

Covid-19 – golf courses and access to the wider countryside

Description

When I heard that the First Minister was going to permit golf courses to open last weekend, without also opening up the rest of the countryside at the same time, I thought she had taken leave of her senses. Or had received some extremely bad advice. Surely it was absolutely obvious that this would create extreme crowding problems elsewhere as the large numbers of people who had been walking on golf courses for the last two months would then be displaced to other locations?

Rights of public access apply to golf courses but these have to take account of those who are playing golf. Under normal circumstances that works well but when very large numbers need to take access at the same time as the golf course is packed with golfers, from dawn to dusk, an impossible situation is created. No wonder most of those who had been taking access, many enjoying the beautiful natural environment of these courses for the first time, had to go somewhere else instead.

And when the somewhere else, if you live in the Glasgow conurbation, is obviously the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, allowing for a bit of flexibility over the 5 mile travel advice, that increases the potential parking and crowding problems there. Add to that the ridiculous decision to keep all the car parks and toilets in the national park closed, despite the Park's Chief Executive, Gordon Watson, having had two months to work out how to manage those facilities once lockdown was eased, you have a recipe for chaos. Mr Watson's explanation of his failure to properly plan for reopening was an example of amateurish Scottish countryside management at its worst. And why the Chief Constable, in his explanation of the challenges his officers faced last weekend, did not point the finger of blame at the golf course opening, is mystifying.

Both the First Minister and Chief Constable have been generous in their praise of the Scottish population and the extremely high levels of compliance with Covid – 19 restrictions. But why will they not trust us to go out into the countryside for the day, keep 2 metres apart and wash our hands afterwards? It is a fundamental principle for any government dealing with countryside access that dispersed rather than concentrated access is best for the physical and mental health of its citizens and for control of a disease like coronavirus. If England can do it, why not Scotland?

The First Minister needs to announce, this week, that the whole of the Scottish road network will be open to all citizens from midnight on Friday, along with all public car parks and toilets. Otherwise the media discussion next week will once again be dominated by all the weekend's bogies.

Category

1. Access rights
2. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

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