoid drawing the conclusion that the reason why a strong pro access line is taken at the application stage is that neither the LLTNPA as Planning Authority nor landowners want to annoy outdoor recreation folk who might then start objecting to applications. Hence, its in both their interests to involve the access team as much as possible at this stage. If you doubt me on this, consider why, of all the unlawful access signs I have now reported to the LLTNPA, only that outside the Cononish gold mine has been removed quickly:

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This sign, placed well outside the mine boundary, could not be allowed to antagonise walkers after the sign was given so was removed.

Once an application has been approved however it's a different matter. Perhaps the access team are not allowed to undertake check visits – it's possible that like the public they are not even told when work has been completed – and planning officers either don't visit or do not have the awareness to identify the issues (or maybe the landowners unlock all the gates before taking Park staff and other visitors round).

Whatever the explanation, this is an issue that needs to be addressed, particularly in light of the Drumlean judgement. Perhaps the LLTNPA could start issuing conditions to developments that on completion track gates can only be locked where pedestrian crossing points are installed and that NO signage may contravene the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. access rights
2. LLTNPA
3. planning

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