

Crap management in Scotland's National Parks

Description

The closure of public toilets in Scotland, which had been going on for years, gathered pace under austerity ([see here](#) and [here](#) for example), with hardly a murmur of political dissent. The Victorians – who knew the value of public conveniences, from both a public health and a tourism perspective – would have been appalled. Despite increasing demand in rural areas, for example on the NC 500, and laudable attempts by local communities to takeover toilets in the public interest, the process continued into the Covid pandemic, with many public authorities using infection control to close the facilities that remain (in Pollok Park, for example, the one and only public toilet has now been closed by Glasgow City Council for a year).

Last year staycations and record number of visitors to the countryside increased public awareness of the need for proper facilities, including for campervans, and there was even a study mapping the density of toilet provision across Scotland ([see here](#)). Given they attract so many visitors, our two National Parks did not come out well. Almost a year later there is very little sign of change, as these two examples show.

The campervan waste disposal facility at Coire na Ciste, Cairn Gorm

On Friday the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) Planning Committee approved the planning application ([see here](#)) to fence off part of the Coire na Ciste car park for exclusive use by campervans between May and October, with four members voting against (you can watch the recording [here](#) from 57 minutes). Previous Planning Convener, Eleanor Mackintosh, put the issues in a nutshell when she asked her fellow Board Members why the CNPA was considering what is effectively just a *“toilet emptying facility half way up an iconic mountain”*? Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)/Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd (CMSL) are proposing to provide no other facilities apart from litter bins.

At the meeting CMSL's Jim Cornfoot revealed two important facts that weren't in the planning papers. The first is that HIE/CMSL are planning to charge campervans £15 a night for the use of this waste disposal facility. Why anyone without a full toilet that needed emptying would be prepared to pay this amount for a piece of tarmac/gravel was not explained. At that price, however, even those with full toilets may think twice about staying. No clear explanation was given by CMSL about what there was to stop people with portable cassettes for their chemical waste from walking through the gate to dispose of their waste and saving themselves £15 in the process.



The chemical waste disposal point at Tarbet free to use, a recognition perhaps by the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority of the difficulties of trying to enforce charges and that the provision of such facilities is far more important than the amount of income they may generate.

The second revelation was that the chemical waste will, once a month or so, be emptied and transported down to.....Glasgow!

The mix of human waste and chemicals is a problem and cannot be disposed of through the normal sewerage system or composting toilets. Chemical waste is a disaster for both, hence the need for specialist processing facilities. But what does it say about HIE, the so-called Enterprise Agency responsible for the Highlands, that there is no appropriate processing facility in Inverness? Instead of using the large number of campervans now visiting the Highlands to create local jobs, HIE appears keener to export the problem/opportunity out of the area, incurring yet more fuel miles in the process.

The idea that they could drive the creation of a comprehensive network of chemical disposal points and waste processing facilities across the Highlands appears beyond HIE's ken. Better to waste £16m on repairing the funicular, while coming up with another half-cocked idea of how to extort money from visitors at Cairn Gorm. Unfortunately, despite the valiant attempts by four Board Members, the CNPA

showed once again it is not prepared to force HIE/CMSL to think.

Poo disposal in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park

Regular readers will know there was a period, almost a decade ago, when the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority recognised the need to improve public toilet provision in the countryside, contrary to the trend across the rest of Scotland at the time. First, however, they abandoned the Five Lochs Visitor Management Plan, which had proposed toilets at places like Loch Venachar. Then they abandoned plans to install toilets in some of the larger camping permit areas where campers were to be concentrated under the camping byelaws.

Added to which the LLTNPA failed and are still failing to make effective use of their existing facilities:



Locked toilets at Firkin Point, West Loch Lomond, 7.15pm on a day in April after lockdown was released



Toilet for people with disabilities, same day, same time – thankfully some employee forgot to lock the door

The result has been predictable, the problems of human excrement in the National Park have got worse, particularly in the camping permit areas. Instead of this prompting a fundamental review of the camping byelaws and the camping development plan, in which no new infrastructure is actually proposed, two years ago the LLTNPA came up with a number of pilot schemes to help campers to dispose of their excrement “responsibly” ([see here](#)).



The waste disposal facility at Suidhe Field permit area, west Loch Lomond

I visited the scheme at Suidhe Field last week and it appeared successful in that there was no obvious sign of excrement or toilet paper in the permit area. I did wonder though whether crapping into a bag increases the likelihood of people getting excrement on their hands and then washing this off into the loch? What are the risks of this compared to digging a hole and then burying it, as recommended by the Scottish Outdoor Access Code? Would a mobile toilet with hand sanitiser not be safer? It is difficult to see how poo bags could ever make up for the deficit in toilet facilities across the National Park.

The sign, "No Rubbish, Poo only", also got me thinking: why is it that the LLTNPA can install and empty bins for human excrement (on land it doesn't own) but won't do the same for dog poo or litter? While human poo is carried away, dog poo gets left hanging in bags from bushes. As I have observed

before, in neither case are many people likely to be prepared to put it in their car.

The explanation for this discrepancy appears to be that the LLTNPA is only prepared to spend money on tackling problems on land it owns or for problems for which it can be held directly responsible, in this case concentrating campers into a small area without any appropriate infrastructure. There is no excuse for this as currently the LLTNPA has £960,000 of income unallocated ([see here](#)).

What needs to happen?

At both Coire na Ciste and Suidhe field our National Park Authorities have responded to problems, in the one case by granting planning permission for a third rate facility, in the other by providing what appears to be the cheapest solution possible.

Meantime, there is no sign of either National Park Authority thinking seriously about what toilet infrastructure is needed in their areas. Unfortunately, the only way I can see that happening is if our politicians start to treat the provision of public conveniences, as the Victorians once did, as keystones of both public health and tourism.

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