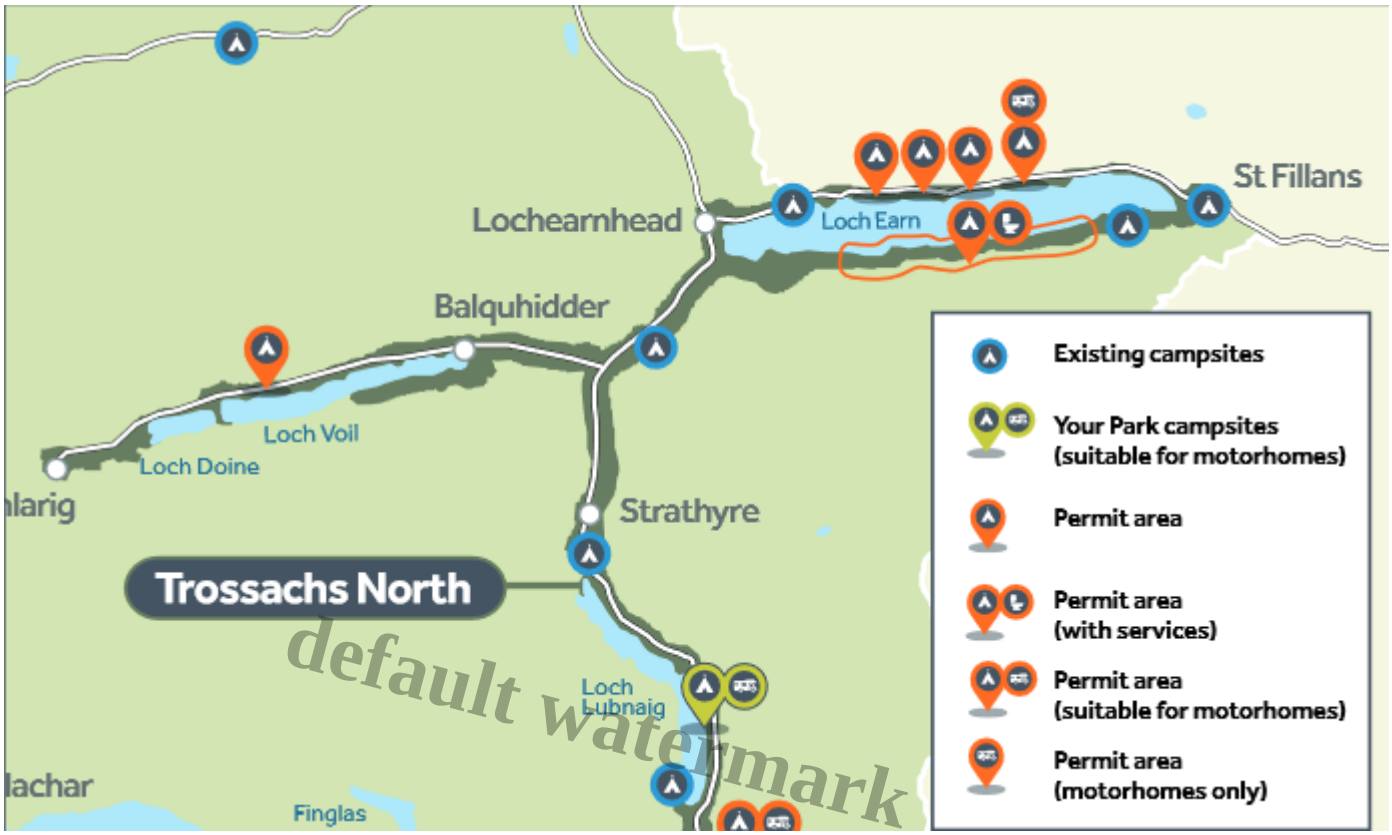
How the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park camping byelaws are falling apart at Loch Earn

Description

Ten days ago I was out walking the hills around Glen Tarken and parked in the first layby on the A85 heading west from St Fillans. The entire shore of Loch Earn, together with the villages of St Fillans and Lochearnhead at either end, are part of the Trossachs Camping Management zone where camping is banned, apart from in designated permit areas, and it is illegal to erect a shelter overnight.

The original intention of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) was also to ban campervans from staying overnight in the camping management zone, i.e the entire shore of Loch Earn, except for one designated layby.



Extract from the LLTNPA Camping Development Strategy October 2016. The first layby coming out of St Fillans is not shown on this map because the intention was not to allow any overnight stays there. Note the toilet on the south shore of Loch Earn â?? never delivered despite this being the largest single camping permit area in the National Park.

The attempted ban on campervans thankfully proved impossible to enforce because vehicle owners have a legal right to stop off by the side of the road overnight. People with tents and shelters were not so lucky. Four years ago Mr Trout, who had fished at Loch Earn for 25 years, was prosecuted and hounded out of the National Park for using a shelter for his dog while he fished overnight (see here).

There were two fishing shelters below the first lay-by, which I later confirmed belonged to the people in the camper-vans and had been left up overnight. I found it quite re-assuring that this harmless practice has quietly resumed, although whether this is because the LLTNPA is now taking a more tolerant attitude or because the camping byelaws are proving impossible to enforce is not clear. The impact this ban on shelters had had on angling was never mentioned in the LLTNPA Boardâ??s formal review of the camping byelaws for the Scottish Government. It needs to be seen for what it is, both an attack on anglers â?? who have paid for the right to fish here â?? and an attempt to undermine access rights.

The lay-by incidentally, as both photos show, was free of litter â?? but then Perth and Kinross Council, to their credit, do provide adequate bins.

The second lay-by, known by the LLTNPA as â??Permit Area Dâ?•, was also pristine. I was surprised to find an almost complete absence of camping signage.

The stout wooden beam on the left used to support a map showing where people were and werenâ??t allowed to camp.

I wondered for a moment if the permit area had been abolished but then realised what had happened.

People have taken the law into their own hands and removed most of the signage. Without signs, of course, the casual visitor driving along the road and deciding to camp, would not know they could be committing a criminal offence. The senior management team at the LLTNPA have completely failed to raise the legal implications this has for their ability to enforce the camping bye-laws in their reports to the Board. Whether this is a result of incompetence or a secret decision to let the byelaws quietly lapse in certain areas is impossible to tell.

There was one sign, however, from Drummond Estates. This advises the public that it is illegal for vehicles to â??encampâ?• in laybys. As I explained almost five years ago, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act provided a perfectly adequate means to stop people encamping in laybys, which had caused considerable concern locally (see here). It seems that the public respects that more than the camping bye-laws and there almost certainly never was any need for camping byelaws along the north shore of Loch Earn.

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Note the wooden post on the left side of the road which once held a camping permit area sign.

The second lay-by, Permit Area C, was equally litter free. The Perth and Kinross workers who empty the bins also appears to do a good job in picking up any litter that is dropped, a good use of resources.

The entire lay-by was free of signage, quite a contrast to four years ago.

I was beginning to wonder if the LLTNPA had quietly abandoned trying to control camping on the north shore of Loch Earn until I reached the next layby (Permit Area B). There, one of the permit area signs had survived but had had a new message stuck over it. My visit took place after the 26th April, when

the camping permit areas were supposed to open up, so I wondered if the LLTNPA had decided to close this area permanently.

To add to the confusion, the LLTNPA had covered the sign in Permit Area A with a slightly different notice, one which claimed the permit area was closed due to Covid. When I got home I checked and

the LLTNPA were selling permits for this and the other three areas, so neither notice should have still been there. More evidence that the LLTNPA lack the capacity to undertake basic management in respect of the camping byelaws.

Permit Area A is also across the border in Stirling and lacks litter bins â?? note the litter on either side of the sign. It is also within a zone where Stirling has banned the consumption of alcohol in public. There is nothing on the LLTNPA permit booking system (see here) to indicate that you can enjoy a drink gazing out over the loch from Areas B â?? D but not from Area A.

No doubt as a result of the lack of bins, suddenly plastic notices appear exhorting people to take their litter home.

That the frustrated public have been removing no camping signs that were erected all over the National Park was confirmed by this pole, where the missing metal sign has been replaced by one in plastic. I talked to an angler here who said the plastic sign had been up for a week and was surprised it had lasted that long.

The cost of all these signs, both in financial terms and now to the environment, is likely to be significant â?? again this is something that has never been discussed by the LLTNPA Board or reported to the

Scottish Government.

How long will this sign last?

Having alienated the angling community, most of whom care passionately about the natural environment and could have been used to educate and influence the behaviour of other members of the public, it appears the LLTNPA is fighting a losing battle to enforce the camping byelaws.

There was plenty of other evidence that the camping byelaws have not been achieving their intended objectives. In every lay-by I visited there was evidence of trees being cut down. The long-term impact of this is unclear, if not too intense it could have a similar impact to coppicing, i.e be good for the environment, but it has the potential to destroy the trees completely.

Above one of the laybys, extensive forest operations were being carried out and large amounts of dead wood has been left abandoned. Potential here for a small business to sell wood to campers. But that would almost certain require the LLTNPA to work with local landowners to work out a system for doing this. Sadly, neither the LLTNPAâ??s senior management nor their Board has the vision or commitment to make ideas like this happen.

I had been tipped me off that no parking signs had been added to Passing Place signs on the south Loch Earn Rd, so I went to have a look. The road is very narrow with very few passing places so one can understand the logic for keeping passing places clear. The problem, however, is that there is almost nowhere else to park. Thus by erecting these signs, even in laybys where there is sufficient capacity to allow some parking, access by the public is effectively being stopped.

Once again it is anglers, who have paid good money to fish, who are likely to be most affected. But my jaw dropped when I spotted an LLTNPA van, parked in one of said laybys, having nowhere else to stop while the Ranger, who had driven it, could be seen patrolling the loch shore looking for illegal campers!

A National Park Authority worth its name would have insisted on alternative provision being made for visitors at the same time as these no parking signs were erected. Unfortunately it appears that the LLTNPA is not even consulting its own workforce, who should have been able to advise on the consequences of measures such as this, about the way the National Park is being managed.

The predictable consequence is that the â??Visitor Experienceâ?• in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park this summer is heading to be one big disaster, marked by camping and parking chaos. For this, for which the LLTNPA is in large part responsible, the public will be blamed and fined. It is time for the Scottish Government to take a critical look at these failures, drop the camping byelaws which are becoming increasingly impossible to enforce and instead tell the LLTNPA to start planning the infrastructure that is needed to help visitors enjoy the National Park.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. camping
2. Camping bye laws

3. outdoor recreation
4. visitor management

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