

Access rights, camping and gaps in visitor infrastructure in the Cairngorms National Park

Description

Park is putting the interests of landowners first

RE the article "Law and Disorder" (Strathy front page, January 16), while now Cairngorms National Park Authority chief executive Grant Moir was responsible for the introduction of camping bylaws on the east shores of Loch Lomond, it was at the time intended as a temporary measure and he has always said he did not believe there was any need for such bylaws in the Cairngorms.

I expect he knows as well as anyone that the extension of the camping bylaws in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National

Park Authority has proved unenforceable and a complete waste of public money.

Accepting that there are no plans currently to introduce camping bans into the national park, the question is why has the park authority suddenly decided to collect data on "irresponsible" camping?

The answer appears to be that they were prompted by land managers, though who those land managers were or what problems they

might have experienced has not so far been revealed.

Why though collect data on litter left by campers and not the junk left lying in the countryside by landowners?

Why too is the park so concerned about the impacts of campfires, when muirburn does 1000 times the damage, destroying tree regeneration and releasing untold amounts of carbon into the atmosphere?

Unfortunately this national park authority, which was set up to promote

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I was pleased to get this letter into the Badenoch and Strathspey Herald on Thursday in response to their excellent coverage the week before about the potential for camping bylaws to be introduced into the Cairngorms National Park Authority.

Law and disorder

■ Park authority's new guidance suggests bylaws could be used to tackle problem camping areas ■ CNPA chief executive: 'There are absolutely no plans to introduce camping bylaws'

TULLOCHGRUE: The beauty spot on Rothiemurchus has had problems with irresponsible camping.

THE Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) has insisted it has no plans to bring in bylaws banning camping in problem areas, despite having indicated that the move could be considered.

Park bosses have set out steps to tackle rogue camping in new guidance that appears to suggest restrictions could be brought in at hotspots.

The park will start monitoring irresponsible camping activity to build up a picture of problems in the strath and wider park area.

Scotland's only other national park - Loch Lomond and the Trossachs - has already introduced bylaws to ban camping and fire-lighting in some parts of the park between March and September.

Zones have been created where it is only possible to stay in campsites or with a camping permit, and has proved hugely controversial.

The new CNPA guidance issued this past week states: "It is not about establishing trends in wild camping which is defined as light-weight for one or two nights and away from roads, because this routinely occurs without any issues.

"This monitoring is focused on sites where informal camping under access rights occur and the issues have become acute.

"The monitoring of irresponsible informal camping activity will allow the CNPA and partners to establish if visitor management measures put in place are working and will build up an evidence base to justify or otherwise the use of bylaws or management rules."

The guidance goes as far as to set out how land managers can make the case potentially for bylaws by listing the kind of information to be collected. This includes "reasonably robust visitor number collection for all visitors to the site" and also comprises:

- Tent numbers
- Damage to the natural and cultural heritage of the site - including fire rings, human waste and litter
- Incidents requiring police involvement

The guidance adds: "The procedure for creating bylaws is complex and it may be more appropriate to liaise with

CNPA chief executive Grant Moir said camping bylaws were not on the agenda.

By Gavin Musgrove
gavin.musgrove@btmedia.co.uk

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While it was good to see Grant Moir, the CNPA Chief Executive (above) deny there were any plans to introduce camping byelaws at the present time, that isn't the same as saying they are off the agenda. I have seen correspondence from CNPA access staff justifying the inclusion of camping byelaws in the revised guidance it has issued to landowners on the basis these powers exist and therefore it would be wrong NOT to mention them.

If that is the case, then why does the CNPA never include reference to its powers (never used) to create byelaws for conservation purposes in other guidance it puts out to landowners? Part of the answer is that the CNPA doesn't put out guidance to land managers about how they should manage the land but only guidance about how they should manage visitors ([see here](#)). There is no reason, however, why other documents should not refer to the CNPA's powers to make conservation byelaws (for example to stop raptor persecution, stop All Terrain Vehicles destroying peat bog, stop the muirburn which trashes so much of the National Park). The CNPA though has NEVER to the best of my knowledge done this. The message is they are prepared to consider using compulsory powers to

control visitors but not the activities of irresponsible landowners. This is not a level playing field and, until it is, the CNPA deserve to be criticised and recreational interests need to remain vigilant.

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Law and disorder

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the police in the first instance to target persistent criminal activity."

But Mark Tate, Cairngorms Business Partnership chief executive, said the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC) already provides great guidance.

He said: "If there is a very small minority who are wilfully irresponsible then existing legislation such as the Land Reform and the Wildlife and Countryside Acts provide adequate tools for dealing with that.

"We will continue to work very closely with the CNPA and other agencies to promote the positive message of caring for the place we love."

Highland Council convener and local member Bill Lobban: "I am totally opposed to the introduction of restrictive bylaws by any organisation let alone the not exactly democratically accountable CNPA.

"If there are severe problems, and I guess the jury is out on that, then there are better ways to manage them than the use of draconian powers such as those introduced in Loch Lomond."

Matthew Kirkwood, head of the Rothern Ranger Service, said the challenge they face is much larger than irresponsible camping – it was the lack of general awareness of responsible access.

He said: "We are committed to SOAC and work very hard to enable an average of 1000-plus visits per day to one of the most protected and special areas for nature conservation in the UK.

"As alluded to in the guidance papers, our experience with irresponsible access behaviour shows that we get the best response from visitors by engaging with them in a friendly, welcoming and positive way."



The shores of Loch Morlich are a popular spot for 'unofficial' camping.

Contacted by the Strathy, the CNPA has since distanced itself from backing the use of bylaws for camping.

CNPA chief executive Grant Moir was instrumental in the restrictions introduced at Loch Lomond and the Trossachs while director of conservation, but he told the Strathy: "There are absolutely no plans to introduce camping bylaws in the Cairngorms National Park and I would like to make it clear that the publication of this guidance is not the first

step towards creating them.

"The issues around informal camping are not significant within the Cairngorms National Park compared with some areas, although we know there are hotspots.

"We aim to gather more empirical evidence, rather than anecdotal, about the level of informal camping along with any problems that need to be addressed such as fires and litter."

■ The new guidance can be found at [www.https://cairngorms.co.uk/working-together/publications/publication/482/](https://cairngorms.co.uk/working-together/publications/publication/482/)

It was therefore very good to see both the Chief Executive of the Cairngorms Business Partnership, Mark Tate, and Convener of Highland Council, Bill Lobban make a strong stand against camping bylaws and to criticise those in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority as draconian.

They could have added that the LLTNPA byelaw have been a waste of scarce public money. I was interested to read in the minutes of the “Your Park” Stakeholder Forum meeting in December ([see here](#)) – and it is a step forward that the LLTNPA is now making this information public – that in response to an excellent question from James Fraser, of the Friends of Loch Lomond and Trossachs, the Park:

“confirmed that the report [to Scottish Ministers reviewing how the byelaws have operated for the last three years] will include financial information including the amount of revenue involved and ranger deployment costs but will not include a full cost/benefit analysis”

That tells you everything and I hope the Friends (of whom I am a “critical” member) now oppose the renewal of the camping byelaws.

A cost benefit analysis would show that trying to police campers has not only failed for campervans but is far less effective and far more expensive than trying to put in place the basic infrastructure needed to support camping and campervanning. Until that cost benefit analysis is conducted we will see the proliferation of what are sometimes well intentioned but ill thought out measures to control camping and caravanning across Scotland on the Loch Lomond and Trossachs model (such as in Fife ([see here](#)) and the North Coast 500 ([see here](#))). This is the wrong way to go and why the Loch Lomond and Trossachs byelaws need to be scrapped.

There is no smoke without fire and behind the Strathclyde news story a major problem is developing in Glen More and around Aviemore, the most popular visitor destination in the National Park. Formal campsites are becoming ever more expensive. The new Oakwood campsite by Aviemore, for example, charges a minimum of £12 for a small tent and £21 for a campervan per night low season ([see here](#)) and there are similar prices throughout Glen More.

Meantime as a result of increasing inequality it's hard if not impossible for many people to get out and visit our National Park. Of these many can't afford to stay in built accommodation and as a result camp, sleep in the backs of vans or hire a campervan for a week. High campsite prices – and costs in the UK are enormous compared to Europe (for £20 a night in the summer, i.e. the high season, I got free access to local transport and lifts in the Saas Taal in Switzerland) – then force many people into roadside camping and campervanning when if, like on the continent, there was an aire available with basic facilities, most would stay there.

Couple this with Forestry and Land Scotland's attempted ban on overnight stays by its car parks along Glen More ([see here](#)) and there are suddenly very few places for people to stop off in the most popular glen in the National Park. This explains the great increase in the number of campervans now stopping at Coire na Ciste, it's about the last place you can go. In bad weather, however, that is not an option so people pull off in other places along Glen More and suddenly the volume of people camping and campervanning informally becomes perceived as a problem.

This is the “problem” that the CNPA has now agreed with landowners to monitor but, instead of saying that the reason for doing this is to decide where best to create “aires” across the National Park, they refer to their powers to control campers by camping byelaws, i.e. by bans. Where campervans, which don't come under access rights, fit into this is unclear. Instead of this approach, it's time that the CNPA, along with Councils for areas like Fife and Highland, started to plan for what basic infrastructure is needed in their areas to support visitors otherwise they will simply repeat the shocking

mistakes of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority.

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Author

nickkempe

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