

The case for rural tourism infrastructure and the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park – Call Kaye

Description

If you did not hear the Call Kaye programme on 18th August, “Is it time to stop moaning about tourists”, it is highly recommended listening. It is available on iplayer ([see here](#)) for another 9 days (from 1 min 20 secs for an hour) and, after all the moaning, mainly featured people who were advocating the need for far better rural tourism infrastructure in Scotland as the best way to address current pressures. Three of them were residents from the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park.

First on was Sarah Heward, owner of the Real Food Cafe in Tyndrum, who argued that “just complaining is not going to solve the problems” and that we need to turn the negative energy being expressed into something far more positive. Two examples she gave of infrastructure failings are that there are just three public litter bins in Tyndrum and that there is no campsite in Killin, despite the area providing some of the best walking in Scotland. She made a plea for leadership from the very top and a coherent tourism infrastructure strategy from Scotland. About the same time Ms Heward featured in a Herald article ([see here](#)).

Next on was Fergus, from the Trossachs. This was none other than Fergus Wood, former Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority Board Member, although he did not admit to this on the programme. Mr Wood has featured on parkswatch on several occasions for all the wrong reasons ([see here for example](#)) and upset local people enough to lose his seat on Stirling Council but on this occasion he was fantastic. He started by saying the three main issues that had been caused by the large increase in visitors were parking, rubbish disposal and toilets.

Mr Wood argued that farmers should play their part in addressing these issues by opening up fields for parking. That regularly happens in England – for a price of course – but that a farmer in Scotland is now calling for this is a major step forward. I hope the Rural Economy Minister, Fergus Ewing, was listening. Mr Wood went to say that while some people who retire to the countryside don't want tourists, the countryside need tourism to provide income and jobs for the young. He ended by saying that the message “take your rubbish home” hasn't worked and that it was time the National Park and Councils came together and agreed how the domestic bin lorries that drive up Strathard each week could also empty public litter bins. The LLTNPA Board should play the clip at their next meeting on the 14th where they are considering a new litter prevention strategy that includes no proposals to increase the number of public litter bins.

The third National Park resident was Sandy Fraser of the Oak Tree Inn, who described how litter bins had actually been removed from Balmaha since the end of lockdown and how his staff clear up the litter in the village each morning. Mr Fraser repeated the same plea for more toilets (some are still, unbelievably closed), car parks and litter provision. He asked what message we are giving to tourists when the Rowardennan Rd keeps being closed at weekends instead of public authorities managing the numbers (which incidentally has played a significant part in the increase of visitors to Strathard and the problems there). He pointed out there has been a significant reduction in car parking places on

east Loch Lomond since the National Park was created, and nothing has been done to address the issues for 20 years.

Gordon Watson, the LLTNPA Chief Executive, was then brought on and asked if he was doing enough. He mentioned some specific investments, such as upgrades to existing toilets (without explaining that this was partly so the LLTNPA could introduce charges) , before admitting there was far more that needed to be done. The problem, although Mr Watson did not say it, is that rural infrastructure has been starved of investment by the Scottish Government.

There were some other great contributions from outside the National Park. One caller asked why Forest and Land Scotland could not introduce more composting toilets as are found in Kielder Forest in Northumberland. And Anne Widdop, who set up Stop Trashing Scotland, which I had mistakenly assumed was anti-visitors, stated very clearly that the main problem was lack of infrastructure. She made a forceful call for trunk road aires, village aires and rural aires to help campervanners enjoy Scotland. She said the £3m in the Rural Infrastructure Fund a derisory sum for the whole of Scotland. She also, interestingly, directly attributed the large numbers of people camping on the beaches at Arisaig to the LLTNPA's camping byelaws – something the LLTNPA continues to deny.

It was fantastic to hear so many other people articulating the arguments that parkswatch has been trying to make for the last five years. Inspiring stuff that cut through all the policy wonkery. A debate has been scheduled in the Scottish Parliament on Dirty Camping this Wednesday. If you agree more rural infrastructure is needed, you could do far worse than ask your MSP/s or their researchers to listen to Call Kaye before the debate.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

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