

Its official – the camping byelaws in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park have failed

Description



Article from Helensburgh Advertiser last week

Three years AFTER the introduction of the camping byelaws, its been revealed that there is a “growing problem of litter and waste in the National Park”.

Remember all those photos of abandoned tents left by campers who were blamed for the litter

problems in the National Park and which were used to justify the introduction of the camping byelaws? If not, here is a wee reminder from the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority's news release announcing the byelaws:



The National Park Authority collected years of evidence to support its proposals and found that, despite increased ranger and police efforts, **serious problems** ranging from widespread litter and fire-damage, to abandonment of entire campsites were continuing to blight the Park's outstanding natural beauty.

So what's causing all the litter now? Have campers simply ignored the camping byelaws or does the growing problem of litter and waste have other causes?

According to the LLTNPA's Annual Update on the Camping Byelaws for Scottish Ministers ([see here](#)), which was considered at their December Board Meeting, the camping byelaws are working, but not very well:

“Key challenges and areas for improvement in relation to camping management moving forward include further reductions in inappropriate toileting, littering and irresponsible use of fires across the National Park in specific areas where these problems persist”

So, according to the LLTNPA, litter associated with campers has reduced even if “*problems persist*” in certain areas. If this is true, what this means is that litter and waste problems caused by OTHERS must have significantly increased!

The truth is that campers have NEVER been the main source of litter and waste in the National Park. Issues like waste abandoned by developers, often with the LLTNPA's cognizance ([see here](#)), fly-tipping ([see here](#)), litter left at laybys without bins and litter thrown out of car windows ([see here](#)) have always been far greater problems.

There were of course issues with a small minority of campers abandoning tents, but this always was a small issue which the LLTNPA deliberately magnified by publishing hundreds of photos of the same abandoned campsite from different angles. The camping byelaws haven't stopped those problems as is demonstrated by this news release ([see here](#)) from October, in which the LLTNPA urges:

“For camping trips and other outdoor pursuits, invest in tents and other gear that can be used over and over again, rather than leaving valuable materials in our natural environment. Leaving tents and other items behind is flytipping and you could be fined.”



Tent dumped in ditch near Inverarnan September 2019

I came across another good illustration of how the LLTNPA deliberately misled the public about the environmental impacts of irresponsible campers at the weekend:



Trees chopped by beavers at Mill Dam by Dunkeld

Photos of trees chopped by a small minority of campers were, like abandoned tents, used by the LLTNPA to justify the camping byelaws. (The byelaws created a new additional criminal offence of collecting or using wood that might cause damage). The byelaws have, just like litter, NOT stopped the occasional chopping of trees by campers but this damage rather pales into insignificance compared to what beavers are doing on Tayside and which conservationists generally agree is good for the natural environment ([see here](#))!

No wonder the LLTNPA is not keen to promote and protect the beavers which have snuck into the National Park over the last couple of years. Their presence will soon put the occasional “damage” caused by campers into perspective.....

What needs to happen

The announcement of a litter summit in March is an indication that the LLTNPA's litter prevention manager, Nik Turner, is doing a good job and is now trying to get the Park to address the real causes of litter rather than blame campers for everything. That is welcome, even if the LLTNPA's focus still appears to be on litter left by visitors rather than those travelling through (stuff chucked out of car windows is almost certainly the biggest source of litter in the National Park), or fly tipping or indeed waste left in the countryside by some landowners.

With the litter problem increasing, there is no now excuse for the LLTNPA to continue with the camping byelaws, which have been both ineffective and very expensive to enforce. Instead they should redeploy the resources wasted on trying to ban and control campers on installing basic infrastructure, such as litter bins in laybys, and employ people to clear up the litter that blights so much of the National Park. I suspect those litter pickers would spend less than 5% of their time on clearing up litter left by campers.

Unfortunately, I don't expect the LLTNPA to address these issues in their 3 year review of the camping byelaws which their Board is due to consider in March. Their Chief Executive, Gordon Watson, has for a couple of years now been taking every opportunity to tell people that the byelaws are here to stay. Moreover, the "review" will take place after this year's camping byelaw "season" has started – a clear sign that it was never intended to change anything. Litter, chopped trees, fires, human excrement and the numbers of campers, all have only ever been an excuse to get people who were doing no harm off the land and to remove their access rights ([see here for example for what happened by Linda Mackay, the former Park Convener's house at Loch Venachar](#)).

The camping byelaws have always, at heart, been a civil liberties issue where the behaviour of a few have been used to justify the removal the rights of the many. Its pertinent to ask how far the example of the LLTNPA, and its manipulative consultation four years ago, has now inspired Boris Johnson's government to consult on new laws to criminalise access in England? The fine piece on this last week by George Monbiot ([see here](#)) concludes with the following words:

"History shows that attacks on general freedoms often begin with an attack on the freedom of a minority. It teaches us that we should never allow a government to divide and rule. An attack on one is an attack on all."

Just a shame that Monbiot seems unaware of how the LLTNPA's camping byelaws were used to divide and rule and now are being used to try and justify attempts to further restrict access rights in Scotland ([see here](#)). The difference between the Scottish and UK Governments is sometimes not as great as is commonly understood.....

Category

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