

Visitor infrastructure – more lessons for the Lomond and Trossachs National Park



spent last week in the Lake District, the first part camping with friends on the east side of Lake Coniston. The small campsite where we stayed is run by a friendly farm and is only let out to groups, perfect for meeting up with friends after lockdown. The campsite was situated in a clearing within Dodgson's Wood, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), with fine moss-covered oak trees and fantastic bird life, not dissimilar to the Loch Lomond oak woods. While facilities were basic it was hard not to contrast them with what is on offer in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA)'s camping permit areas.



The Lochan Maoil Dhuinne camping permit area south of Rowardennan

Instead of selecting glades in the oak woods for camping, the LLTNPA has tried to force campers into areas that are horrible for camping. Its assumptions are that campers can't be trusted in protected sites, like Dodgson's Wood, and people don't care where they camp. Both assumptions are wrong.



The farm had taken the trouble to pipe in water from the beck and provide a dish-washing area. While the waste water drained onto an open slope, there was little sign of pollution by the end of the week. I guess the wildlife cleared up the small food scraps and we used biodegradable washing up liquid.



Several benches were supplied for sitting on and there was also a fire pit, with the farm providing wood sourced from outwith the SSSI. There was no evidence of campers damaging trees around the camping area and the area of bare ground around the fire was very limited give that it is used by groups. I am personally not that keen on fires but the site was quite midgie in the evenings and a fire did help. While the LLTNPA do provide wood at the campsites they run at Loch Chon and Loch Achray, they don't in the camping permit areas and the consequence is branches ripped or sawn off trees.



There were four composting toilets, quite a contrast to the LLTNPA which refuses to provide campers with either composting or mobile toilets. Instead it has resorted to trialling poo bags in its camping permit areas ([see here](#)) and has insisted on installing very expensive flushing toilets in its campsites. This has severely impacted on the ability of the LLTNPA to provide other facilities. It was the cost of the toilet and waste water treatment at the Cabin at Loch Lubnaig that appears to have scuppered proposals in the Five Loch Visitor Management Plan to extend toilet provision across the Trossachs.

For water, toilets and firewood, the charge for four nights midweek was £200. For our group this came to about £3.50 a night each, incredibly good value compared to the LLTNPA's £3 per night charge for a camping permit in return for which campers get nothing. Dodgson Wood provides precisely the sort of model of basic campsite that the LLTNPA should have been providing throughout the National Park but has failed to deliver.

The LLTNPA – letting down local communities and businesses

By coincidence, one of our party had recently been to Inverlochlarig, in the Braes of Balquidder, and got talking to the landowner there while buy venison from the farm shop ([see here](#)).



The car park at Inverlochlarig, with a nicely constructed shelter but not toilets

The number of people now using the car park and needing to have a crap after a long drive has started to create problems with human waste. According to my friend, the landowner said they had approached the LLTNPA asking if they would install mobile toilets and was refused, being told the budget had been used up and the cost of permanent flushing toilets would be c£150k. This is the National Park Authority that had not allocated £960k of its budget at their March Board meeting ([see here](#)).

If sending a mobile toilet truck down Balquidder was thought too expensive, composting toilets would be the obvious solution. I suspect that for a small fee the farm would be only too happy to help maintain them but composting toilets are off the agenda in the LLTNPA because of their Chief Executive, Gordon Watson, who doesn't believe they work in Scotland. This has caused all sorts of unnecessary problems.



The abandoned public toilets at Duck Bay

One place where the LLTNPA would be justified in installing permanent flushing public toilets would be at Duck Bay, on the west shore of Loch Lomond. This is the most popular picnic site in the National Park. Following on from their initiative with the local community in Arrochar ([see here](#)), at the end of last week the Friends of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs (FOLLAT) launched a similar initiative at Duck Bay.



Sam Newell of Honeywagon-the toilet suppliers, James Fraser of the Friends and Stuart King of the

According to the news release([see here](#)), FOLLAT appear to have secured some funding from the LLTNPA, although how much they don't say. But two quotes, the first from Jackie Baillie, the local MSP, and the second from Gordon Watson, the LLTNPA Chief Executive are quite revealing:

"The Friends are to be congratulated for taking the initiative to provide much needed temporary toilets at this popular Loch Lomondside picnic area"

Note that it was FOLLAT, not the LLTNPA, who took the initiative. That is despite Mr Watson stating:

"Providing temporary toilets here is essential to supporting people to have a more enjoyable and responsible visit. With the National Park Authority not owning any land in this area we are delighted to support and help fund a partnership approach to deliver these crucial facilities." [My emphasis].

So, why did the LLTNPA failed to do anything to support such crucial and essential facilities up till now? The answer lies in the quote. Rather than seeing itself as responsible for providing appropriate visitor infrastructure across the National Park, the LLTNPA has been deliberately limiting what it does to the land it owns. Instead of taking an overview of what is needed across the National Park, and working with other public authorities to prioritise expenditure based on this, it competes with others for resources. That is not what it was set up to do.

The implications of Mr Watson's statement that toilets are essential for people to have a "responsible visit" is that the LLTNPA believe it is irresponsible for people who might need to go to the loo to visit

places without toilets. If accepted, that would turn access rights on their head and put much of the National Park out of bounds. It is not visitors who are irresponsible but the current leadership of the LLTNPA, who have completely failed to provide appropriate infrastructure and have wasted much of the resources available to them.

Both Dodgson's farm campsite and Duck Bay illustrate what could be done if there was the will within the LLTNPA Board and Senior Management Team.

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