

The Loch Chon campsite three years on – the ongoing waste of scarce resources

Description



Entrance to the Loch Chon camping area barred to vehicles October 2019

The Scottish Government approved the camping byelaws in January 2016 on condition that the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority would create new camping infrastructure. 300 new camping places were promised for the first year and the Scottish Government delayed implementation of the byelaws by a year to give the LLTNPA time to put new facilities in place. In the three “camping seasons” since the LLTNPA has created just two new campsites, at Loch Chon and Loch Achray.

Both have been beset with problems, with the campsite at Loch Achray opening a year late ([see here](#)). The campsite at Loch Chon opened first. Among the problems highlighted on Parkswatch were the pitches which the LLTNPA had designated for people to camp, with many too sloping or boggy to pitch

a tent, and the virtually non-existent water supply ([see here](#)). The LLTNPA and the campsite was saved from ignominy by the very helpful and friendly wardens.



The actions of the LLTNPA to improve the campsite over the last year or so have vindicated the criticisms made on parkswatch. The camping platforms show that much of sloping area was, and is still, unsuitable for camping.



The rubber camping mats prove too that most of the flat areas were too boggy for camping. However, as a solution to the problems posed by the terrain, they are considerably better – and appear more popular – than the wooden camping platforms. The LLTNPA should never have approved a campsite of this size here and against the wishes of the local community council. However, their management proceeded regardless so they could say to the Scottish Government they had met their target for new camping places.

The cost of all these improvements is likely to have been considerable, not least because the LLTNPA after last season had to drill a borehole to provide a reliable water supply to the campsite. I have now asked the LLTNPA under Freedom of Information for the costs of developing and running the two new campsites over the last three years. This information is important to help determine whether the camping byelaws and “Your Park” monies have provided best value or whether the money might have been better spent.

After all the errors and mistakes, Loch Chon is now a pleasant place to camp and I suspect that feedback from the campsite for this last year in particular will be overwhelmingly positive. The staff who have achieved this turnaround deserve congratulations.

The good work of frontline staff, however, is still being undermined by poor management decisions.



Water supply from the new bore hold switched off October 2019. Is it really

beyond the ken of the Park to leave the water on at least until the first severe frosts or design it so it can remain on all year?

I have visited the campsite twice this Autumn, once in September and then in October after it had closed. In September there were still signs up at the entrance of the large car park saying it was reserved for campers, despite it being almost empty. Moreover, campervans are not allowed to stay, a missed opportunity, not least to bring in a little more income. That is bureaucracy gone mad.



Blocked off parking area October 2019

The Loch Chon campsite was looking beautiful in October, with the trees changing colour. Indeed in many ways this is probably the best time of year to visit, whether camping or not. Yet not only were some of the parking areas blocked by barriers but the water supply was cut off and all the toilets locked.



While the LLTNPA

continually promotes itself as developing tourism, it seems to have its head in the sand when it comes to the tourism season. This is extending considerably, in part due to the growth in campervanning. An ideal opportunity one might have thought but instead of providing for this by keeping places like Loch Chon open, the LLTNPA closes down a high proportion of the facilities it operates.

Parkswatch has commented regularly on the stupidity of shutting toilets for much of the year and of the hypocrisy of the LLTNPA in then complaining about human waste in the countryside being a problem.



Sign on public toilet door in Aberfoyle in October

This was nicely encapsulated by the above sign which I spotted on my way to the Loch Chon campsite. The sign would be half redundant if the LLTNPA had just kept the toilets at the Loch Chon

and Loch Achray campsites open and totally redundant if only the LLTNPA had the ambition to develop the visitor infrastructure it was set up to provide.

The implicit message behind this sign is that anyone who can't hold on for so long or may be embarrassed about going in the countryside, shouldn't go any further. That is a disaster for a National Park which has a statutory duty to promote enjoyment of the countryside. Three years after the introducing of the camping byelaws, the LLTNPA still needs to get back to basics.

That is still one of the key issues the LLTNPA Board needs to address in its three year review report to Scottish Ministers on the operation of the camping byelaws and provision of new camping infrastructure. That is due in December. It will be interesting to see if the LLTNPA is upfront and transparent about all the money it has spent/wasted on the camping byelaws and considers whether scarce resources could not be better used. If, for example, it hadn't spent so much money on patrolling the Park looking out for unlawful campers, it could have kept its facilities open year round.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. camping
2. Freedom of Information
3. LLTNPA
4. Scottish Government
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