

The public holiday chaos in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park last week

Description



Overflowing bin by River Leven, Balloch, last Monday. Photo credit anonymous reader.

The primary reason for the creation of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park was to provide a mechanism that would manage visitors better in the interests of both people and the natural environment. The National Park was envisaged as a body that would ensure that proper infrastructure was put in place to enable people to enjoy the stunning landscapes while protecting them at the same. Fifteen years after its creation, it is reasonable to expect that the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority would have had proper plans in place to facilitate people's enjoyment of sunny public holiday weekends. This post takes a look at what happened a week ago on the public holiday weekend and what this tells us about how far the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority has delivered the aspirations people had for it.

Litter



At least there are bins in Balloch unlike in the Argyll and Bute part of the National Park.
Photo credit anonymous reader

I am very grateful to the reader who sent in the photos of overflowing litter bins around Loch Lomond Shores at Balloch which illustrate this post. What they show is that while a large proportion of the public don't like to take their litter away with them – maybe its deeply uncool to walk along the shores of Loch Lomond with a bag of litter in one hand? – most people do try and put their litter in bins where they exist.



Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park

May 4 at 3:00pm · 🌐

We want everyone to be able to enjoy the wonderful surroundings of the National Park this Bank Holiday weekend so if you're out and about please make sure you respect the environment and others by behaving responsibly and taking your litter home with you. #RespectYourPark



15 years of exhortations have not worked

The problem is that the bins that are in place don't have the capacity to meet the demand, hence all the overflowing rubbish, which then of course gets scattered by animals. The solution is obvious: either more or larger bins are required or empty them more often.



While our Public Authorities can plan for snow

several days in advance within most of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National they seem incapable of planning for litter. I understand some are now investigating smart bins which will notify HQ when they fill up. Useless on a busy holiday weekend unless the collection lorries are out on patrol all day. No expensive technology should be required to manage litter on holiday weekends – there is evidence going back many years that unless the weather forecast is dire, in popular places such as Lomond shores, Luss and Balmaha the numbers of visitors will be high and bins will fill up and, eventually start spoiling the “visitor experience”.

While litter was one of the main causes of complaint to the LLTNPA last year, their complaints register ([see here](#)) shows that they don't treat this as being their responsibility unless its on their land.



Now that the LLTNPA has taken over responsibility for the car park at Balmaha it is responsible for emptying the bins there while Stirling Council empties the bins on the main street. There appears to be no co-ordination between the two authorities.

That is completely wrong – the LLTNPA was set up to give a lead on issues such as this and indeed used photos of litter to justify the camping byelaws. A litter strategy was promised several years ago as part of the now abandoned Five Lochs Management Plan but this commitment has been abandoned without explanation. Since then some Board Members, to their credit, have been asking for a proper litter plan but have had about as much impact on the LLTNPA senior management team as Parkswatch on this issue.....nothing to speak of! So here's a suggestion to the Convener James Stuart: with Board Members having plenty of time on their hands set up a joint Committee comprising a Councillor Board Member from each Local Authority and Transport Scotland, add to that representatives from local communities and recreational organisations as critical observers, and task them with producing a fully costed plan to put proper infrastructure in place to address the litter issue.

Road chaos




One of the Stirling Council enforcement signs – this one by the Balmaha car park – which sprang up

saying they are responsible for enforcement of parking restrictions on the main road.

Last Monday I was lucky enough to be in the Cairngorms – I have learned through experience to avoid the Loch Lomond National Park on holiday weekends – but driving back heard on BBC Radio Scotland that the police had had to close the road to Balmaha due to gridlock in the village. While it was stated this was due to cars parking on double yellow lines on the main road into the village, the cause of the problem was that the number of cars in the village exceeded capacity. This is another problem which has existed for many years. Its actually got worse because in the past a field used to be opened up to provide extra car parking but that has now gone and with the creation of the clearway to Rowardennan there are now very few places to park. Rather than waste their visit, most drivers just end up breaking the law.


While it appears Stirling Council, who are now responsible for traffic enforcement on the east Loch Lomond Rd, failed to predict there might be traffic problems on a sunny holiday weekend which resulted in the police having to step in, the real problem is not enforcement but the absence of any plan of deal with the amount of traffic on holiday weekends. The east Loch Lomond Visitor Management Plan should have been an opportunity to address these issues but instead by-passed them completely. It urgently needs reviving. While part of the solution should involve extra parking capacity, that need not be at Balmaha, if the model used successfully by many National Parks in Europe was adopted. This involves closing dead end roads to cars at popular times in cars and instead provide shuttle buses. There road could be closed from wherever a convenient field could be found on the Drymen to Balmaha Rd. This would improve the experience for everyone, provide local employment and income to whoever owned the field. It should not be difficult: buses used for school transport simply need to be redeployed at holiday weekends and other popular holiday periods. This solution to traffic problems on east Loch Lomond has been mooted since before the LLTNPA was created fifteen years ago yet nothing has been done to progress it. Instead, the LLTNPA's solution is to exhort people to park responsibly:

Posts



Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park 7 hrs · 🌐

It's another sunny, busy day across the National Park. Balmaha Car park on East Loch Lomond is now full 🚗
If you're heading this way please think about alternatives and drive and park responsibly.



Post 13th May

Exhortations will solve nothing, action is needed.

Camping chaos

Meantime, the LLTNPA's efforts to manage and control camping – there would never have been a problem is the LLTNPA had not allowed over 1000 camping places to be lost since it was created 15 years ago – was backfiring.

On the Parkswatchscotland Facebook page it was reported there was NO running water at the Park's Loch Chon campsite on the Sunday and while bottled water was being supplied to campers the toilets, not surprisingly, were in a disgusting state. The LLTNPA's decision to install fully flushing toilets, at enormous cost, without checking the adequacy of the water supply now appears totally reckless and composting toilets would clearly have been a much better choice. Its almost impossible to understand how the LLTNPA could report an 85% satisfaction rate with this campsite in their report to Scottish Ministers when these problems have been going on now for over a year. The only possible explanation I can think of is that campers are so appreciative of the efforts of the local staff to keep the place going in the face of the problems created by their superiors that they don't complain. This matter should have been referred to Environmental Health long ago.

Elsewhere there was plenty of evidence that the camping byelaws are failing. Last week I commented on how people are still drinking and leaving their rubbish within the camping management zones ([see here](#)).

Since then I have been told about what happened at Inversnaid last weekend – its just outside the Strathard camping management zone – where a group descended on the beach and were involved in various incidents of anti-social behaviour which caused considerable disruption not to say alarm locally. In their report to Scottish Ministers the LLTNPA claimed that there was NO evidence that the camping byelaws had displaced anti-social behaviour. This is complete rubbish and the LLTNPA can only say this because it has made NO attempt to monitor what is going on elsewhere. I know from talking to people in Cowal that problems there have significantly increased since the introduction of the east Loch Lomond byelaws. The answer to this displacement -is NOT to extend the byelaws to yet more places which is what happened at Strathard where the RSPB asked for the byelaws to be extended to Loch Arklet with the result that there are now problems at Inversnaid. Whatever boundary is set the trouble makers will inevitably move to the other side of it and such an approach would ultimately result in a camping ban across Scotland which simply penalises the vast majority of responsible campers. Rather, the answer lies, as it always has done, in policing.

Unfortunately the LLTNPA has failed to make any public arguments against the reduction in police numbers in the National Park but, given the loss of rural police, now is the time for it to think creatively. So how about publicly calling on Police Scotland, which has tended to concentrate its workforce to urban locations, to deploy a tiny proportion of its workforce in the countryside at weekends and holidays to respond to anti-social behaviour and traffic problems? That won't address serious rural crime issues but it would help the more minor issues that can be associated with visitors.

Looking forward

The holiday weekend shows that the LLTNPA has completely failed to tackle what are entirely predictable visitor management issues, which mar people's ability to enjoy the area, and that some of the problems are getting worse. If the LLTNPA has not held a debrief, involving Board Members, about the problems at the holiday weekend it should do so urgently. Their immediate focus should be on what it can do now to reduce the entirely predictable problems which are likely to occur at the end of May holiday weekend and on the Glasgow Fair weekend as well as sunny weekends in-between and not stick their heads in the sand and pray for wet weather.

The medium term issue is that the LLTNPA needs to start planning and acting like a National Park now. It needs to have a proper discussion with the police – it has still not published the Operation Ironworks Report from last year which should have informed its report to Ministers on the camping byelaws and set up a group to develop a litter strategy which sets out a consistent approach to litter throughout the National Park and ensures the various public authorities work together instead of doing their own thing as at present.

Beyond that it needs to put in place a comprehensive suite of local Visitor Management Plans in partnership with stakeholders – a process that was started by Grant Moir, who is now Chief Executive the Cairngorms National Park Authority – but since abandoned and it needs to develop an alternative to the camping byelaws.

Category

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