

Forestry Commission Scotland and access rights in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park

Description



Photo credit Andy Gray

Following my post last week on forestry and access ([see here](#)), Andy Gray sent Parkswatch a couple of photos he had taken on Saturday 12 May 2018 when he and his family had decided to enjoy an ascent of Cruach Tairbeirt, the small hill above Loch Lomond which is most frequently accessed between Tarbet and Arrochar. On walking through the footpath tunnel at Arrochar train station, the

only easy access on the south side of the hill, they came up against the barrier and signs in the photo above.



Photo credit Andy Gray

Despite the right hand sign saying there was a diversion along the pavement, there were no signs to indicate which way along the pavement people should walk or where the diversionary route went!

There was also no sign of any forestry activity and seeing the path ahead was clear, Andy decided to continue with his plans. A short distance further on they came across a fell tree which appeared to have been purposefully placed across the path to halt progress. However, they took a short detour round this and continued all the way to the top without coming across any further barriers, such as felled trees, or evidence of dangerous work in progress.



In my view, in this case FCS has clearly misused the safety sign and its main

purpose appears to be to intimidate people from taking access and to avoid the bother of contractors putting up signs ONLY when work is in progress. Both signs constitute an unnecessary and unwarranted restriction on access rights and clearly contravene best practice advice for forestry managers that restrictions should be the minimum necessary. Instead, like the West Highland Way “closure” referred to in my post last week, the FCS is attempting to close this route for months.....

Or rather, it appears, for years.....here is the edited text of an email I received back in June 2016:

“the path to Cruach Tairbeirt is blocked by a barrier right at the Tarbet railway bridge / station and there is a poster from the forestry commission saying “path closed try Tarbet Isle”. Suggested re-opening time is February 2017. My wife and I did not want to wait that long so we proceeded with all due caution. There was no forestry activity of any kind. There is a new forestry road a few tens of metres above sea level. This joins the A83 near the TA building. Ironically the walk was easier than usual because they have cut through several fallen trees that had heretofore constituted considerable obstacles.”

So access restrictions here have now been going on here, on what is publicly owned land, in a National Park, for over two years. This totally contravenes the advice in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (and FCS’ own guidance on Managing Woodland Access and Forestry Operations [\(see here\)](#)):

- *Keep the area affected, and the duration and type of any precaution, to the minimum required. Tell people about these at the main access points and, if possible, provide alternative routes.*
- *If possible, concentrate felling and extraction at times when public use is likely to be lowest.*
- *Allow people to use particular routes when work has ended (such as for the weekend) and would not cause significant safety hazards.*



Sign erected by the local community showing Cruach Tairbeart behind Arrochar station and local points of interest

If the local Forestry Commission District, of Cowal and the Trossachs, which seems to ignore the advice from its own headquarters, wanted an example of how to manage access when heavy machinery is in use, they could have simply looked across the glen at the Arrochar Community Hydro scheme which was officially opened on 15th May and which I went to look at in December:



Access along the Three Lochs Way maintained! Clear maps! And signs at all the main access points:



Brilliant! So, why

cannot FCS take a similar approach?

Unfortunately while people from the local community appear to have a good understanding of access rights, respect them and have been active in developing the path network around Arrochar, they appear to have no influence over Forestry Commission Scotland. Neither, it appears, does the Loch

Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority.

FCS appears to be a law unto itself and needs to be held to account. Staff need to be forced to follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and their own guidance. If you see FCS signs that are not exemplars of good practice in respect of access rights please complain to FCS and report them to the local access authority as I should have done for Cruach Tairbeart two years ago.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. access rights
2. Forestry Commission Scotland
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