

A different approach to campfires and barbecues in the Cairngorms National Park is possible

Description

Couple who scooped £7.9m Lotto win share woodland site

A COUPLE who won a £7.9 million Lotto jackpot have bought a 15.5-acre woodland which they now share with local Sea Scouts to provide them with a space for outdoor adventures.

Ted Newton, 84, and his 80-year-old wife Marilyn originally bought the woodland in east Kent to walk their dog, Poppy, but have since opened it up to the local community, including a school and creche as well as the scouting group from one of the most deprived parts of the county.

The couple are now set to host their 31st event for the Sea Scouts on their land.

Mrs Newton said: "We moved here so we had somewhere for our grandchildren to run about and explore. Little did we know when we bought Park Wood that not

only would it be our grandchildren running about, we'd also play host to many hundreds of young people from the locality and, importantly, from Dartford Cambria Sea Scouts.

"Our son leads the Sea Scout group, which is based in an area of Dartford with high levels of deprivation.

"With money tight for so many families it can often be hard for the Sea Scouts to fund camping trips away, meaning the children sometimes miss out on gaining essential skills, unique team-building opportunities and, importantly, a chance to engage with nature.

"When Steve asked if the Sea Scouts could come and hold a one-off camp, we were only too happy to say yes, and now, almost

10 years on, we're delighted to regularly host all sorts of different scout camps and are readying ourselves for the 2025 schedule."

Steve Newton said: "It never fails to amaze me when some of the young children, who maybe haven't been in this sort of natural environment before, tentatively start to explore. They may start nervously but quickly grow in confidence and are so much more relaxed.

"Being able to return time after time and to take part in lots of different activities, from Duke of Edinburgh hikes to visiting the Battle of Britain Memorial, is a fantastic opportunity.

"Older teenagers from our group regularly camp in the woods, gaining essential time in the great outdoors, and developing skills,

from learning to build a fire and cook over the coals to clearing a campground of undergrowth and using axes or saws effectively.

"Everything we do here is to help these young people have fun, without the aid of a screen or technology, encouraging them to work together as a team and to engage with the natural world."

Mrs Newton added: "It's not everyone's first thought, to buy a 15.5-acre wood – complete with its own unique postcode – but of everything we have been able to enjoy since that incredible win, creating this wooded wonderland must be our greatest joy.

"We also invite the local school down, the village creche visit, and people walk their dogs here. We love nothing more than seeing the woods come alive."

Herald 26th February

A couple of weeks after the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA)'s approved byelaws, which seek to criminalise the general public for lighting a fire ANYWHERE in the National Park between 1st April and 30th September ([see here](#)), the Herald published this story about two 80 year old lottery millionaires from Kent. The contrast in approach is striking. Instead of trying to ban fires, the couple are helping young people to learn campcraft:

"Older teenagers from our group regularly camp in the woods, gaining essential time in the great outdoors, and developing skills from learning to build a fire and cook over the coals to clearing a campground of undergrowth and using axes and saws effectively"

While the CNPA's proposed fire byelaws do contain provisions to allow private landowners to consent to groups like scouts to light fires on their land – even at times of very high fire risk! – as staff stated at the Board Meeting, the CNPA do not want to encourage this. The exemption appears designed to head off criticism that the CNPA is a complete killjoy and preventing young people from learning from fires.

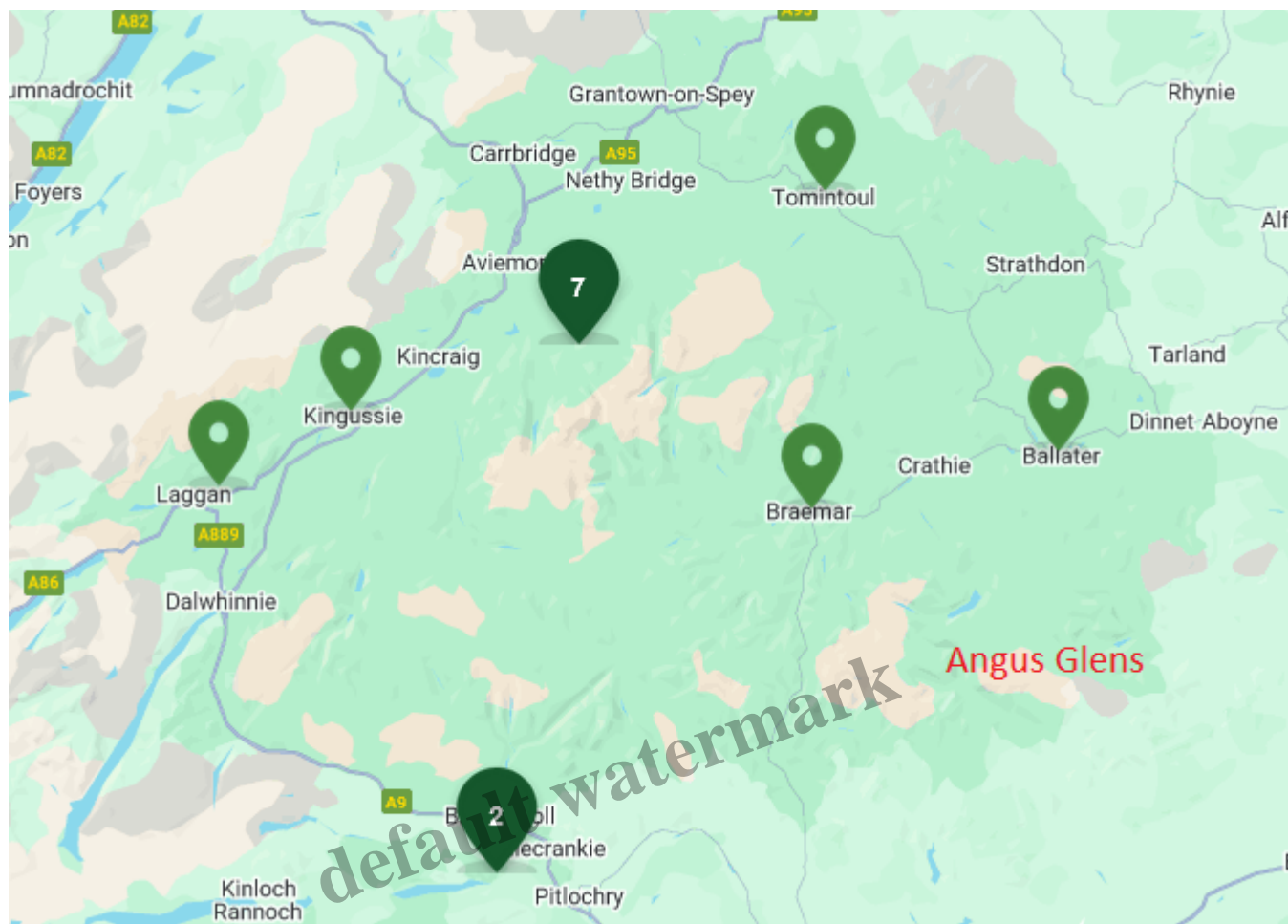
What the article tells you it is quite possible allow people to light fires and barbecues quite safely even in woodland, if you provide them with the basic skills to do so. In pointing this out I am not arguing anyone should be able to do so fires in the Caledonian Forest – there is two little left to risk this – or close to houses, but I am arguing it illustrates how the CNPA's proposed ban is completely disproportionate.

The proposed ban also contradicts one of the CNPA's four statutory aims, to promote public enjoyment and understanding of the countryside. Enjoyment, because fires give people great pleasure and are one of the ways they learn to appreciate the countryside. Understanding, because to light a fire you need to know the risks and learn how to prevent them. Unfortunately, the CNPA has given up on trying to promote enjoyment and understanding in favour of bans.

In doing so the CNPA has gone significantly further than the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) whose camping byelaws only applied to the parts of the National Park around lochs, albeit these provided almost all the best places for camping.

The only place where the general public, unless they know a sympathetic landowner like the lottery millionaires, will still be able to camp in the Cairngorms is "a licensed caravan site". There are just 14 such sites in the National Park – but neither the number, the distribution or whether they allow fires was stated in the final report put to the CNPA Board:

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Map Credit Visit Cairngorms. The 7 marks Glen More

While there appear to be lots of campsites in Glen More, it attracts far more visitors than any other area in the Cairngorms and campsite provision is totally insufficient to meet demand. It was this – made considerably worse by the closure of the Forest and Land Scotland (FLS) campsite – which was responsible for so many people camping/lighting fires around the shores of Loch Morlich after lockdown and prompted the calls for a ban on fires. What should have been an area ban around Glen More – because of the Caledonian Pinewoods and numbers of houses in trees, coupled with improved campsite provision – has turned into an attempt to ban fires throughout the National Park.

The unfairness of this is illustrated by the map. People from Dundee have had a long history of visiting the Angus Glens and there used to be an informal campsite at the head of Glen Clova. There is now nowhere where they will be allowed to light a fire DESPITE the Angus Glens being burned to bits due to the intensive grouse more management there.

FLS had an opportunity to change this with their purchase of Glen Prosen, both by providing a campsite and also by encouraging groups like the Scouts to come to the glen and learn things like campcraft in what remains of the woods after Storm Arwen. Instead, following their consultation on the future management of the glen last summer they issued this statement:

Fire risk

What you said...

Some concerns were raised about the risk of wildfire increasing with change in land management due to increased fuel load and visitor access.

What we're doing...

Developing a fire plan that sets out how we'll reduce the risk of wildfire starting and spreading, and what our response will be if a fire does happen. Local residents, neighbouring landowners and emergency services will be consulted on this in late 2024.

It would be interesting to know WHO expressed those concerns – it looks like it has come from the grouse moor interests who continually claim that THEIR fires are necessary to reduce fire risk – but the way “change” in visitor access is being associated with “increased fire risk” is disgraceful.

The one hope on the horizon for a changed approach is Tory MSP Liz Smith's proposed Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill which this month, three years after it was first mooted, was approved in principle by the Scottish Parliament. By restoring outdoor education to the school curriculum and giving every child the right to four nights in a residential centre – a paltry amount compared to the two weeks Strathclyde Regional Council aspired to provide before it was abolished – ALL children could be taught about fires and barbecues, both the risks and how to enjoy them.

Were this to happen it could open the door to our National Parks reverting to an educational approach to outdoor recreation, as originally intended. It should be an essential part of the recreational infrastructure in our National Parks. That is far more likely to have success than trying to punish people.

The combination of these proposed byelaws to ban fires and the proposals in the Natural Environment Bill to empower National Parks to issue Fixed Penalty Notice ([see here](#)) is quite predictable. More punishment! The cost of enforcing the fire byelaws fully across the National Park will be enormous and to pay for this the CNPA will have to start fining people even when there is no high fire risk and how they are managing their fire or barbecue is as safe as the residents of the Cairngorms who are still doing so in their own gardens.

Category

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Tags

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