

Storm Arwen, Loch Katrine and the costs of climate change

Description



The road to Stronachlachar pier, Loch Katrine. Photo credit Steamship Sir Walter Scott Trust.

While working on my last post criticising the response of the leadership of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority to the climate emergency ([see here](#)), I had no idea of the damage that had by wrought by Storm Arwen at Stronachlachar in the Trossachs. My thanks to the Steamship Trust for including parkswatch in an email to the LLTNPA and others showing the damage.

Storm Arwen was preceded by a hitherto rare red, “danger to life”, weather warning from the Met Office. It came from the north and was predicted to impact most on the east coast. While a lay person might have anticipated strong north winds would impact on Speyside, which is open to the north and indeed where lots of roads were blocked by fallen trees, Loch Katrine is in the lee of fold after fold of hills.

While wind flows over and around mountains in extraordinary ways, which you will know if you have been lifted off your feet on the north east side of Ben Nevis in a south westerly, it would take a far greater expert than I to explain why a place like Stronachlachar was so hard hit by Storm Arwen.

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Photo credit Steamship Trust

The email stated that twenty large trees have been blown over and people were trapped in nearby properties.



Unfortunately this tree didn't quite miss the cafe. Photo credit Steamship Trust

While the damage could have been worse, significant repairs will be needed to the pier cafe and other structures, while the Steamship Sir Walter Scott Trust was due to start work on improving the car park at Stronachlachar Pier on Monday. That work, funded by the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund and part of green recovery “post-Covid”, will now be delayed and extra costs incurred.

The damage follows the extreme rain event in August 2019 which caused extensive landslips around Glen Falloch and Loch Katrine ([see here](#)) and ([here](#)), including no less than twenty-one along the road

round the north shore. One of those landslips came close to killing the occupants of one of the houses there. The road was then closed for almost two years while it was cleared, houses excavated, a bent pylon replaced and slopes stabilised.



New landslip defences above the pylon. The size of the walls is an indication of the severity of the landslide risks around Loch Katrine. Photo credit author.

The landslips had serious financial consequences for the Steamship Trust because a significant part of their income came from people wanting to walk or bike along the north shore of Loch Katrine, who used the Steamship Trust's facilities, including the Steamship to get to or from Stronachlachar. Now this.

The costs of extreme weather events are not the only financial challenge the Steamship Trust has had to face. Like other businesses it has had to cope with Covid, while just before that in January 2020 cracks were discovered in the steamship boiler putting it out of commission. While all businesses sometimes face unexpected challenges, in the case of the Steamship Trust extreme weather events combined with the impact that several centuries of overgrazing has had on the stability of slopes round Loch Katrine have made a challenging situation even more difficult.



Photo credit Steamship Trust

The evidence from the recent storm at Stronachlachar adds to my argument that it is time that the LLTNPA stopped thinking only about itself as an organisation and focussed instead on what it can do to prevent or mitigate the human induced “natural” disasters in the National Park. As part of this it should consider how it might better use its resources to support people’s livelihoods. The involvement of private capital as a solution to the climate emergency, which is being promoted by LLTNPA convener James Stuart, will only make matters worse. The last thing rural businesses need is to be saddled with more debt. Debt is what pushes over organisations like the Steamship Trust when disasters happen. What we need is increased public investment.

I am not arguing here that the LLTNPA should directly support the Steamship Trust, though help from the Ranger Service with the clear-up might be welcome. The Steamship Trust are a resourceful organisation with good contacts and I am optimistic they will pull through despite all the setbacks. (But the LLTNPA could at least stop making life even more difficult for them as they did with the Roderick Dhu footpath planning application ([see here](#)).

In the years ahead, however, we are going to see lots more organisations and people in the rural areas of the National Park affected by extreme weather events made worse by the degradation of the natural environment. Until the LLTNPA actually starts to do something meaningful to mitigate those impacts, I believe it has a moral duty to help those communities. Perhaps rather than installing heat pumps and solar panels for its own buildings, it would be better using government funding to do the same in businesses which are on the brink due to the impact of extreme weather events and its own failures to change how land in the National Park is managed?

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. climate change
2. conservation
3. LLTNPA
4. natural environment
5. Scottish Government
6. Tourism

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