

Climate Change for Outdoor Education Centres in Scotland

Description

Closure of the Blairvadach outdoor centre would be a blow to future generations

I WRITE to say how saddened I was to hear that Blairvadach Outdoor Education Centre is to close.

The Blairvadach project really grew out of the ground-breaking work of the dedicated volunteers who set up and ran "The Brassbounders", a sailing club for Glasgow schoolchildren.

Originally the brainchild of art teacher Donald Bruce, the club was begun in the late 1950s and based at Hogganfield Loch where, every weekday evening between Easter and the end of September, a small band of teachers and policemen worked in their own time to bring the wonderful sport of dinghy sailing to ordinary Glasgow kids. I should know, because I was one of those kids.

The club was transformative for my life and I don't doubt it was equally so for the many other youngsters who first learned to tack and gybe within the narrow confines of that little loch. It began with six Enterprise Dinghies, but by the early seventies, and with grant aid from Glasgow Corporation Education Department, the club had a fleet of 12 fibreglass Kestrels which made for exciting, but safe instructional platforms.

Fortnight-long summer sailing camps were held at Glasgow Education Department's Residential Schools at Castle Toward, Achnamara and Caol Ruadh, and there we could put what we had learned at Hogganfield into action on what I later came to realise were some of the finest sailing waters in the world. We were so lucky. I met my wife Anne through the club and, now in our seventies, we are still enthusiastic sailors.

The dreadful Cairngorms disaster in 1971 effectively put an end to the Brassbounders. The whole area of outdoor education



Councillors should 're-think Blairvadach closure decision'

was tightened up and it became impossible to operate the club on a volunteer basis.

The emergence of Blairvadach soon afterwards was however a clear sign that the council still had an appreciation of the value of the kind of work the Brassbounders had been doing. Strathclyde Regional Council came into being in 1975 and continued Glasgow's enlightened policies towards outdoor education.

Since then Blairvadach has introduced many thousands of Glasgow's youngsters to the whole gamut of outdoor pursuits as well as to dinghy sailing and to close it now for a saving of £200,000 or so a year seems desperately short-sighted. I don't suppose there are many of those far-seeing 'Brassboulder' pioneers left now, but those who are still around will surely be shedding a tear over this silly decision.

John Urquhart, Helensburgh.

I HAVE been following with interest your coverage of the recent council budget cuts and

your excellent "Race to Save Music in Schools" article (February 23).

The same headline could equally apply to outdoor education with the shocking announcement by Glasgow City councillors that they plan to axe Blairvadach Outdoor Education Resource Centre on the edge of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, which councillor Frank McAveety rightly describes as "one of the major institutions of Glaswegian childhood."

I read with disbelief that the SNP and Green councillors have joined forces to vote through the closure of Blairvadach at a time when the Scottish Government is placing a greater emphasis on issues such as health, wellbeing and environmental education.

This decision seems to fly in the face of these priorities and the "annual saving" of £212,000 achieved will deprive the young people of Glasgow of life-changing experiences in Scotland's great outdoors.

For over 45 years Blairvadach

has been a leading provider of quality outdoor education and training, which has made an enormous contribution to the personal development of tens of thousands of Glasgow's young people.

It has an outstanding reputation and is one of Scotland's largest outdoor education providers. I would urge councillors to think again and keep it open to enrich the future lives of Glasgow's young people.

James Fraser, Chairman, Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs and Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre

Herald letters 26th February.

I do not think there is anyone who will contest the value of Outdoor activity / residential experiences for helping young people to develop in life, education, health and social relationships. High quality Outdoor Education / residential experiences develop young people for life's challenges, greater understanding of the natural environment, greater social interaction and make them aware of the natural environment and climate issues.

The Scottish Government and local authorities have many sins to answer for.

Over the last two years over I reckon 12 local authority outdoor centres / services have been closed or drastically cut back by lack of Scottish Government support and local political party politics. Low Port Centre, West Lothian's residential service, was closed in January and the remaining service significantly reduced. North Lanarkshire Council's Kilbowie centre in Oban have been recently informed they will likely be closed in the coming months.

On the party politics, under financial pressure, the SNP minority administration in Glasgow voted to close Blairvadach, with this opposed by Labour, while in North Lanarkshire the opposite has happened. The Labour minority administration voted to close Kilbowie, with this opposed by the SNP! ([see here](#)).

Like Blairvadach, the Scottish Government could intervene to stop such closures but they choose to blame their convenient "fall guy", the Westminster parliament. It is more a question of what the Scottish Government values to invest in – or not.

True outdoor adventure activity and residential experiences are becoming more socially exclusive and affordable only to children who have wealthier families. As local authority centres close, more expensive private providers are stepping in and profit making. Private centres generally do not offer concessions or subsidise children from low income households, unlike local authority centres such as Blairvadach.

Funding for trips and fees which could go to local authority centres are taken out of the council system, as they send school groups to private centres, further undermining the sustainability of public outdoor education provision.

The Scottish Government are paying lip service to Health and Well Being and "Outdoor Learning" as they are closing outdoor education services and taking away the highly experienced professionals who deliver activity and train many teaching staff to deliver Outdoor Learning within their schools.

The Scottish Government claim they have championed Outdoor Learning in primary schools. Outdoor Learning has experienced positive growth in schools but this generally happens on school grounds and local green spaces as it is low cost and can be safely managed by teaching staff. Outdoor learning has also revitalised school learning by using creative ideas outside to develop health and well being, group work, literacy and numeracy and wider curriculum. However it has some way to go to be truly integrated with teacher training and school curriculum.

Outdoor Learning is one pillar of outdoor education but it is not an outdoor residential experience or an adventure type of outdoor activity which Blairvadach provides.

Outdoor centres / services have been slashed more than the Thatcher government in the '70s and '80s. Fortunately the Tories did not manage to close all local authority centres . The current Scottish Government appear to be finishing the job off for them.

Scotland was once the world leader in outdoor education but we are now the disillusioned nation who accepts the eradication of outdoor education centres/ services while its government still proclaims its education is great. When are people going to actively protest at council offices and the Scottish Parliament as the politicians do not appear willing to listen to copious amount of comments on Facebook and blogs such as this?

Councils conduct public consultations on efficiency measures when they have already decided cutbacks. They use the screen of consultations to justify their actions. When you scratch the surface, very few people agree with outdoor centre closures as they appreciate their educational / social value.

This has been written by an outdoor education professional who, as a teenager went to an outdoor centre and became passionate enough to make it their career, which has now ended. I am saddened to see such unique resources being eradicated but more for the removal of positive opportunities for future generations of children. What is the true cost to society of these cutbacks?

Category

1. Cairngorms
2. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. LLTNPA
2. outdoor education
3. outdoor recreation
4. Scottish Government

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