

Unfair, unjust, unnecessary and unworkable – the LLTNPA’s war against campers

Description



The unjustness of the camping byelaws. People were sleeping in this van quite legally but if they had a tent they would have faced fines of up to £500 and a criminal record.

Saturday was the first time I had been along the “camping management zone” on the west shore of Loch Lomond for a couple of months. Prior to the start of the camping byelaw “season” in March the LLTNPA spent a lot of money erecting “repeater” signs warning campers that they faced fines of up to £500 for camping on these shores outwith permit areas. At the same time, however, the LLTNPA appears to have accepted that the byelaws were unenforceable in respect to people saying overnight here in a vehicle ([see here](#)). The obvious unfairness and unjustness is encapsulated by the photo

above: for people who can afford a van its still easy to enjoy the National Park and carry on kayaking or angling while sleeping overnight on the loch shores, while if those same people tried to camp they risk a criminal record.



Being able to stop off is very important to tourism

We passed literally dozens of campervans and caravans parked in laybys along the A82. A reflection in part of the lack of reasonably priced sites for people to stay (sleeping right on the road cannot be that great an experience) but also of other factors such as convenience and a wish to enjoy the loch shore. I even saw two people asleep in a car – I refrained from taking a photo. There is nothing wrong with any of this but the right to stop off for the night is now denied to people who want to do so in tents. That is fundamentally discriminatory and wrong.



Shelter – its illegal to erect any form of shelter except an umbrella under the camping byelaws – and tents (sorry barely visible behind trees) on shores West Loch Lomond Saturday

We also saw two groups of tents pitched outwith permit areas. They like the people in campervans were out overnight in the National Park, whether on the way somewhere or simply to enjoy themselves but, unlike the people in vehicles, were risking a £500 fine and criminal record by doing so.

One group was still there when I returned later in the day. Not the first time that I have witnessed tents remaining unlawfully in place all weekend this year. So, has the LLTNPA at last accepted its byelaws are unenforceable and its a waste of resources chasing people who have done no wrong?

I have my doubts, the explanation is more likely to lie in the target for this year's Operational Plan:

Reduced level of recorded camping byelaw contraventions and outcomes between March – September 2018

At the June Board Meeting the report on the Operational Plan reported:

“147 byelaw contraventions recorded. 0 individuals have been reported to the Procurator Fiscal”.

These figures are well down on the same period last year, despite the far greater number of people

camping due to the excellent weather in May and early June. Had the LLTNPA continued to record breaches of the byelaws as they had done last year this would have shown they were failing to meet their targets and provided proof the byelaws were not working. The LLTNPA's answer has been to reduce the enforcement and/or recording – note the target is only about “recorded” byelaw contraventions not “actual” byelaw contraventions. This would fit with all the reports parkswatch has received of Rangers failing to check permits in permit areas even when there is obvious evidence of anti-social behaviour. Expect another report to Scottish Ministers at the end of this year with figures which bear no resemblance to reality.

The LLTNPA's failure to provide places to camp as promised continues



The Inveruglas camping permit area as it appeared Saturday

On the way back I popped in to take a look at the Inveruglas camping permit area. While there were a number of campervans in the car park by the camping permit area there were no tents. I was not surprised, its shocking, covered in brambles and vegetation. There was just one place I could see that was fit for camping and there the vegetation has worn away by overuse – one of the very things the camping byelaws were intended to stop:



There was room for one, maybe two tents in the Inveruglas camping permit area

The LLTNPA markets this as providing 5 places and after previous criticisms their website now says this about the area:

Permit areas don't have set pitches; you choose where you want to camp within the area. This permit area has a maximum of 5 spaces available. Inveruglas permit area stretches from the back of the Long Stay Car Park to the shoreline, with the best spots for camping along the shore.

Yes, that's another pebbly beach where people are expected to camp.

Meantime, there is NO news about the opening of the Loch Achray campsite ([see here](#)). Originally this was planned to open for the Spring and the delay was blamed on the bad weather. Staff then claimed it would be open for the end of May:

<u>NP Partnership Plan Priority</u>	<u>Activities</u>	<u>Rating</u>	<u>NP Partnership Plan Indicator of Success</u>	<u>Meas</u>
8.1 Visitor Management	10. Continue to deliver the Camping Development Strategy and Monitor Camping Management Zones	Behind Schedule	7 – Visitor Economy	Comp facilities
7.1 Growing Tourism Markets		Note: 4	8 – Public Experience	Identifi bring Delive Imple Identifi encou motor

Extract from Operational Plan update presented to Board Meeting in June

At the Board Meeting itself at the end of June staff claimed the campsite would be open for the start of the busiest part of the year for camping. Well August is now half gone and Loch Achray is still not open. There has been no news release about the opening and there is no reference to it on the campsite and permit booking area on the Park website. The Park did announce however at the start of the byelaw season that it had recruited two new wardens:

“Six new campsite wardens have been recruited and trained to provide cover for Loch Chon campsite and the new Loch Achray campsite.”

The incompetence is staggering. Its time the LLTNPA Board held staff to account for their failures to manage and develop visitor infrastructure in the National Park.

The implications of this failure needs to be fully discussed with stakeholders and in the report that the LLTNPA Board has to provide to Ministers at the end of this byelaw season. That report needs to include, besides an analysis of the how the byelaws are being enforced, a report on how many of the 300 camping places they promised Ministers for the start of the byelaws were actually in place and use-able by campers 18 months later.

The dangers of allowing the failure of the camping byelaws to go unchallenged

On Countryfile on the 5th August there was a feature on “over-tourism” which compared current tourist pressures on Skye with those in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park and presented camping permits as a way of managing numbers. There was no critical analysis of how the byelaws have worked and the whole assumption, that numbers are a problem rather than an opportunity could have been taken straight from the National Park.

I had assumed that the obvious evidence of the failure of the camping byelaws would prevent their extension elsewhere – it should do in a rational world. We know however how politicians clutch at straws and what the Countryfile programme demonstrates is that as long as the camping byelaws continue there will be risks to access rights across Scotland. That is why everyone who cares about

access rights in Scotland, whether they camp in the National Park or not, should be calling for the repeal of the camping byelaws.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. camping
2. Camping bye laws
3. LLTNPA
4. Minister Environment

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