

Dirty camping and camping incompetence- the case of Glen More

Description

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Strathspey & Badenoch HERALD



Police at the beauty spot over the weekend. Right: Arrow points to wild camping fires which had to be put out.

Beach watch

Patrols at beauty spot to be stepped up after emergency services called

by Tom Ramage
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CAIRNGORMS National Park rangers and forestry staff are to step up patrols at a beauty spot in the strath after the 999 services were called out repeatedly over the weekend to deal with problems caused by "dirty campers".

Some 200 tents were pitched in and around Loch Morlich over the two nights.

One well-placed source said: "Most people listened to reason and behaved themselves but some were past caring with the booze and were offensive especially to rangers."



It is understood some 30 campfires had to be extinguished by firefighters on Friday night and around the same the next night on the beach and surrounding wooded areas.

Campfires and barbecues are now being banned at the beauty spot and there will be more signage warning people of the potential dangers.

The situation has been exacerbated by Camping in the Forest's (CITF) decision not to open the Glenmore campsite they lease from public agency Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) until April 2021 following the lockdown despite coming under pressure from Scottish ministers and offers of rental support.

Public authorities met at the beach on Monday to discuss the mounting problems at Loch Morlich also including littering and human excrement.

Glenmore resident

Alan Stewart, says it is becoming a fire hazard.



Glenmore Campsite has remained closed despite Scottish Government pressure and offers of support with the rent.

Duncan Ferguson said: "If they don't get on top of this they'll have no beauty spot left and that will finish the local economy."

"There were cars and campervans packed into any tiny little space at the weekend and what good were the campervans anyway? They're bringing nothing to the local economy and are a worse plague now than the ticks."

"I wish the authorities well after their meeting, but why were there no community representatives? How can they sort out all the dirty camping problem without Highland Council, community council or the local residents having an input?"

"At the moment the job

of getting on top of all this is being done better by the rain and the midges. It's something."

Alan Stewart, who lives at the Cairngorm Sleddog Centre by Loch Morlich, said: "Our road end had been full of large motor homes - over four days they have filled our two large bins. I don't want to think about what they do with their human waste"

"There are so many large tents too. It's all becoming a major fire hazard. The area is very dry and it just takes one wild camper fire on that hill and it will be more than a new funicular which is needed."

Keith Taylor, owner of Loch Morlich Watersports Centre on the beach, said:

"There simply aren't the facilities available, even though we need the people to come. It's just a question of getting the balance and the timing right."

"I do have to say that after the weekend there was plenty of rubbish left but the vast majority of it was bagged by the visitors which was something."

"But I firmly believe that a camping ban on the beach is absolutely vital now if this is the way things are going to continue."

Graeme Prest, FLS's north region manager condemned "the level of irresponsible, anti-social behaviour that was on display from a minority of people on the site."

"As well as littering and human waste, there were several examples of malicious fire-raising and several trees were cut down illegally - an act of wanton vandalism. This was not wild camping but dirty camping - and it is not acceptable."

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23rd July

No sooner had I complimented Forest and Land Scotland on how they had opened up their car parks

in Glen More to campervans ([see here](#)) than they did an about turn as a result of events on the weekend that followed (see above). FLS is now trying to close car parks in Glen More to campervans staying overnight and the Cairngorms National Park Authority was quoted (in the next page of the article) yet again as saying how they don't really want to introduce camping byelaws to control what people do. What neither FLS nor CNPA have said is that almost all of the problems in Glen More have been created by the failure of our public authorities and the Scottish Government to provide adequate infrastructure for visitors.

The Glenmore campsite scandal



Another sign that contravenes the Trades Description Act 1968 which made it an offence for businesses or salespeople to sell a product or service based on misinformation. Campers are NOT welcome by Camping the Forest. Photo credit Alan Bratney

A large part of the problems in Glen More would disappear overnight if the Glenmore campsite hadn't been closed to the public by Camping in the Forest.



When "sorry" is a meaningless term. Photo credit Alan Bratney

To add salt to the wound, Camping in the Forest appears to be policing the campsite, which provides the best area for camping in the whole of Glen More, to prevent anyone from camping there informally:



More false information. The campsite is not private property but public land held on our behalf by Scottish Ministers. Photo Credit Alan Bratney

Camping in the Forest's actions force people to camp in far more sensitive areas.

The Glenmore campsite is owned by Forest and Lands Scotland and leased to "Camping in the Forest" by Scottish Ministers. The Minister responsible, Fergus Ewing, last week was reported in the Strathy as calling on Camping in the Forest to re-open the campsite:

Anger over decision not to open site

SCOTTISH tourism secretary Fergus Ewing has blasted CITF for their refusal to reopen Glenmore campsite – a decision taken, he said, despite the offer of rental support.

The local MSP said: “FLS has been working hard to persuade CITF that this decision is unacceptable and should be reversed. These are, after all, sites owned by the public and the public should have use of them.

“Post-Covid-19 there is a pent-up demand for use of the sites. Lack of access to them is leading to all kinds of behaviour on the part of a minority of individuals which in turn is causing distress and nuisance to local residents at Glenmore.

“It is notable that other caravan and camping sites are indeed open for business and my information is that many of them are fully booked up. It is therefore obvious that such sites can be run both well and profitably.”

He added: “Nonetheless it is not too late for CITF to reverse their decision. Further efforts are being made to reach that outcome.”

This ‘blast’ from Fergus Ewing was bizarre. Since FLS own the land, why doesn’t he, as the responsible Scottish Government minister, simply ask his department to terminate the lease? A well

drafted lease will normally contain provisions for how it may be terminated in exceptional circumstances (I have requested a copy under Freedom of Information laws). Even if the lease has been poorly drafted and does not contain such a provision, as Minister responsible Fergus Ewing could offer to buy out the leases now and hand the land over to someone prepared to manage it in the public interest.

Camping in the Forest is not, however, an organisation totally independent of government. It operates 16 campsites across the UK on land owned by what was the Forestry Commission. As far as I can ascertain all 16 – they include not just Glen More but campsites at Cashel on Loch Lomond and Cobleland in the Trossachs – are run by “Camping in the Forest LLP” (Limited Liability Partnership). While this is controlled by the Camping and Caravanning Club Ltd ([see here](#)), the Forestry Commission is listed as the other, minority, shareholder and supplies one of the two Directors of the company:

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CAMPING IN THE FOREST LLP

Company number **OC370500**

Follow this company

- Overview
- Filing history
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Officers **Persons with significant control**

2 active persons with significant control / 0 active statements

The Camping And Caravanning Club Ltd **ACTIVE**

Correspondence address

Greenfields House, Westwood Way, Westwood Business Park, Coventry, England, CV

Notified on

6 April 2016

Governing law

Companies Act 2006

Legal form

Company Limited By Guar

Place registered

Companies House

Registration number

00445520

Nature of control

Ownership of voting rights - More than 50% but less than 75%

Incorporation

Uk

In other words Mr Ewing, as lead Minister for Forestry, would appear to have an interest in the lease not just as the lessor but the lessee. As part owner of the company, the “Forestry Commission” could ask Camping in the Forest to re-open all its campsites in the public interest.

The accounts of Camping in the Forest show that as lessee the Forestry Commission had been receiving income (£411,215 for 2019) from these campsites each year:

19 Related party transactions

The following information is provided in accordance with FRS transactions with related parties for the year.

Transactions with the Camping and Caravanning Club

During the year ended 28 February 2019, The Camping and Caravanning Club charged the LLP:

- £702,375 (2018: £681,276) in respect of management
- £207,360 (2018: £256,851) in respect of a year’s tax charge

The outstanding balance owed to the Camping and Caravanning Club at the end of the year was £451,398 (2018: £451,398).

Transactions with the Forestry Commission

During the year ended 28 February 2019, The Forestry Commission charged the LLP:

- £80,640 (2018: £99,886) in respect of a year’s tax charge
- £411,215 (2018: £436,421) in respect of Ground Rent

It is possible that when the Forestry Commission was split up in April 2019 Mr Ewing, who led the negotiations on behalf of the Scottish Government, waived any rights to the income derived from the three campsites in Scotland that were part of the Camping in the Forest portfolio. If that was so, further investigation would be merited. It appears more likely, however, that Mr Ewing reached some agreement on how income from Camping in the Forest would be apportioned between England and

Scotland. Assuming that is the case, by allowing all three Scottish campsites to remain closed, Mr Ewing is depriving forestry in Scotland of much needed income and the Strathspey area of some much needed jobs.

It would be in the public interest to know if Camping in the Forest has received any money from the UK Government to furlough staff or any other compensation as a rural business (Mr Ewing was responsible for the disbursement of grants to rural businesses in Scotland during the Covid-19 crisis)

Mr Ewing clearly now needs to act very quickly to address this disastrous situation for which he holds ultimate responsibility and transfer all three Camping in the Forest campsites in Scotland to alternative operators who will act in the public interest.

The consequences of the campsite closure and additional infrastructure needed

With the main campsite closed, Glen More, as the most popular visitor destination in the Cairngorms National Park, would be under pressure at the best of times. But with the rise in staycations as a result of Covid-19 and people being urged to take their holidays in Scotland by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, it is not surprising the glen has been overwhelmed. Local people – I met two last week near the summit of Creag Meagaidh who had been doing litter picks – and local forestry and National Park staff have been left to sort out the mess. The madness is illustrated by the local office of Forest and Land Scotland taking on 16 extra part-time staff to help manage visitors – heaven knows how they are paying for this – when their ultimate boss is failing to act to address the most fundamental part of the problem and appears to have cut off a source of income that might have helped pay for this.

The top priority is to create capacity in and around the glen to meet the influx of visitors. Even if the campsite re-opened tomorrow, there would be insufficient capacity.

Top priority should be toilet provision. When the visitor influx started, Forest and Land Scotland's toilets at its visitor centre in Glenmore were still closed:



Glenmore Visitor Centre Forest Notices

COVID-19 has changed lots of things we do. And as we re-open the majority of our facilities and welcome more of you back in Phase 3, we need your help to do it safely. Please check what's open before you travel; enjoy your visit safely by following NHS and Scottish Government guidance; take your litter home with you; and follow the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#).

At this location:

- › The car park is open and normal charges (if any) now apply.
- › Toilets are closed while we work to make them safe for you to use. A phased reopening of our public toilet facilities began on Monday, 20 July 2020. For now, please "go before you go" and check helpful apps or websites to find toilets that are open nearby.
- › The visitor centre is closed.

Please bear with us and check back regularly for updates. You can also find more information by visiting our [COVID-19 page](#) and our [FAQs](#).

Screenshot taken 30th July – AFTER the toilets had been re-opened

While the toilets have now been re-opened – see below – it's hardly surprising there was a disgusting faecal mess in some of the area if people had "nowhere to go".

There has, however, been a broader issue with toilet capacity ever since Mr Ewing pushed the Cairngorms National Park Authority to consent to two new houses being built opposite the campsite where a public toilet was previously located. Glen More is a prime area for mobile toilets, as I have previously advocated ([see here](#)).

The other pressing issue is capacity for campervans and more specifically large mobile homes. The extent of the issue is illustrated by the data ([see here](#)) that Alan Bratney has collected from surveys over the last two weeks, some of which was published in the Strathy today. The data shows the extent of the demand for campervans – almost 100 a night at the weekend (suggesting that many campervanners are in fact Scottish voters) – and how this has been affected since Forestry and Land Scotland tried to close its car parks overnight.

While in my view Forestry and Land Scotland should re-open its car parks to vehicles overnight, larger mobile homes should be asked to stop off elsewhere. The problem is that they are far too big for many

of the car parks and take up space at the expense of others. There are two obvious places which could be used for this purpose in the short-term, like on the continent where large mobile homes are directed to car parks on the fringe of settlements: the parking areas around the Aviemore Centre and the Coire na Ciste car park.

In the medium term what is needed to reduce traffic pressure in the glen is a park and ride from Aviemore, as was floated in the Cairngorm and Glenmore Strategy. However, if it had even a shred of enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise would now be facilitating mobile homes to stop off in Coire na Ciste. HIE has failed completely to act on proposals from entrepreneurs to provide facilities for campervans in the Ciste (electric hookups, toilets etc) which might have brought some much needed income into Cairngorm Mountain. This possibility now gets a token mention in HIE's latest version of a vision for the mountain. Don't expect anything to happen. Alan Bratney's survey recorded 35 mobile homes in the Ciste Car Park on just one single night. If provided with facilities at £10 a night, that could bring in over £1500 a week of income to Cairn Gorm. That would be a far better capital investment than spending £10-15m on repairing the funicular and could be done now with a supine CNPA expediting every Planning Application that is placed before it by HIE.

Taking this argument further, the current situation in Glen More shows the complete stupidity of HIE's plan to repair the funicular railway. The area needs no more summer visitors and, as Alan Mackay showed this week ([see here](#)), the funicular is not the way to bring back winter visitors, who are needed, to the area. Mr Ewing could usefully be instructing the agency for which he is responsible to spend some of the money set aside to repair the funicular on providing basic visitor infrastructure in the glen. That is the real priority.

The response of our public authorities to the problems in Glen More

Visitor safety is put first at loch

THE landowners of Loch Morlich and Glenmore Forest have said they expect a return to a 'more normal situation' over the coming few weeks at the beauty spot.

Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) has had to lay on some provisions for the sake of visitors safety in the meantime.

Graeme Prest, FLS's north region manager, said: "The toilets at Loch Morlich are open - with Covid controls such as an enhanced cleaning regime in place - and have been helpful in managing the influx of visitors."

"The events that took place recently were, of course, unacceptable and we met with our partners to discuss ways that we might prevent the same thing happening again."

Campfires and barbecues have been banned in the area. Some barbecues were



WHAT OVERNIGHT PARKING BAN? Loch Morlich car park late on Saturday night.

also being discarded in the waste collection skip FLS had provided creating a further fire risk.

Mr Prest said: "Our team has done a great job in subsequently managing visitors and have been on-hand to remind people of what is and is not permitted at Loch Morlich. The lack of a formal campsite has resulted in some visitors arriving at the

site but not having any other options in place.

"With visitor safety in mind, we decide that the best thing to do was to permit them to stay overnight on the condition that they leave first thing in the morning.

"This was the expedient thing to do and was a temporary measure.

"It remains the case that overnight car parking at

Loch Morlich is not permitted. We would urge anyone thinking of visiting to plan ahead and always have a plan B. We expect to return to a more normal situation over the next few weeks."

Aviemore firefighters attended the beach at around 11.20pm on Sunday to extinguish two campfires amid fears on local social media that a major forest fire had broken out. The Loch Morlich Watersports Centre webcam appeared to show a fire taking hold in the woods.

Aviemore-based Scottish Fire and Rescue Service station commander Roddy Chapman said: "While crews are committed to putting out these types of fires, by responding to such incidents we are not available for our primary role of responding to life-saving emergencies."

■ **More coronavirus news on pages 4, 5, 8 and 18.**

Strathy 30th July

While Graeme Prest, the FLS Manager, stated to the Strathy that people's behaviour was "unacceptable", it is arguable he had but little choice to do this in a culture where it is always the individual who is blamed for the failings of our public authorities. His statements that the re-opening of the toilets "have been helpful in managing the influx of visitors" and the "lack of a formal campsite has resulted in some visitors arriving at the site but not having any other options in place" show what the real causes of the problems were.

While having the power to control entry vehicle to their car parks, FLS have not gone in heavy handed against people who have broken their rules. Instead they are currently allowing people to stay if they

agree to leave the next morning. This is a welcome contrast to the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority where public authorities have been abusing their powers and charging dozens of people ([see here](#)), . It seems that FLS has retained some ability to distinguish between responsible and irresponsible behaviour, as set out in our access legislations and the Cairngorms National Park Authority appears to have been taking a similar line ([see here](#)). (However the statement that *“At no time, should anyone be lighting a fire in the Cairngorms National Park, posing a risk to people, property and our natural heritage”* is wrong. You have a right to light a fire under the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and there clearly are some places in the Cairngorms National Park where you could do this responsibly).

Any plan for the future should be based on allowing people who exercise their access rights responsibly to continue to do so. The problem, however, is that neither the CNPA nor FLS are setting out what infrastructure is needed on the ground to enable people to enjoy the area without adversely affecting the natural heritage or the local people that stay there. Without a plan, starting with getting Fergus Ewing to re-open the campsite, the pressure on staff to try and restrict the area to visitors will increase. All that will do, just like the disastrous Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park camping byelaws, is displace the problems elsewhere.

What needs to happen

Visitor Management at Glen More is as much of a test of the Cairngorms National Park Authority as east Loch Lomond has been to the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority. The problem is not just that there has been a failure to implement the Cairngorm and Glen More strategy – not helped by HIE failing to deliver any of what was promised for Cairn Gorm – but that this plan is no longer fit for the purpose. An emergency summit, that includes not just local agencies but local people and all the recreational and environmental organisations with a stake in the area, should be called to agree the basic building blocks for a new plan.

As for resources, besides re-opening the Glenmore campsite, Mr Ewing should instruct HIE to use some of the money earmarked to repair the funicular on providing basic facilities in Coire na Ciste which would reduce pressure on the area.

The other MSP for the local area, Finance Secretary Kate Forbes, yesterday announced a £14m subsidy to keep owners of large hotels going over the winter ([see here](#)) because of the “important contribution” they make to the Scottish economy. A similar sum of money could have addressed most of the gaps in visitor infrastructure which are causing problems at present (my rough estimate was £10m would provide a good start).

There are plenty of resources. The fundamental question is when is the Scottish Government going to provide infrastructure to help people enjoy the countryside and protect our finest landscapes on which the rural hotel trade depends?

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