

Visitor management and access rights in Glen Clova revisited

Description



The field where the former informal campsite used to be located – the No Camping sign removed Photo taken 10th February

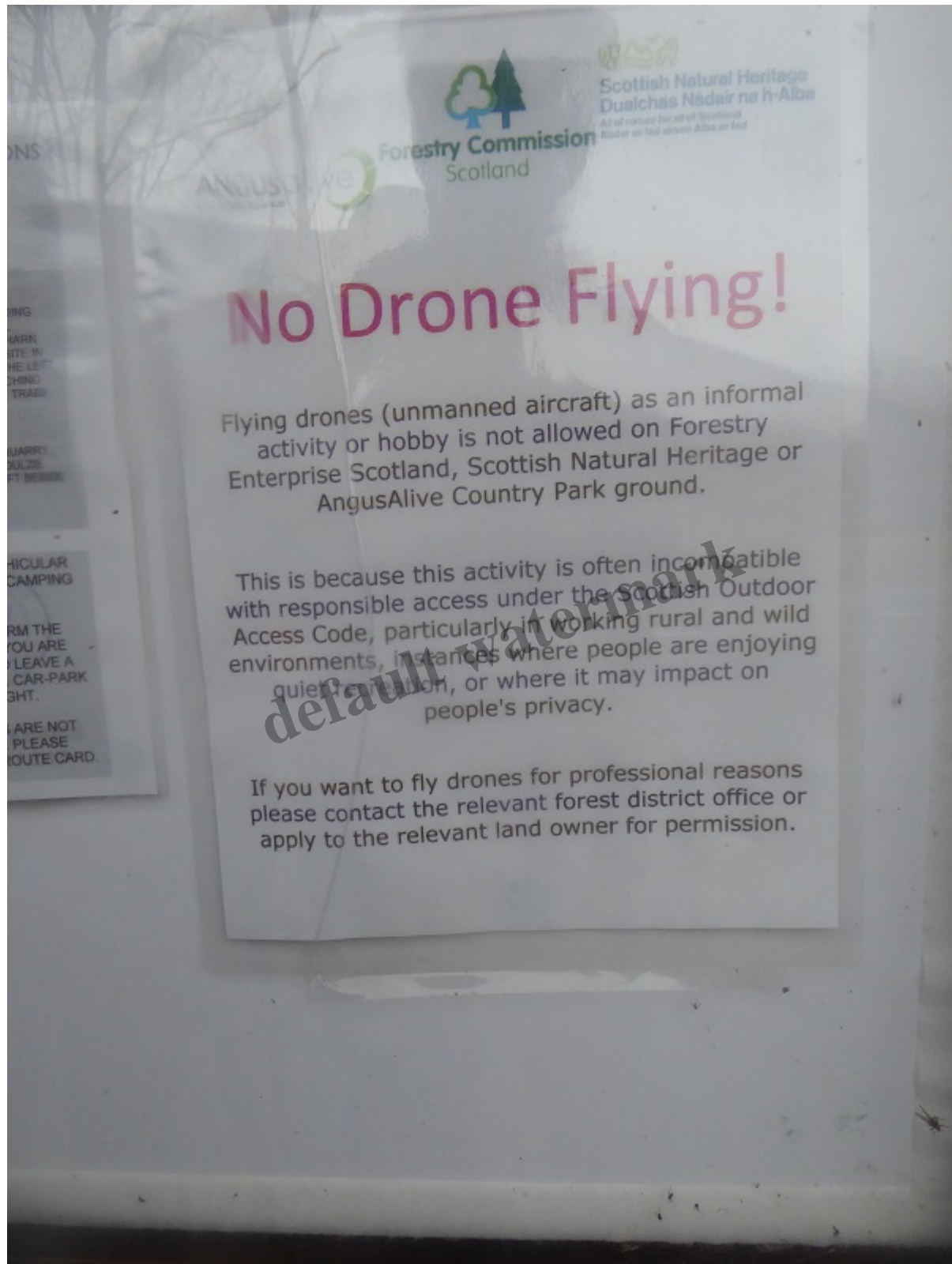
A year after my post on how the signs in Glen Doll at the head of Glen Clova contravened access rights ([see here](#)) I revisited the glens. I was pleased to find that two of the three signs I had commented on have been removed.



No camping sign as it appeared last year – not only was it wrong to say “No Camping Is Allowed” it wrongly referred to “approved wild camping sites”

A number of regular visitors to the Glen commented on my first post and one informed me that the camping in this field was stopped at the time of the Foot and Mouth crisis. It was the failure of land managers to “re-open” the countryside after that crisis in 2001 that helped persuade MSPs of all political persuasions in the Scottish Parliament to establish access rights in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. One wonders if Glen Doll is the last Foot and Mouth closure to be addressed or whether there are still others lurking out there 16 years later?

The second sign to have been removed was the one which muddled drone flying with access rights:



Sign last year which wrongly implied drone flying is covered by access rights

There are still Forestry Commission sign claiming the area is a drone free zone (the signs from Balmoral Estate have been removed) but there is no longer any reference to this being irresponsible under access rights:



Drone flying is not a matter for access rights. While there is nothing to prevent landowners putting up signs declaring drone free zones (unlike signs which try to restrict access rights) they are legally dubious. The current law on drone flying sets a height limit of 400ft and makes it unlawful to fly close to houses (and airports) but says nothing about the general countryside. The signs therefore have no legal effect.

One wonders if the Forestry Commission, instead of trying to impose its own version of the law (which it has been doing increasingly in respect to access rights) would not be better accepting the legal framework for drones and then asking people to act in certain ways. For example:

“While its not illegal to fly drones under 400ft or away from houses as long as you keep them in sight, we would ask you to consider others and wildlife before flying drones here.

The third sign, from the Forestry Commission, in the large Glen Doll car park is, however, still there:



This sign has no legal basis. Camping rights extend wherever access rights extend so long as they are then exercised responsibly and if someone parks in the car park and then goes to camp somewhere nearby FCS can do nothing about it (unless the person concerned does something irresponsible like cause damage). FCS would also appear to have no legal address against people stopping off here in campervans as the notice contains no reference to any legally enforceable regulations (as is required by law).

The problem is that people get put off by these signs and, as I said a year ago, *“the inevitable consequence of car park charges and trying to ban overnight stays there is people will try and stay elsewhere”*. In the last month there have been two further comments on my blog piece from people asking where in Glen Clova they can stop off in campervans. The Glen Doll car park is by far the best place. It has a toilet open 24 hours and space. This contrasts to the two narrow roads up Glen Clova

which have very few pulling off places. While it is quite legal for any vehicle to stop off overnight on a public road or private road where there is a right of passage, in some places it makes little sense to do so except in an emergency. Glen Clova is one such place. It therefore makes absolutely no sense to try and prevent people using the stopping off point at the end. FCS should be trying to support overnight visitors instead of trying to discourage them. The case for this is even greater now that the other low cost accommodation which used to exist at the Clova Hotel has closed)



Spotted in a newspaper when I got home

During my stay I went into the excellent Glen Doll Visitor Centre which is operated by the Angus Ranger Service to thank them for the removal of the first No Camping signs. Its fantastic that Angus and other parts of the Cairngorms National Park still operate a remotely based Ranger Service. The contrast with the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park where, for example, Rangers have been removed from remote bases like the Community Centre in Arrochar is striking. The outdoor community need to defend services such as this. The Ranger had seen seven red kites compared to my two!

We had a very good discussion. It covering everything from how schools were finding it harder and harder to afford bringing children here for the day (there is an educational area in the Visitor Centre) to the management of access. The Ranger told me in a matter of fact way how he had had to stop campervanners on a couple of occasions from trying dispose of their chemical waste down the toilets. That led on to the lack of appropriate provision across Scotland compared to countries like France.

The problem of course is austerity. Our Public Authorities are starved of the resources to put proper infrastructure in place and then as a result try to manage visitors in ways that are totally counterproductive. It would be worth the Cairngorm National Park Authority instigating a visitor infrastructure plan for Glen Doll (the car park is now often full in summer) which clearly set out the resources needed. This could be on the model of the 5 Lochs Visitor Management Plan which the CNPA's Chief Executive, Grant Moir, developed in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park when he was there.

The LLTNPA unfortunately abandoned Visitor Management Plans in favour of a war on campers. Glen Clova would be a good place for the CNPA to show how National Parks really can make a positive difference, whether to recreational visitors or the children of Dundee.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. access rights
2. camping
3. CNPA
4. Forestry Commission Scotland
5. visitor management

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