

Class wars and the National Park – Blairvadach outdoor centre threatened with closure

Description



Photo from the National

Blairvadach ([see here](#)), Glasgow City Council's last outdoor centre, is threatened with closure ([see here](#)) as a result of cuts agreed by the SNP run Council, which ultimately result from budget allocations made by the Scottish Government . Located 1km north of Rhu on the Gare Loch, just outwith the National Park boundary, for many Glasgow school children its the one opportunity they get to experience outdoor education and the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, where many of the activities take place.

Blairvadach is different from other Outdoor Centres run by the private and voluntary centre. Its been properly resourced, has considerable expertise (being recognised as a course provider by the Royal Yachting Association, Scottish Canoe Association, Mountain Training, Cycling Scotland, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, National Indoor Climbing Award Scheme and the John Muir Trust) and gives children from Glasgow the opportunity to experience really challenging outdoor experiences (rather than the anodyne taster offerings which are offered by much of the private sector – not always their

fault, they don't have the money).

The quote from National ([see here](#)) from the Glasgow Education Convener, Chris Cunningham, shows just how out of touch some local councillors are:

The closure of Blairvadach is deeply regrettable but we will create a number of outdoor learning activities. Improving attainment must remain our highest priority

What outdoor learning activities and how can they adequately replace what is offered by Blairvadach? And how does this fit with the SNP's commitment to close the attainment gap? Its worth repeating.....the ONLY time in their childhoods that some of Glasgow's poorest children ever get to experience the countryside is on trips to Blairvadach.

16 jobs are to go to save a reported £218k ([see here](#)). How many £millions is Glasgow and the Scottish Government going to spend to subsidise the rich and famous to attend the Climate Change summit in November? .

Under Strathclyde Regional Council, young people in Glasgow and its conurbation got the opportunity to experience what was possibly the finest outdoor education system in the world. Strathclyde's commitment was every child would get a week away in a centre at both primary and secondary school.

Before its creation in 2003, when I was on the Board of SNH, we had discussions about what success for the new National Park Authority would look like. A key idea was that every child from the Glasgow conurbation would get to spend a week in the National Park at some point in their schooling. There has never been any attempt to implement that. Instead, twenty-five years after Strathclyde was abolished, Scotland is a much richer country but the public is being told we cannot afford outdoor education for children in state schools. Neo-liberal ideology has resulted in a situation where those running the state no longer believe it should pay for children to have such experiences.

Instead, its being left to charitable trusts to offer a few lucky children to have these experiences. Ardroy, at Lochgoilhead in the National Park, is doing its best but will never be able to pick up the slack and is at present appealing for funding for a new accommodation block ([see here](#)). Dounans in Aberfoyle is sadly down at heel – I was there in September for the Reforesting Scotland Gathering – and was kept going in part with Leader funding from the EU. And so, the unjust story continues.....

Meantime, Scotland's policy making elite produce policies and plans which trumpet at great length about the importance of equal access to the outdoors for all, equal education attainment etc but do nothing to make this happen. The latest such document is the LLTNPA's draft Outdoor Recreation Plan, the consultation on which ended in January, which makes not a single mention of Outdoor Education nor of all the centres that have closed since Strathclyde days ([see here](#)). If Blairvadach closes, all the worthy intentions set out in that plan will have been undermined before it even starts. I have written to the LLTNPA Convener, James Stuart, today asking that that the Park makes a stand and objects to this closure. Its actions, not words that count.

Coincidentally, the day before Glasgow's announcement, I happened to be out ice climbing, in a rare weather window, and stopped off on way back in afternoon at "McGregor's Landing", the former West Dunbartonshire Outdoor Education and Conference Centre at Ardlui.



Is this the fate that awaits Blairvadach and will it be sold off to a private developer as West Dunbartonshire is trying to do? (Photo taken in downpour!)

The abandoned centre is slowly being reclaimed by nature but is meantime blighting the area.



The litter at the entrance was far worse when I was last here. This is in a camping management zone and clearly has nothing to do with campers! The camping management zones have achieved almost nothing.



The litter and fly tipping does tell us something, however, about what's happening to the National Park.

What a contrast between this blight and the failure of McGregor's Landing to deliver something special for the people of West Dunbartonshire and Tom Hunter's plans for a bright new shiny Leadership Centre on the unspoiled South West corner of Loch Lomond which is inside the West Dunbarton Council boundary ([see here](#)).

Tom Hunter is one of Scotland's richest men and, if he and his ilk were paying more tax, our councils might also have had the money to pay for outdoor education centres for all across Scotland. Perhaps Sir Tom can prove me wrong and fork out the £218k that is apparently needed to save Blairvadach for another year while Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Government get their act together and work out how they can once again provide outdoor education for all?

The experiences that outdoor education centres promote, testing yourself in new situations (also

known as building resilience), learning new skills, working as a team, being connected to nature are, to my mind, just as important as a group of elite people being able to gaze out over Loch Lomond while they deliberate the fate of Scotland as Tom Hunter is proposing.

One could comment ad-finitum on the hypocrisy of the Scottish establishment, for example:

- The proposed closure of Blairvadach is, in policy terms, yet another blow against the Curriculum for Excellence, which was supposed to deliver a broad based education for children.
- 2019 was the Year of Young People, where Scotland was supposed to put the needs of young people first – has the SNP administration in Glasgow asked any young people what they thought about their experiences at Blairvadach?
- This year is Scotland's Year of Coasts and Water. While Visit Scotland promotes the experience, Blairvadach arguably did more than any other organisation to enable Glasgow children to participate in watersports. Yet its to be closed for want of £218k.

The stated good intentions of the Scottish Government and our public authorities are constantly undermined by their actions. Their priorities are all wrong. I hope people will protest against this obscene cut.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. LLTNPA
2. outdoor recreation

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