

The locked Forestry and Land Scotland car park at Sallochy – undermining access rights and a sign of what is to come?

Description



Photo credit Alannah Maurer

A few weeks ago I was contacted by a person who had parked their car to go for a walk from Sallochy on east Loch Lomond and had been harassed by rangers for doing so. Last week I was sent these photos which show the gates are now being locked in the day to prevent the general public to access on what was – and still is during the winter months – a public car park provided by Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS).



Photo credit Alannah Maurer

This has now morphed into a restricted campsite accessible only if you have the code to the gates



Photo credit Alannah Maurer

As part of its attempt to restrict party campers on the east shore of Loch Lomond, the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) promoted a number of actions designed to make access by car between Balmaha and Rowardennan much more difficult. These included blocking off informal parking places and then, when people started to park on the public road, getting Stirling Council to turn it into a clearway.

That left Milarrochy (where the LLTNPA has been ramping up restrictions on boat launching [see here](#)) and Sallochy as the two remaining public car parks on the east shore of Loch Lomond. (There is also a car park at the Scottish Royal Forestry Reserve woodland restoration site at Cashel but that is reserved for their visitors).

The last time I parked at Sallochy was a few years ago on an outing with the Scottish Ornithologists Club Clyde branch to enjoy and learn about the birds of the wonderful Loch Lomond oak woods. We had no difficulties using the campsite and walked past campers. That experience is no longer possible except for people who are fit enough to walk to Sallochy from Balmaha or Rowardennan and back, prepared to cycle down the narrow road or prepared to book a camping space and pay the £9 per adult per night fee with an additional £3 to park the vehicle.



Clearly FLS are now doing all they can to keep the gate locked. Photo credit Alannah Maurer

The purpose of the Sallochys camping area

Having started by trying to restrict cars to restrict campers, FLS and the LLTNPA now appear to be using camping as an excuse to restrict vehicle access by the public as might happen on a private commercial campsite. That was never the purpose of Sallochys.

The proposals the LLTNPA developed in 2010 to introduce camping byelaws were intended to stop people partying on the east shore of Loch Lomond. They created serious problems for “responsible” campers, particularly people backpacking the West Highland Way. As a result Scottish Natural Heritage made their support for the byelaws ([see here](#) for their response) – always only intended as a temporary measure – conditional on the provision of “informal camping places”:

SNH supports, in principle, the National Park Authority’s proposal to introduce a camping byelaw for East Loch Lomond. However our support is conditional on the adequate provision of informal camping within the restricted area being fully operational before the date byelaws come into effect.

Hence why in 2011 FLS submitted a planning application ([see here](#)) for a “Partial change of use of car park to allow an informal managed camp site (20 pitches)”. The clue, in terms of vehicle access by the general public, is in the title of the application and the word “partial”. The creation of the camping area

affected the size of the car park and the arrangements for using it but there was nothing in the application to suggest that a large area would not remain available to the public arriving by car.

Indeed the report by LLTNPA officers stated that:

“Car park barriers will separate camping vehicles and day users. Day parking will close at 8pm”

before concluding that while a formal campsite in this location would be contrary to LLTNPA policy

“material considerations justify support being given to this informal managed campsite at Salloch Bay Car Park”

The FLS website ([see here](#)) now describes their site at Salloch as a campsite, with public parking “out of season”, rather than as a public car park AND camping area. The site plan on the website,

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Parking” and separated by barriers from the metered parking places for general visitors

The idea was that the site should serve a dual function, as a car park for day visitors and as a campsite.

Creeping access restrictions

I am not certain when FLS started to try and exclude day visitors from the Sallochy car park but they were doing so in 2020, after the first Covid lockdown:



The no access to day visitors notice in 2020 was clearly temporary

The gate to the site which had closed at 8pm, a measure intended to prevent campervans and other vehicles stopping off overnight, was now being kept shut through the day. I had assumed that these restrictions were part of the infection control measures designed to prevent the spread of Covid in public places, including the management of toilets, so did not think fit to complain. It appears that having instigated temporary restrictions as a Covid emergency measure, FLS then decided to make them permanent contrary to the original intentions for the site.

FLS' reason for this is unclear but may be linked to the way the informal camping area, originally mainly intended for walkers passing through, is now being marketed as a place for families to have a short-break (i.e to come by car and stay a few days). If so the change from an informal to something approaching a formal campsite may have been partially by default but the consequence is a place that can only be enjoyed by those who have paid. The LLTNPA set a precedent for such an approach with the Loch Chon campsite, on land owned by FLS, where Day Visitors are now prevented from using the former car park. At Loch Chon, however, the consequences are not so severe as it is still possible to park nearby so the access implications far less serious.

It is unclear if this decision has been made by FLS staff in isolation. Having allowed what was the east Loch Lomond Stakeholder Group to lapse, joint visitor management between public agencies was restarted during Covid in the form of the horribly named National Park Safe Recovery Action Group. Then last year the LLTNPA announced they had set up four visitor management groups in "high pressure areas" including east Loch Lomond. Those groups ([see here](#)):

"are composed of representatives from local Community Councils and Community Development Trusts, businesses, landowners, Local Authorities and key agencies such as Police Scotland, Transport Scotland, Forestry and Land Scotland and the National Park Authority".

Any proposal to close off the Sallochy car park should have been discussed by east Loch Lomond Management Group first. If it was that would be very concerning but not a surprise as organisations representing outdoor recreational interests are not included while the group itself appears accountable to no-one (papers and minutes are not published). If not discussed, one might have hoped a member of the group would have spotted the locked gates at Sallochy and challenged FLS.

The implications of closing the Sallochy car park for outdoor recreation and access rights

FLS' move to close the car park at Sallochy has had a significant impact on the ability of people to exercise their access rights. Some of that impact could have been mitigated if there was a shuttle bus to drop people off between Balmaha and Rowardennan but a few weeks ago the LLTNPA announced that their attempt to tender for such a service had collapsed (the second year this has happened). If the decision to lock the gate was taken in anticipation of a shuttle bus service it should now be reversed.

It is not just walkers, however, who have been affected. FLS markets the Sallochy "campsite" as having "easy access facilities" but clearly has given no thought to how people with disabilities might be able to enjoy the area during daytime. The short answer is if dependant on a car they can't. The measure is contrary to the LLTNPA's draft National Park Partnership Plan, the consultation on which closes today: this claims the Park is committed to "equal access for all" but what has happened at Sallochy that none of its commitments are worth the webspace they are in written in.

The bay at Sallochy is one of the few round Loch Lomond with a shallow beach suitable and safe for

swimming or launching water craft and was very popular in the past with canoeing clubs and educational groups. Those activities are now impossible from March to the end of October, the very period when people are most likely to venture into or over the loch. So much too therefore for the LLTNPA's statutory duty to promote access to the countryside.

The decision to try and exclude day visitors from the facilities at Sallochry also makes no sense from an investment perspective. The now forgotten East Loch Lomond Visitor Management Plan 2014-19 recorded that:

"There has been considerable investment in key car parks along the length of the C6 (B-road) providing opportunities for people to engage in recreational activities. Following refurbishment of the FCS car parks at Sallochry and Rowardennan a charging regime was introduced".

In 2015 I submitted an FOI to FLS to better understand what they were doing on east Loch Lomond and received the following pieces of information, the first on costs and charges:

East Loch Lomond - Sallochry & Rowardennan

Year	12/13	13/14	14/15
Expenditure	49537.02	61690.54	75690.74
Income	36373.29	53214.6	64901.88
Net cost	13163.73	8475.94	10788.86

And the second on the numbers of visitors to Sallochry in 2015:

Sallochry, C&T - Car Park
Site Number: 00000031
Vehicle Count Report
Summary

	Actual	Estimated	Total
			Vehicles
Totals for year	13618	1992	15610
	Actual	Estimated	Total
			Vehicles

Question 3 : Notes on Visitor counts

1. The estimated figures are to cover gaps when the counters were not c
2. The estimated number of visitors in cars is based on previous validati

Given the increase in the numbers of people visiting the National Park since Covid, a reasonable guesstimate would be by locking the gates at Sallochry, FLS have prevented an incredible 40,000

people a year from enjoying access rights (20,000 cars at two per car) as well as losing a large source of income.

If the LLTNPA fail to take action to force FLS to re-open the Salloch car park, the logical conclusion is being run as a pilot to test people's reaction to the suggestion in the draft NPPP that car access may need to be restricted to reduce carbon emissions. In principle, I am not averse to such a proposal but ONLY IF the LLTNPA shows itself capable of setting up shuttle buses, as exist in many places on the continent, and guarantees continued vehicular access to those with disabilities or who need to use vehicles to carry out their chosen activity (eg transport canoes). Until the LLTNPA acknowledges the importance of access by road and guarantees to continue to make that possible where alternative means do not exist, all those who enjoy outdoor recreation should protest. It is our rights to enjoy the countryside that are at stake.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. access rights
2. LLTNPA
3. parking
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