

The sorry state of recreational infrastructure in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park – an example from Ardgartan

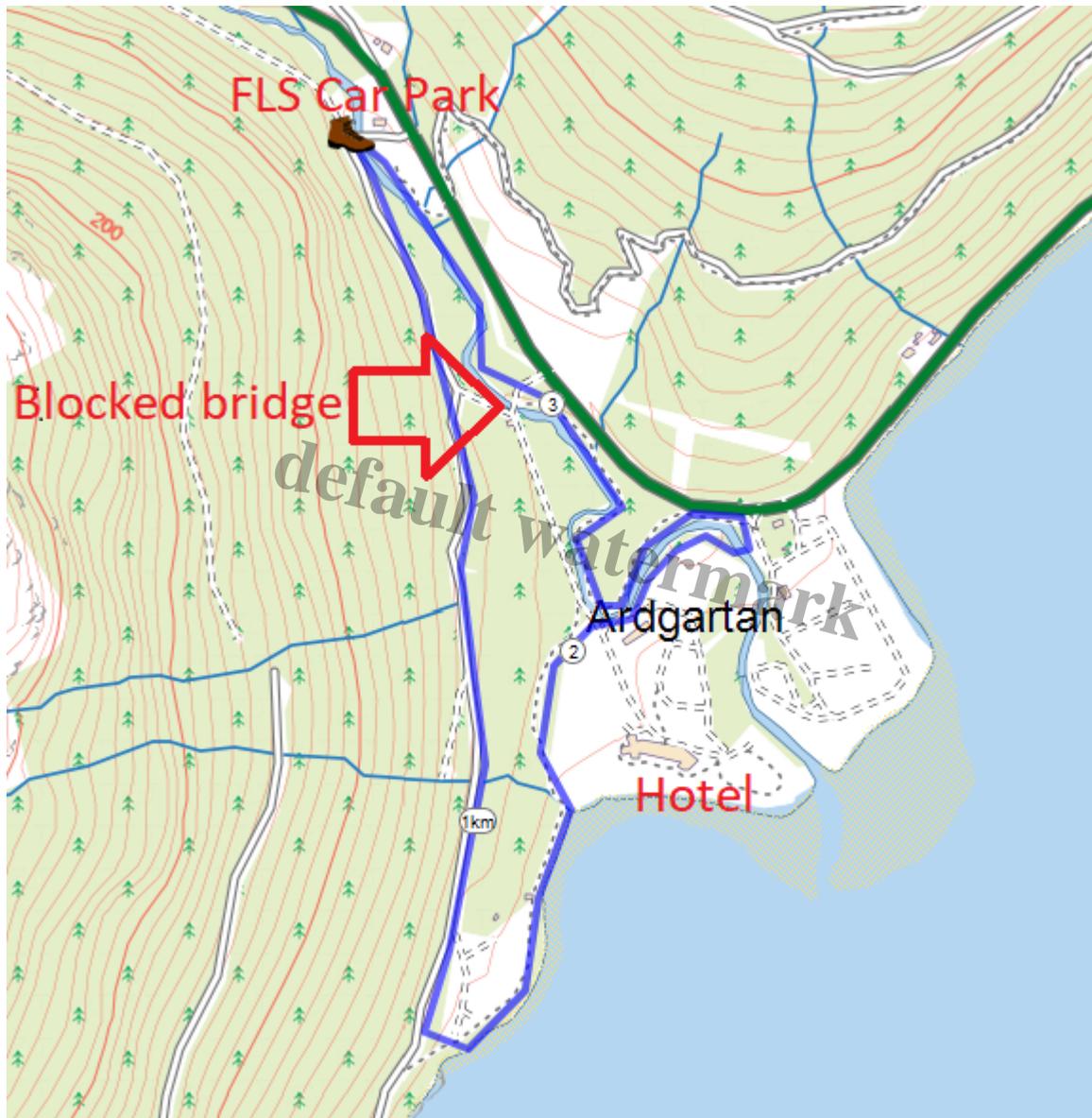
Description



Blocked off footpath across Croe Waterin Arrochar – the sign says – “Bridge Closed, Bridge Unsafe”. Note there is nothing on the sign to say who blocked the path or is responsible for maintaining the bridge. Photo credit Alannah Maurer

[This post was updated 21.00hrs 2nd December after a reader clarified FLS owns the bridge]

Following my post on the replacement bridges at Bracklinn Falls and the West Highland Way ([see here](#)) Alannah Maurer sent me some photos of a path and bridge over the Croe Water at Ardgartan which has been blocked off since 2019 and possibly earlier.



Map credit Walk Highland with the blue showing their 'Ardgartan Shore and Woodlands' walk.

I couldn't tell from either the Registers of Scotland or Andy Wightman's website Who Owns Scotland who owns or is responsible for the bridge. While Forest and Land Scotland (FLS) clearly own the land on the north side of the Croe Water, it looked like the land on the south side of the bridge could be owned either by the Ardgartan Hotel or FLS. I have since been informed by a reader, however, that FLS, part of whose function is to facilitate outdoor recreation, owns the bridge. Unfortunately FLS have no legal obligation to maintain the pedestrian bridges it owns.

A walk over the bridge is still being promoted on the Ardgartan Hotel website showing it was valued locally ([see here](#)):

Recommended Walks from the Ardgartan Hotel

Riverside Walk

- Distance: 1.9km / 1.2 miles
 - Terrain: flat path but can be muddy after heavy rainfall
 - Time: 25-40 mins
 - Way-marked path signed by red marker posts.
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STAGE 1

Turn left from the hotel and continue along the tarmac road past the pink cottage. On the right hand side there is a lay-by with a small bridge crossing Croe Water.

STAGE 2

Cross the bridge and turn left, continuing on the woodland trail for ½ mile before arriving at the forestry car park. From here you can loop back around and follow the red marker posts back towards the hotel.

STAGE 3

You will pass the initial bridge that you crossed but keep walking and you will eventually reach the Forest Holidays Campsite which has a small shop and café. Either pop in for a refreshment or you can continue along the path until you reach another small bridge. Cross over Croe Water once again and follow the direct path to the hotel.

The bridge is also in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, one of whose statutory purposes is to promote outdoor recreation and which was supposed, through the National Park Partnership Plan, to get other public authorities working alongside it to achieve its objectives. Had the LLTNPA been doing the job it was set up to do, it would have been taking action to ensure recreational infrastructure such as this was maintained:



Note how the path now bends round the incomplete fence as walkers have chosen to cross the bridge anyway. Photo credit Alannah Maurer

Instead, any recreational infrastructure regarded as “non-essential” is just being allowed to crumble – like the pink cottage behind – and the LLTNPA has been allowing FLS, by far the largest single landowners in the National Park, to get away with reducing the number of paths and bridges it maintains ([see here](#)).

Its all about money of course. But despite the voluminous research showing that outdoor recreation and exercise is good for people’s physical and means health and reduces demands on the NHS, the LLTNPA has proved itself incapable of making the case to the Scottish Government for investing in recreational infrastructure.

Instead, the LLTNPA has done the opposite, abandoning its outdoor recreation plan ([see here](#)), doing the minimum possible to extend its core paths network ([see here](#)), frittering away the legacy from the Mountains for People footpath project and asking the Scottish Government to approve byelaws making it far more difficult for people to go camping or boating.



Extract from core paths plan for Ardgartan. The bridge is an obvious missing link

All the LLTNPA does for recreational infrastructure is beg for money for what is most pressing, like the West Highland Way. Crumbling bridges like that at Ardgartan, which might once have been maintained, have no chance. The LLTNPA has no strategy or plan to deal with the disappearing infrastructure apart from the unstated one of hoping no-one notices.

The LLTNPA has committed to reporting on the state of nature in the National Park every five years ([see here](#)). It is telling that they have not committed to do the same for outdoor recreation and produce a state of access infrastructure report in the National Park every five years. The two should be connected because the vast majority of people use outdoor recreational infrastructure to enjoy nature.

Meantime, I would welcome other photos or examples of crumbling recreational infrastructure in either of our National Parks – a public inventory is needed to show what is going on.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. FLS

2. LLTNPA
3. outdoor recreation
4. paths
5. vision for National Parks

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