

Scotland's Year of Coasts and Waters 2020 – the head of Loch Long.

Description



Floating debris, that could be hauled in to dry ground. Photo Credit Nick Halls 14th January 2020

Every year I check out the litter and marine debris washed up on the shore at the head of Loch Long at Arrochar, and occasionally the state of a similar beach at Lochgoilhead.

Debris accumulates in vast quantities during the southerly gales and high tides that annually occur between October and late Spring. Because of the geomorphology of the Clyde Estuary and the Irish Sea, and the manner in which the tides work around the Mull of Kintyre and Mull of Galloway and into the Clyde Estuary, Loch Long seems to accumulate rubbish and debris from along the South West Coast of Scotland and England and the East Coast of Ireland – and probably gains some that is washed into the Irish Sea from the Atlantic ([see: Talking Rubbish: Citizen Science and The Arrochar Litter Sink](#)).

Predominantly south westerly winds combined with the North Atlantic drift/Gulf stream cause huge amounts of marine litter to be deposited all along the western coast of Scotland, which seems to

accumulate in the greatest quantities at the head of enclosed lochs, where the sea water tends to rise and fall without much tidal scour. Many of these are difficult to access by land, and unpleasant to approach in small boats.

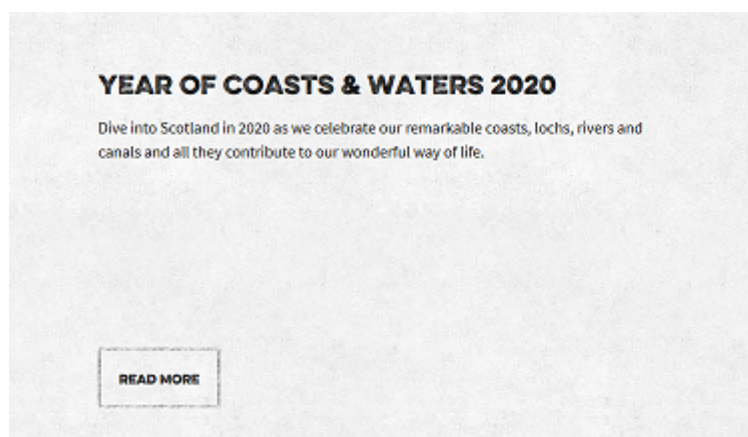
The accumulation at Arrochar is exceptional, and although efforts are made to regularly remove the debris from accessible areas close to the village, much cannot be easily removed and has accumulated to build-up the salt marsh shoreline around the Loch to the Western shore.

The accumulated debris has resulted in quite an unusual habitat, somewhat spoilt by non-native invasive species, due to garden rubbish being dumped into the Loch, the most obvious being Japanese Knot Weed. This is almost as difficult and expensive to eliminate as Rhododendron, involving repeated use of herbicides. The tidal zone is worthy of serious botanical and biological study, as an exemplar of the environmental outcomes of long-term accumulation of pollution and marine debris. It is already of interest to ornithologists.

This year, which has been designated Year of the Coasts and Waters, it occurred to me that the accumulation at Arrochar, and possibly other easily accessed heads of enclosed lochs, may present a valuable opportunity to remove enormous quantities of plastics and domestic and fishing debris from the oceans, and increase responsible tourism, while developing a much more honest appreciation of the threat to the Coast and Waters.

It seems to me to be hypocritical for the media pundits to be wringing their hands about the plastics in the ocean, with photographs of beaches in Asia covered in litter, while much of it originates from Europe and while Scotland's coasts are littered with what gets returned by the sea. Scotland's coastline is disgusting, in detail.

The media approach replicates the subliminal message projected over decades that pollution and environmental damage is happening elsewhere and faraway, exemplified by images of burning forests, endangered exotic animals, whales and penguins, while totally ignoring the unfolding environmental disaster under our feet.



Screenshot 3rd Feb from Visit Scotland website – they are leading on Scotland's Year of Coasts and Waters

The pictures of Scotland on the Visit Scotland website show what appears to be pristine beaches and landscapes. It seems to me fundamentally dishonest, when in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, immediately beside the A 83, there is an example of the marine pollution that is on every

beach in Scotland.

The images of brightly colored marine food products ([see here](#)) are equally dishonest as they probably contains micro plastics, and may well be polluted by chemicals and possibly radioactive.

I was reminded of the oil spill off the North West Coast of Spain, in 2002, when the tanker Prestige, broke up 130 miles off Finisterre, and heavy oil was washed up on the beautiful beaches and turned the cliffs black with oil thrown up by the spray. There were demonstrations, and the slogan was 'Nunca Mas' [Never Again]. The Spanish offered cheap air flights to people willing to come and help clean the beaches around the Galician coast. Local groups organised beach cleans, and provided overalls for visitors, and everywhere there were dummies dressed in overalls and wellington boots hanging to attract volunteers to particular beaches. This approach attracted environmentalist from all over the world, raised awareness of the impact of oil pollution and helped Spain become one of the more environmentally aware and concerned country in Europe. Every where I go in Spain I meet people with deep concern about protecting the environment, and with a sophisticated understanding of the social impacts of pollution and environmentally ill-considered land use, and who actually do something about it.

It is time for Scottish Government, Argyll and Bute Council, the LL&TT NP, Visit Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage to actually involve the people who claim to be concerned in something more practical than demonstrations and waving banners and placards. It is an issue of, equal if not greater, importance for Scotland than CND, 'Indy Refs' and Camping bans – and dwarfs any terrestrial litter issue.

Arrochar is an almost perfect place to initiate a valuable, economic, educational, social and tourism project, focused on cleaning up the area. Inspired by the sense of urgency now being fermented in relation to Climate Change and Marine Pollution and plastics.



View west towards the Cobbler Carpark, showing the ramp in the foreground, originally intended for launching boats, during a previous attempt to enhance shoreline for recreational purposes. Probably seldom if ever used. Now allows vehicular access to beach. Photo credit Nick Halls 14th January 2020.

The beach is accessible, the accumulation is continuous and the environmental impact considerable. The community has a long track record of trying to tackle the issue ([see here](#)), is already accessible by bus, train and bicycle, and connected by formal long-distance paths and numerous informal routes through the Arrochar Alps to the rest of Argyll. No serious investment is required, certainly less than required to make the road safe on the Rest and Be Thankful ([see here for BBC coverage latest landslide](#)).

The village has hotels that are relatively underused during the winter period, all of which could be supplying more than seasonal work, if the visitor numbers were to be increased by officially coordinated beach cleaning projects, analysis of the debris, studies of the local environment, and development of recycling and composting of organic debris. The practical 'hands on' aspect proved to be popular in Galicia, as it is with many voluntary beach cleaning projects, as distinct from passive interpretive 'nature walks', and superficial field studies.

A wire net flat on the sea floor where the marine debris accumulates that could be lifted and the debris hauled to dry ground, regularly by a couple of tractors might facilitate continuous sorting and removal.

The theme should focus around restoring the environment, rather than trashing it and could be

targeted at urban residents, who are less able to involve themselves in practical, healthy and active environmental projects.

In practice the amount of marine debris that could be removed from the oceans would be considerable and enhance the amenity value of the most outstanding Fjord landscapes within a National Park in Scotland, and probably improve the marine pollution situation throughout the Clyde Estuary. It might even eventually result in the shell fish in the Loch becoming edible!

Currently the situation at the head of Loch Long is treated as an inconvenient cost, and the potential economic value of treating it as an opportunity, ignored. A fundamental change in mind set is required.

It would be a step forward for the Board Members and Officials of the LL & T NP, to develop indigenous and relevant economic development, rather than such shocking, environmental proposals as Flamingo Land. The point about a NP is that it is not urban, nor does it need 'fairs and circuses', with 'clowns and comic singers' and the surreptitious conversion of the country into an extended dispersed dormitory town, with an excess of second homes, temporary accommodation, and an aging population of residents with high living costs, low paid employment and disappearing services.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

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2. Litter
3. LLTNPA
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6. Tourism

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