

The Voice

The magazine of the Friends of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs

***HERE COMES
SUMMER***



**ALSO INSIDE
THIS ISSUE:**

Bonnie Banks Bin Scheme; News Updates; Discover Drymen; Walk in the Park *and more*

It's been a while, but... **WE. ARE. BACK.**

DUCK BAY HOTEL & RESTAURANT

Duck Bay is one of Scotland's finest restaurants offering international cuisine in a breath-taking environment overlooking Loch Lomond and the majestic Ben Lomond. Open every day from 9am, Duck Bay is the perfect base for touring, outdoor activities, leisure pursuits or relaxing on the bonnie banks.



Bobby's at Duck Bay is perfect for light lunches, afternoon teas or refreshments. Relax in luxurious surroundings with beautiful views of the world famous Loch Lomond.

Our Bar Menu is available from noon with Afternoon Tea served daily from noon until 5pm. Open every evening serving refreshing drinks, cocktails, spirits, malts, prosecco and champagne.

WINDOWS *on the LOCH*

BRAND NEW IN 2021, Windows on the Loch is a beautiful addition to Duck Bay. An intimate yet versatile restaurant offering our hotel guests a beautiful landscape to start their day while they enjoy their Full Scottish Breakfast. From noon, escape from reality as it transforms into our premium Afternoon Tea suite featuring the finest in Scottish produce while soaking up the views of Loch Lomond.

Duck Bay Loch Lomond G83 8QZ Tel: 01389 751234

COAST

Catch up at Coast with friends, family and colleagues. Located on the banks of the River Clyde at Langbank with stunning views of Dumbarton Rock and Ben Lomond. Open daily from 9am serving breakfast, cakes, sandwiches, teas and fresh ground coffee.

Our family style grill menu is available from noon with last orders at 10pm. Our 7 Day Carvery serves a choice of succulent roasts with all the trimmings. Enjoy the panoramic view from our terrace with an aperitif.

30 Main Road, Langbank PA14 6XR Tel: 01475 541254

LOCH HOUSE

The Loch House at Lochwinnoch is open daily from 9am serving an ever changing range of cakes, sandwiches, teas and fresh ground coffee. Dine al fresco and enjoy the panoramic views from our magnificent terrace open daily from 10am (weather permitting).

Our family style grill menu is available from noon with last orders at 10pm. Our 7 Day Carvery serves a choice of succulent roasts with all the trimmings.

Largs Road, Lochwinnoch PA12 4JF Tel: 01505 843848

BOARDWALK

Boardwalk at Falkirk is open daily from 9am serving freshly ground coffees & speciality teas, wines, champagnes, spirits, malt whiskies and fabulous cocktails. Breakfast is served from 9am until noon. Our extensive menu is available from noon onwards until last orders at 10pm. Our 7 Day Carvery offers a great selection of succulent roasts with all the trimmings.



Ideally situated for visiting The Falkirk Wheel and The Helix Kelpies, Bobby's is the perfect stop for a light lunch, afternoon tea or refreshment.

Our Bar Menu is available from noon. Afternoon Tea is served daily from noon until 5pm. Open every evening serving refreshing drinks, cocktails, wines, spirits, malts, prosecco and champagne.

Millennium Wheel Drive, Falkirk FK1 4AD Tel: 01324 272427

DUCK BAY LUXURY COTTAGES

Our luxurious cottages, a literal stones throw from the lochshore and a short walk from our hotel facilities, are the ideal place to retreat.

Wake up every morning to the rippling of water and bird song, bask in tranquil afternoon light soaking up the scenery and dine alfresco watching the sun set over Loch Lomond.

Each cottage boasts a large lounge, kitchen, three double bedrooms and a family bathroom. Outside is a private deck, a kids play area and a private hot tub overlooking the majestic Loch.

Duck Bay Loch Lomond G83 8QZ Tel: 01389 751234

RIVER HOUSE

River House at Stirling is open every day from 9am serving freshly ground coffees, speciality teas, an entire range of wines, champagnes, spirits, malt whiskies and fabulous cocktails.

Breakfast is served from 9am until noon. From midday our extensive restaurant menu packed with classic and contemporary dishes is available until last orders at 10pm.



Relax over a light bite, afternoon tea or aperitif in Bobby's at River House. Soak in the stunning views of Stirling's historic castle and countryside.

Our Bar Menu is available from noon with Afternoon Tea served until 5pm. Open every evening serving refreshing drinks, cocktails, wines, spirits, malt whiskies and champagne.

The Castle Business Park, Stirling FK9 4TW Tel: 01786 465577



A Cawley Gift Card makes 'the perfect gift' for any occasion!

Gift Cards are valid for 12 months from date of purchase, available to use in any of our venues and redeemable against the cost of food, beverages and accommodation.

Gift cards can be purchased online at www.cawleyhotels.com and also from all of our venues.

Chairman's Introduction

WELCOME TO THIS SUMMER EDITION OF VOICE, *which coincides with the 20th anniversary of the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park and is packed with topical news, views and features about different aspects of the Park. This edition also includes news on recent activities by the Friends and others working to make the Park a better place for people and nature.*



It is encouraging that the the 20th anniversary of Scotland's first National Park is being marked by a Scottish Government consultation on the creation of at least one more National Park by 2026, which is a major vote of confidence for the existing two National Parks. However, it is very timely that this is being coupled with taking stock of what people value about Scottish National Parks, and what these areas should deliver in the future. It is important that objectives and priorities of the existing National Parks remain relevant and focussed on future challenges including the climate emergency, sustainable travel and tourism, and helping to stem the decline of rural communities in the face of the threats from rampant inflation, acute shortages of affordable housing and the shrinkage of the labour force to sustain traditional rural industries such as farming, forestry and tourism.

Over the past six months it has been encouraging to get back to some form of normality with most of the Covid 19 restrictions lifted. This has meant we have been able to re-introduce our successful programme of volunteer 'Make a Difference Days' tackling some conservation and visitor management tasks; and re-activate our Business Supporter and OUR park visitor giving schemes to support a raft of natural and cultural heritage, access, youth and community projects that have stalled in recent years. It is particularly pleasing that we are now able to work with youth groups again to support outdoor activity and environmental education work in the National Park in partnership with Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre. The importance of providing more youth outdoor recreation and environmental education opportunities has never been more evident and we are grateful to West Dunbartonshire Council for helping to fund our latest programme of youth initiatives which are aimed at introducing children from urban areas to the natural wonders of the National Park.

We are also continuing to focus on some priority visitor management issues to welcome visitors back safely and responsibly in partnership with others, including the National Park, Councils, Forestry & Land Scotland and

local communities. We have stepped in again this year to address some of the gaps in provision in areas such as West Loch Lomond, the head of Loch Long and the Trossachs and are receiving an encouraging level of funding support from public agencies and local businesses for innovative projects such as our 'Adopt a Bonnie Banks Bin Scheme'. These collaborative efforts are making a difference and there are signs in locations such as Arrochar and Duck Bay, where we provided badly needed temporary toilets, that more permanent schemes will be developed by public agencies as part of future visitor infrastructure investment plans.

Please enjoy reading this edition of Voice and hopefully the contents will inspire you to get out and about again in the National Park over the coming months. If you are not already a member of the Friends, please consider joining and supporting our efforts to help protect, provide for and promote Scotland's first National Park.

All the very best and stay safe.

JAMES FRASER

Chair - Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs



Articles published in The Voice do not necessarily represent the views of The Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs. Charity No. SC015389

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Cover photo – A classic view of Ben Lomond and the Ptarmigan Forest from Tarbet. There are plans for major tree felling here - see page 23 for more details
Cover image by Paul Saunders www.paulsaunders.co.uk



Willie Nesbit, Vice-Convener of the National Park receiving a special bottle of Loch Lomond malt whisky from Friends Trustee, Joyce Deans and James Fraser, the Chair of the Friends

PROTECTING THE SPECIAL QUALITIES OF LOCH LOMOND

To mark the 20th anniversary of the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park, a special presentation was made at the recent AGM of the Friends at Ross Priory to Willie Nesbit, Vice-Convener of the National Park, who has served on the Park Board for 16 of these 20 years and made a major contribution to the work of the Park Authority. He has also been a regular attendee at Friends events over the years and has kept members up to date with topical news from the Park Authority. Willie is pictured receiving a special bottle of Loch Lomond malt whisky from James Fraser, the Chair of the Friends.

At the well attended AGM members enjoyed a splendid evening meal provided by Strathclyde University's Ross Priory staff, before hearing a comprehensive review of the year by the Friends Chair, James Fraser and approving the annual accounts. This was followed by two interesting talks on protecting the special qualities of Loch Lomond. Scott Braidwood shared the plans for restoring Inchconnachan Island which has recently been purchased from Luss Estates following generations of ownership by members of the Colquhoun family. An interesting talk on the seriously flawed plans for the £180 million upgrade of the A82 along the north shore of Loch Lomond was given by John Urquhart and he put forward a strong case for the plans to be re-thought with plans for a new high road being his preferred option (see separate article on page 11).

VOLUNTEER MAKE A DIFFERENCE DAYS SUCCESS

The third in a series of volunteer Make a Difference Days in the last eight months, coordinated by the Friends with support from the National Park, was recently held at Balmaha Bay on Loch Lomondside and was a great success with 18 volunteers helping to restore the Mountain Garden at the popular Tom Weir's Rest site. Other tasks included creating new flower beds at the nearby village green and unchoking the stream behind the Tom Weir Statue, where some overgrown shrubs and tree saplings were removed.

The Friends are responsible for maintaining the Tom Weir statue and the associated picnic area which continues to be visited by large numbers of day visitors and tourists. Sandy Fraser of the nearby Oak Tree Inn has sponsored the site maintenance works since the outbreak of Covid 19. During this time, several attempts were made to raid the three donation posts on the site with heavy duty steel cutters. Little money was taken on each occasion but it has cost many hundreds of pounds to repair the damage.

Another successful Make a Difference Day was organised at the end of March in partnership with Forest Holidays by Loch Lubnaig. The 18 volunteers from the Friends, Forest Holidays, Terrenus Land & Water Ltd and the National Park removed over 100 bags of rubbish from laybys and along loch shores and banks. They also removed broken plastic tree guards and

cut back vegetation beside the approach road and cycleway on the former railway line near the Strathyre Holiday Lodges as part of an effort to protect wildlife and improve biodiversity.

A further Make a Difference Day is planned for November on West Loch Lomondside which will be a repeat of the successful event held there last November with over 40 volunteers undertaking a variety of tasks to improve the bonnie banks.

John Urquhart, Vice-Chair of the Friends, who participates in all these events, said: "It is great to see such large turnouts of enthusiastic volunteers from various backgrounds and organisations who take a real pride in contributing to the protection of the special qualities of the National Park. They are truly making a real difference and we greatly appreciate their efforts."

Pauline Lynch, Environment and Sustainability Officer at Forest Holidays, said: "We are really pleased to support these events and the wider efforts of the Friends to make the National Park a better place for people and nature. At the recent Loch Lubnaig event, it was disappointing to see the scale of littering and fly-tipping and I would urge visitors planning to come to the lochside to act responsibly by taking litter home and leaving nothing behind, to protect the rich variety of wildlife on the shoreline of this special loch."



Volunteers are pictured after a productive day of opening up the views at the Tom Weir Statue and restoring the Mountain Garden in Balmaha. Pictured second from the right is Sandy Fraser of the Oak Tree Inn who maintains this popular site on a year round basis.

ADOPT A BONNIE BANKS BIN SCHEME LAUNCHED



Some of the sponsors are pictured at the launch of the Bonnie Banks Bin scheme on Luss beach. Left to right: Niall Colquhoun, Lodge on Loch Lomond Hotel and Inn on Loch Lomond Hotel; Patrick Colquhoun, Luss Estates; Fred Moore, Cruise Loch Lomond; Cllr Shonny Paterson, National Park Authority Board member; Simon Miller, Luss Estates; Evan Jones, Forest Holidays; Darroch Cawley, Duck Bay Hotel; and Alison Moore, Lochs & Glens Holidays.

Following the runaway success of the A82 Loch Lomondside layby litter bin scheme piloted by the Friends last summer and continued through to March this year, steps have been taken to place this on a more sustainable footing with the introduction of an imaginative Adopt a Bonnie Banks Bin Scheme, modelled partly on the roundabout sponsorship schemes introduced widely by local authorities throughout the UK.

The scheme is being coordinated by the Friends, but now enjoys the financial backing of nine local tourism businesses, Luss Estates, the Park Authority, Argyll & Bute Council and ENVA, who are our waste disposal and recycling partner. It is costing £26,000 to fund the 20-bin scheme for a full 12 months, including twice weekly uplifts during busy holiday periods and once weekly collections at quieter times but, along with some other measures, it is helping to transform the overall appearance of the busy 13-mile tourist corridor between Arden and Tarbet on the lochside. Over the original nine-month pilot period, 25 tonnes of litter was collected and an impressive 97% of this waste was recycled with much of it being baled to help fuel steelworks. This equates to the equivalent of a staggering 6,500 bin bags of litter collected overall (200,000 litres) with 6,300 bags of litter being recycled. It is anticipated over the first full year of the new Adopt a Bonnie Banks Bin Scheme that an estimated 10,000 bags of litter will be removed from the lochside.

MORE RESPECT

James Fraser, Chair of the Friends said: "We were convinced the introduction of bins in busy lochside laybys with regular emptying and monitoring would greatly improve the situation and this has proved to be the case with more visitors now treating the area with more respect and helping to keep the bonnie banks almost litter free.

We are delighted that so many partners have come on board to sponsor bins and ensure the continuing success of the bin scheme. It is to the great credit of local tourism business owners that they have stepped in to help with funding at a time that they are in an

early stage of business recovery, following the loss of substantial trading income due to Covid 19 closures and trading restrictions, but it reinforces how strongly they feel about ensuring the bonnie banks of Loch Lomond are kept that way for the benefit of visitors and local residents."

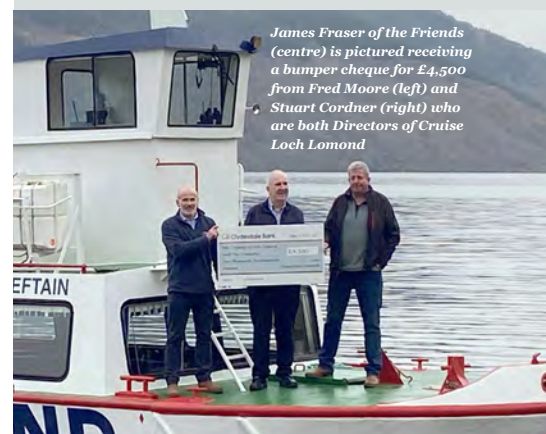
Sir Malcolm Colquhoun of Luss Estates said: "When I made a plea early last year for urgent action to be taken to tackle the scourge of litter on the lochside, and in particular along the A82, I hadn't anticipated the Friends would rise to the challenge and step in with the delivery of such a successful pilot bin project that has exceeded expectations. I am very pleased, along with other local businesses, to be supporting the Adopt a Bonnie Banks Bin Scheme and it is encouraging that both the Park Authority and Argyll & Bute Council are contributing some funding too and are augmenting the scheme with some other practical litter clearance efforts."

Jackie Baillie, MSP, said: "I wish to congratulate the Friends of Loch Lomond on this scheme which has already produced such positive results. I also wish to thank the partners who have provided their wholehearted support. "Sadly, litter on the A82 at the lochside is a serious problem and has been for a number of years. It is exacerbated during the summer months when we welcome tourists from home and abroad to see our beautiful area and I am hopeful that, with 20 new bins in the area this summer, we will see a huge benefit and the area will be at its' best for visitors and residents alike to enjoy."

National Park Authority Chief Executive, Gordon Watson added: "We welcome this initiative which is helping bring about a truly collaborative approach to tackling an issue that continues to plague our busiest tourist route. As well as providing funding to support to the Friends initiative, we have recruited additional seasonal Environment Officers, invested in more effective bins at our sites and will undertake regular litter picks at camping permit areas and car parks beside the Loch. We will also continue our high profile litter campaigns as part of the wider effort to get on top of the litter problem and encouraging people to respect the special scenic and landscape qualities of our National Park."

FUNDING BOOST FOR LOCHSIDE PROJECTS

Several lochside visitor management and conservation projects have received a welcome cash injection of £4,500 from donations made by passengers on cruises operated by long established Cruise Loch Lomond. Projects benefiting from the funds include litter management along West Loch Lomondside, protecting views of the loch and Ben Lomond along the A82 tree corridor, red squirrel conservation at Cashel Forest and local village warden schemes. Friends Chair, James Fraser said: "Cruise Loch Lomond have been long-time supporters of the Friends of OUR park visitor giving scheme that provides a mechanism for visitors to donate funds through local businesses to support conservation, heritage, access and visitor management projects in the National Park for the benefit of people and nature. "It is to the great credit of the directors and staff of Cruise Loch Lomond that they have managed to raise so much for local projects during the past two years, a challenging time interrupted with Covid 19 closures and restrictions on trading, and we are grateful for their efforts. "We rely heavily on this sort of support from 100 businesses in and around the National Park and they all deserve our sincere thanks, as do their many thousands of visitors who are helping us to make a real difference to making the National Park a better place with the delivery of many practical projects on the ground working with local communities." Stuart Corder of Cruise Loch Lomond said: "We are only too glad to try to help locally based projects in the National Park which need financial support, and the Friends of OUR park scheme has been an excellent way for us to do this. We wish to thank all customers who have made contributions to our fundraising while we have been part of this great initiative led by the Friends of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs." Cruise Loch Lomond operates out of piers around Loch Lomond and has been at the forefront of many green tourism initiatives as part of their efforts to ensure visitors can enjoy the special natural and cultural heritage qualities of Loch Lomond.



James Fraser of the Friends (centre) is pictured receiving a bumper cheque for £4,500 from Fred Moore (left) and Stuart Corder (right) who are both Directors of Cruise Loch Lomond

BUSINESS SUPPORTERS AND OUR PARK SCHEMES RE-ACTIVATED

Following the extensive closures and restrictions due to Covid 19 that impacted on the operation of tourism businesses over the past two years, the Friends Executive Committee decided to suspend both the Business Supporters and Friends of OUR Park visitor giving schemes that normally generate substantial income to support the running of the Friends and a range of projects. Both schemes have now been re-activated and all long term Friends Business Supporters have rejoined and many businesses have are now re-introducing options for visitors to donate funds to the Friends of OUR park visitor giving scheme. In the interim the Friends were successful in securing a sizeable Thrive and Adapt grant which has enabled the hours of our part-time Support Officer, Jennifer Plunkett, to be extended. Any business interested in joining the Business Supporters or OUR park visitor giving schemes should contact Jennifer by telephone on 07496 433134 or by email at info@lochlomondtrossachs.org.uk.

Long-term Friends of OUR Park scheme participants, Anne Uraquhart of Balmillig Guest House, Helensburgh; Sandy Fraser of the Oak Tree Inn, Balmaha; and Victoria Carroll of Lochend Chalets, Port of Menteith are pictured receiving bottles of Loch Lomond malt whisky from Joyce Deans of the Friends, Willie Nisbet of the Park Authority and James Fraser, Chair of the Friends. Between them over the past 12 years they have raised over £60,000 from visitors to support a range of heritage, conservation, access and youth projects in the National Park



FAERIE BRIDGE RE-INSTALLMENT

The Friends recently stepped in to coordinate extensive repairs to the dilapidated Faerie Bridge, which forms part of a popular walk in the lochside village of Tarbet. A £2,000 repair was undertaken by local contractor Robert McKendry and was funded by the Hannah Stirling Loch Lomond Trust.

Faerie bridge before and after



Pictured are some of the team involved in the village warden and visitor management initiative. Left to right: Bob McEwan, Visitor Services Warden; Clrs Iain Shonny Paterson and Mark Irvine, Argyll and Bute Council; Duncan MacLachlan, Friends Trustee and Arrochar & Tarbet Development Trust; Jane Anderson, Destination Arrochar Alps and Martin Semple, Visitor Services Warden

TWO VILLAGES VISITOR WELCOME INITIATIVE RESCUED

Last summer the Friends joined forces with Arrochar & Tarbet Development Trust and Destination Arrochar Alps to deliver an impressive package of visitor management actions in the two lochside villages of Arrochar and Tarbet. This included the provision temporary toilets, the employment of three visitor wardens, the installation of new directional signing and the production of attractive information map panels for display at 30 locations. This was funded by NatureScot, the Hannah Stirling Loch Lomond Trust and the Friends. The future of the visitor welcome initiative was in doubt this year as the NatureScot Green Recovery grant scheme was initially wound up and in response to lobbying by local MSP Jackie Baillie on the Friends behalf the Scottish Government indicated there would be no repeat of the scheme and also, more worryingly, there would be no additional funds for visitor management activities provided to the National Park Authority and other public agencies. In the absence of the funding scheme the Friends were asked by local community groups to look at alternative funding sources and over the winter months a funding package was assembled for a two villages visitor management programme with contributions from Argyll & Bute Council's Staycation Fund, the Park Authority, the Hannah Stirling Loch Lomond Trust, Luss Estates and the Friends of OUR park visitor giving scheme.

This again enabled the roll out of temporary toilets for the April to October period at the two busy locations at the head of Loch Long Arrochar Car Park and the Cobbler Car Park. Sufficient funding was also secured to employ two part-time village wardens. Sufficient funding was only secured for 40 hours of warden cover initially but thankfully, following a recent change of heart by the Scottish Government, the NatureScot Green Recovery grant scheme was re-introduced to support 'boots on the ground' this summer and consequently the Friends were

successful in securing a top up grant to increase village warden cover from 40 hours per week to 70 hours per week between June and October. The National Park Authority was also given an extra £600,000 to support visitor management activities throughout the Park.

VERY ENCOURAGING

Duncan MacLachlan, Friends Trustee and Chair of Arrochar & Tarbet Community Development Trust, who is coordinating the delivery of the programme locally said: "It is very encouraging to have so many funders on board to support the provision of much needed temporary toilets in Arrochar, which continues to be a very popular visitor destination, as well as building on the success of the excellent village warden scheme that has been expanded to cover Tarbet as well as Arrochar this year. "I also welcome the more active involvement of Luss Estates, with them taking on responsibility for managing the busy Arrochar car park and funding toilet provision and maintenance there which is helping to make a real difference locally." Local Councillor and Park Board member, Shonny Paterson, said: "It is great to see the level of collaboration now taking place to kick on from the success of last year's visitor management initiative led by the Friends with the active involvement of local groups. I am delighted Argyll & Bute Council, the Park Authority and Luss Estates have all stepped in to help ensure the continuance of the two villages visitor welcome scheme which bodes well for the future and I look forward to playing my part in securing more permanent village infrastructure improvements for the benefit of local residents and visitors." Following the recent purchase of the Glen Loin 2 car park by Argyll & Bute Council, preliminary design work is underway to explore the options for extending the car park and providing permanent toilets at this busy location below the popular Arrochar Alps.



TROSSACHS TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS ON TRACK

Trevor Geraty, Chairman of Strathard Community Council (left) is pictured with James Fraser in Aberfoyle where a new window display with the Trossachs Trail map has been installed

The ambitious two year £650,000 Trossachs Trail Visitor Management Project is now well into its second year and is on track for completion in spring 2023. The project was successful in securing a maximum grant of £375,000 from the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) administered by VisitScotland and is being led jointly by two charities, the Steamship Sir Walter Scott Trust and the Friends. The RTIF grant is being routed through the National Park Authority to these charities and other funding support is being provided by Callander and Strathard Community Hydro Funds, the Steamship Trust and the Friends of OUR park visitor giving scheme.

The Friends are working on the second phase of the Trossachs Trail refresh, following the completion of signage improvements and the production of a new website and information panels last year, now on display in various locations around the route promoting sustainable ways of enjoying the area by boot, bike and boat.

Work on two of the larger infrastructure projects at Ben A'an car park and at Stronachlachar Pier car park has been completed. Forestry & Land Scotland led on the project to double

the size of the Ben A'an car park with a grant of £84,000 secured by the Steamship Trust from VisitScotland. At Stronachlachar a new woodland car park has been created and small-scale improvements to the existing car park include the provision of bays for campervans with service hook ups and improved facilities for cyclists and walkers.

Further phases of improvement works at Trossachs Pier car park and toilets are scheduled for later in 2022 and tenders were recently issued for phase 1 works to reinstate the historic Roderick Dhu path to the viewpoint where Sir Walter Scott was inspired to write his blockbuster poem The Lady of the Lake, published in 1810 and credited with being the birthplace of Scottish tourism.

A wider review of visitor infrastructure issues in the Trossachs and Strathard area is underway, with the National Park Authority commissioning consultants who will liaise with local stakeholders to help identify and shape the priorities for action over the next five years. This is one of eight studies in different parts of the National Park to address longstanding visitor infrastructure shortcomings and to assist bids for additional support from the national Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund.

NEW LOMOND TRAIL NOW OPEN

The construction phase of a new wildlife trail to Loch Lomond has recently been completed and the appropriately named 'Lomond Trail' is now open and welcoming visitors to experience the stunning habitats and nature found at RSPB Scotland Loch Lomond National Nature Reserve.

The route adds 1.3 kilometres of accessible trail; connecting the existing visitor hub, car park and Airy Woodland Trail to the Loch Shore Path, with stunning view across the loch with Ben Lomond and Conic Hill forming the backdrop. The boardwalk section of the trail creates an immersive experience for visitors to walk through Fen habitat, before leading on into Ring Wood an ancient oak plantation rich in wildlife.

The project has been 5 years in development and planning, with construction finally starting in January this year. It has been made possible through £350,000 of funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund, Brown Forbes Memorial Fund, the Horace and Helen Gillman Trusts, along with the RSPB.

To add to the visitor experience, viewing areas and interpretation are being installed, where people can watch and learn about local wildlife. As well as providing access to the full extent of the reserve, the RSPB aim to open-up activities to a wider, more diverse audience through a programme of community outreach, working in partnership with organisations and schools across West Dunbartonshire. It is hoped that the opening of Lomond Trail, provides increased access to all, acting as a valuable asset to the local and wider community and enabling more people to have more connections with the spectacular nature found here.

DUCK BAY TOILETS CAMPAIGN CONTINUES



Last year, following a 25 year absence of functioning public toilets at the busy Duck Bay Picnic Area beside Loch Lomond, the Friends were successful in securing a funding package to deliver temporary toilets from April to October and they were described as 'a game changer' by Alan Cawley of the Cawley Group who own and operate the neighbouring Duck Bay Hotel.

The Friends have stepped in again this year with the provision of temporary toilets at the main Duck Bay car park with funding support from the Park Authority, Argyll & Bute Council, Hannah Stirling Loch Lomond Trust and the Friends of OUR park visitor giving scheme. The Cawley Group have again kindly agreed to sponsor regular daily cleaning and the supply of toiletries and hygiene materials for the heavily used toilets.

Meanwhile, the campaign to secure more permanent toilets and other much needed visitor infrastructure improvements continues. Duck Bay features in the recently completed West Loch Lomondside Visitor Infrastructure Study commissioned by the Park Authority and funded by VisitScotland along with various other sites along the A82 corridor, which is one of the busiest tourist routes in Scotland. Argyll & Bute Council, the site owners, have also recently completed their own series of studies and investigations and have concluded that incorporating any commercial development opportunities in an investment programme at Duck Bay is a non-starter due to extensive flooding at the southern end of the site.

The controversial plans to introduce traffic regulation orders and car parking charges has stalled following strong objections lodged by the Cawley Group and the Friends last year. Alan Cawley of the Cawley Group has confirmed he would still be willing to invest heavily in providing extra free car parking beside the existing car park and Duck Bay Knoll, building new state of the art public toilets, adding signage and quality picnic facilities at this important Loch Lomond gateway site which is enjoyed by over 300,000 visitors each year. It is hoped that some collaborative joint working can unlock the true potential of this site for the benefit of visitors and local residents and the Friends plan to continue to campaign to ensure this happens.

NATIONAL PARKS AND THE FUTURE



Communities, groups and individuals are being invited to share their views in a consultation on the creation of Scotland's first new National Parks in 20 years.

The Scottish Government committed to establish at least one new National Park in Scotland by the end of this Parliamentary session in 2026, as part of the Bute House agreement with the Scottish Green Party and the Programme for Government.

The public consultation is looking at what people value about Scottish National Parks, and what these areas should deliver in future, in particular how they can help to protect and restore nature, tackle climate change and promote sustainable land use. This will be followed by a longer period during which communities, local government and organisations will be encouraged and supported to develop proposals for new Parks.

Biodiversity Minister Lorna Slater visited Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park to open the consultation and speak to pupils at Luss Primary School, who have been involved in a local COP 26 legacy tree-planting project.

Ms Slater said: "It is almost two decades since Scotland's first National Parks in Loch Lomond and The Trossachs and the Cairngorms were established. Both are home to some of the country's most outstanding scenery, are internationally important areas for nature and receive millions of visitors each year. They work hard to tackle the biodiversity and climate crisis, help manage facilities for visitors, promote responsible access and develop sustainable communities. They have become jewels in Scotland's crown, and now is the time to add to them.

"We are committed to establish at least one new National Park in Scotland by the end of this Parliamentary session in 2026. To be able to do this in an open and transparent manner, we need to be able to assess any new area which is to be considered for National Park status against a set of agreed expectations.

"This is where we need your help and ideas. We want to gauge what people want their National Parks to deliver for the environment, culture and the communities within their boundaries. I would strongly encourage everyone to take part and ensure your views are heard and reflected in the shaping of this historic expansion of Scotland's National Parks."

While the short public consultation period has ended we would encourage readers to write to the Minister and local MSPs with views on Scotland's National Parks and future priorities.



NEW STRATHARD FRAMEWORK

A new Land Use and Rural Development Framework has been developed by the National Park Authority, the local community and public agencies to agree a shared vision for the Strathard area, covering Kinlochard, Stronachlachar, Inversnaid and Aberfoyle.

It is the first time that both land use and development planning have been brought together in this way to provide a view of issues and opportunities across the area,

resulting in an agreed pathway to change that should help decarbonise the area over the next 20 years and make this new shared vision a reality.

The Framework is the result of a project led by the National Park Authority that has seen community representatives in Strathard work with public agencies.

Building on existing plans and strategies, the project has engaged a number of local stakeholders to identify priorities to support the ambitions of the community. These include opportunities to:

- *Support Strathard's woodlands and peatlands to act as a carbon sink while also improving the biodiversity of the area;*
- *Use nature-based solutions to manage flooding along the Duchray Water;*
- *Improve and enhance infrastructure and facilities such as active travel routes and new affordable housing; and*
- *Create opportunities for outdoor activity and promote Strathard as an eco-tourism destination alongside a balanced visitor management approach for the area.*

Underpinning the new Framework is a Delivery Plan which sets out 10 partnership projects to deliver on these priorities.

NEW WEST HIGHLAND WAY BRIDGE

A new West Highland Way bridge has been installed near Derrydarroch in memory of Scotland and UK ultra-runner John Kynaston, who sadly passed away in January 2021. John, originally from Liverpool and aged 61 at the time, was a committee member of the West Highland Way Race, one of the world's longest established ultra-marathons. John's family, friends and the ultra-running community organised a crowdfunder to raise £20,000 for the replacement bridge, just north of Beinglas Farm in Loch Lomond & The

Trossachs National Park. The original bridge was washed away in a severe storm in 2019. The project is supported by John's wife Katrina, and his four daughters Jo, Emma, Laura and Hollie. Ian Beattie MBE, West Highland Way Race Director, said: "John was a truly inspirational man, friend and athlete and the whole ultra-running community misses him dearly. He loved the Way and the Race, and we believe this bridge provides fitting tribute to him".





THE SHIP ON THE SLIP

She was the last paddle steamer built in the UK and it's all go at Balloch Pier where volunteers are working hard to return the Maid of The Loch to operation on Loch Lomond. The ship sits on the slipway so the hull can be extensively repaired and after a successful fundraising campaign earlier this Spring, her paddle wheels too will be completely refurbished by the end of this year.

The Ship on the Slip is a unique attraction - where else can you get into an actual shipyard and hear from experienced guides and engineers exactly what is happening?

You can also explore our Historic Steam Winch House and Slipway built in 1902 and still operational to this day and you can discover fascinating stories about Clyde shipbuilding at our Cabin Museum. Both are open every weekend until the end of October (11.00am-4pm) with the Winch House Boiler also regularly 'In Steam'.

You can visit the new onboard 'Chariots of Steam' Exhibition of model ships, all built by Lachie Stewart who won Commonwealth Gold in 1980 in the 10,000m race. If you'd like to experience every area of the ship and see the renovation work in detail, then a bespoke Hard Hat Tour is the one for you.

Free entry to winch house, shipbuilding exhibition museum and slipway. Chariots of Steam exhibition £3 per adult-free for child. Hard Hat tours £15 per adult and £5 for child. Coffee House on the pier – open every day.

For details of special events including steam weekends see www.maidoftheloch.org

BEN LOMOND TREE FELLING PLANS

Forestry and Land Scotland has announced controversial plans to harvest around 125,000 tonnes of timber from the prominent Ptarmigan Forest on the slopes of Ben Lomond. This will have a major visual impact on the classic view of the Ben from West Loch Lomond and the loch itself for many years to come but presents an opportunity to replace a large swathe of conifer trees and replace them with a better mix of woodland. The plans include the retention and regeneration of existing native woodland. Simon Turner, planning forester for Forestry and Land Scotland said: "The Ptarmigan Forest is part of the iconic view of Loch Lomond and has the West

Highland Way running through it. The trees have reached an age and a size where they are at risk of being blown over on the steep slopes and we consider it would be appropriate to move forward with felling these trees in a controlled programme." More information on the plans are available from Forestry and Land Scotland as are the plans for the felling of large areas of larch on the other side of the loch at Cruach Taibert, which is required to help slow the further spread of the tree disease *Phytophthora Ramorum* across the Cowal area of the National Park. For further details please contact enquiries. central@forestryandlandscotland.gov.scot.



LEADERSHIP CENTRE PLANS FOR LOCHSIDE SCRAPPED

The Hunter Foundation recently announced that their ambitious plans for a £10 million Leadership Centre on waste ground at Ross Priory beside the southern shore of Loch Lomond have been dropped in favour of acquiring the Blair Castle and the associated 220 acre Estate in Ayrshire as its new headquarters and home to all of its leadership programmes. The acquisition of the 900 year old Castle will enable the Hunter Foundation to accelerate its work in entrepreneurial scale-ups, head teacher and public sector leadership. The proposed Centre at Ross Priory had received planning consent from the National Park Authority following a rigorous design and assessment programme, despite some local opposition. As part of the plans, it was proposed to create a 'windows on the loch' theatre and some secluded accommodation nearby. The centre would have helped fund the existing historic Ross Priory operation which is run as a recreational and social club by Strathclyde University.

PLEASE SLOW DOWN FOR WILDLIFE

One adult otter, one hedgehog, one brown hare, two badgers and numerous deer - my personal and very sad count of wildlife killed by vehicle collision last month in the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park.

Over recent months, the Save Our Wildlife campaign has gathered new support but during the busy summer months there will be many more wildlife casualties.

Forest Holidays are talking to suppliers, guests and local communities. We supply free, non-branded car window stickers, posters and website logo asking people to "Drive Slowly for Wildlife".

With a growing network of businesses and organisations taking part, we can all help "Save Our Wildlife".

For more information, please contact Pauline.Lynch@forestholidays.co.uk.

Please report all wildlife road casualties at projectsplatter.co.uk/report-roadkill.



Full steam ahead for steamship restoration



The plans to restore the 122-year-old Steamship Sir Walter Scott and get her back plying the waters of Loch Katrine, in the heart of the National Park, later this year have taken a major step forward with the announcement of a £130,000 grant award from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

This award, along with the substantial sum raised from an ongoing public appeal and a series of smaller grant awards from The Hugh Fraser Foundation and Gordon Fraser Charitable Trust, has enabled work to begin to replace decking and the two cracked boilers on the historic Steamship. In recent months bands of enthusiastic volunteers from the Steamboat Association of Great Britain have been busy skilfully stripping out old decking and rubbing down the wheelhouse, handrails, and seats as part of the preparatory work for the fuller £500,000 restoration programme which is anticipated will be completed later this summer.

As part of the latest grant award, funding will be used to greatly reduce the steamship's

carbon emissions using a revolutionary hydrogen and vegetable oil fuel as well as to cater for a wider range of mobility and sensory needs. An exhibition on the story of early tourism and steamships on Loch Katrine together with the involvement of skills trainees recruited locally in the restoration work and operation of steamship are also planned.

MARITIME HERITAGE ASSET

James Fraser, CEO and Trustee of the Steamship Sir Walter Scott Trust, said: "We were delighted to receive confirmation of support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to help restore this important maritime heritage asset, which has brought so much pleasure to millions of people for over 120 years. As a charitable trust we are responsible for protecting and caring for the Steamship for the nation and to ensure current and future generations can continue to enjoy the scenic splendours of Loch Katrine onboard this unique historic vessel."

He added: "The Steamship carries the name of one of Scotland's most famous writers who was inspired to write his blockbuster poem 'The Lady of the Lake' which was published in 1810 and is credited with the birth of Scottish tourism leading to the popularisation of the Trossachs as a tourist destination and the introduction of pleasure boat trips on the loch. It is important we continue to nurture and celebrate this rich cultural heritage and combine it with enabling people to enjoy



the natural wonders of Loch Katrine on the steamship which is a national treasure."

Caroline Clark, Director of The Heritage Fund in Scotland, said: "We are delighted to be backing this project, which not only secures the Sir Walter Scott as a valuable and much-loved heritage asset it also supports it as it charts a course to modern, cleaner steam sailing thanks to the investment in hydrogen and vegetable oil fuel.

"Tremendous community support both locally and from steam enthusiasts across the country has helped this project on its voyage and The Heritage Fund is delighted to be on board."

Local Councillor, Martin Earl commented: "This is a huge project, one that will secure the future of this iconic vessel, make it more accessible and environmentally friendly. This award is well deserved. Everyone involved in the Steamship Trust and this project have helped secure it with their continued commitment and hard work. The Loch Katrine location is a cornerstone of the visitor economy and with the steamship central to that success it is essential it is restored."

Whilst the grant award from the Heritage Fund has been crucial for the appeal, donations are still welcome as the campaign is still to reach its target of £500,000.



CALLANDER VISITORS WELCOME

The community-led Visitor Information Centre is open for a second year in Callander's Main Street, with support from the Friends, local businesses and Callander Community Hydro Fund. Find out all you need to know about Callander and the Trossachs from the people who know it best. More information at www.visitcallander.uk.



The hard work of Cormonachan Community Woodlands Trust, and in particular the Trust's Secretary Dee Locke, has continued to pay dividends with further success in securing funding to conserve the Ancient Semi Natural Woodlands between Lochgoilhead and Carrick Castle and extend the path network, adding to the existing 2.5km of circular paths, car parking, a red squirrel hide and contemplation shelter.

The Trust has raised £253,000 for the ambitious Upper Cormonachan Heritage Paths Project with contributions from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, NatureScot and donations of £18,400 from Lochgoil Community Trust, the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs and other supporters. This project was initially conceived by Liz Evans, Dee's late wife, first Chair of Cormonachan Woodlands Association and Trustee of Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre in September 2017 when, after the formal opening of the new Cormonachan Woodlands car park, she and

CORMONACHAN WOODLANDS PATH FUNDING SECURED

Guy Keating from the National Park walked and surveyed the potential of opening a new path network to the Forest Road, Medieval Settlement and the spectacular Cormonachan Falls with another car park. This was agreed as possible. Sadly, in October 2017, Liz was diagnosed with pancreatic and liver cancer and died on 31 December 2017. She asked Dee to continue with this project and later a memorial 'Contemplation Shelter' at the start of the new 2km path route was built in her memory and opened on 6th June 2018. She was the driving and inspirational force to opening Cormonachan Woodlands for the local community and Ardroy OEC to use.

Four and a half years later, the project has now been funded and will be constructed in the autumn to be completed by 31 December 2022, an appropriate day, five years later. The contractors are McGowan's of Aviemore, specialists in hill and technical land construction.

A82 UPGRADE

A PLEA TO TAKE THE HIGH ROAD TO AVOID AN ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTER ON LOCH LOMONDSIDE

In September 2015, Transport Scotland announced that its preferred route option for upgrading the notorious section of the A82 between Tarbet and Inverarnan would closely follow the line of the existing road which is wedged between the West Highland Railway and the steep fjord like banks of Loch Lomond. A sum of £8 million was allocated for the next stage of design work and there was a target date of 2017 to publish draft orders which came and went.

It wasn't until 2021 that Transport Scotland went public with an interactive "story map" showing a "Low Road" proposal closely following the loch shore with extensive lengths of viaduct bridging bays, unsightly rock cuts and the removal of large areas of ancient oak woodlands. The story map can be seen on the Transport Scotland website.

HADAT's main locus is countryside access. We want to get the best access deal out of the A82 upgrade we can and we don't think a "Low Road" does that. The park already has major issues coping with the demand for parking, camping and picnicking by Loch Lomond, but this proposal will do little to help with any of that. Instead, it will just reduce and damage some the most valuable natural and scenic landscape assets in the National Park – Loch Lomond's irreplaceable broadleaf woodlands and shorelines.

Over 6 million vehicles use the A82 every year and the proposed cycling/pedestrian path will mostly be right next to fast flowing vehicular traffic which is not sensible at a time the Scottish Government is prioritising safe active travel by bike and foot.

We also want to see more benefit for local communities. Ardlui and Tarbet both have serious road safety problems and unrealised potential, but the proposals will do nothing to address road safety, parking and economic regeneration issues in and around these settlements. The local Primary School in Tarbet will still be difficult to access safely.



The Friends would like to upgrade works that were more sympathetic to the natural environment

We propose an alternative "High Road" option which offers the following advantages:

- the special qualities of the ancient oak woods and shoreline will be preserved, allowing wildlife and people to reconnect with the loch margins;
- the old road would continue to carry traffic during the construction period and afterwards would be available as a delightful walking and cycling route (saving time and money as no cycle way would need to be built);
- the old road would continue to be available for access to properties and businesses;
- the Three Lochs Way could be linked to the West Highland Way at Inverarnan, facilitating a long wished for 'Round Loch Lomond' walking route;
- fewer engineering problems accommodating existing buildings and infrastructure;
- Tarbet and Ardlui would be by-passed by heavy traffic as would isolated dwellings along the route, improving quality of life for residents and alleviating road safety issues at Arrochar Primary School;
- the higher, straighter route will be faster and safer than any loch side route could ever be;
- the new road would afford stunning views of Loch Lomond and it would quickly become a 'must do' journey;
- native woodland plantings along the new road will soon mask any scarring and improve impoverished biodiversity.

Recent changes on the A82 near the Pulpit Rock have permanently damaged the lochshore. Sadly, much more of this is being promised.

John Urquhart, in his role as Convener of Helensburgh & District Access Trust (HADAT) led a delegation to the National Park Authority Board earlier this year to set out the case for them to lobby Transport Scotland to re-think their controversial plans for the £150 million upgrade of the A82 between Tarbet and Inverarnan. Here he briefly describes the scheme and sets out the case for an alternative new high road.

We have discovered that Transport Scotland instructed their consulting engineers, Jacobs Fairhurst, to base their recommendations on something called the "Design Manual for Roads and Bridges" (DMRB), rather than the much more rigorous "Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance" (STAG) system, which is normally used for such major projects. With the cost of the A82 upgrade likely to increase to over £200 million by the time it is built, it is hard to understand how such a fundamental error could have been made. The STAG approach would have examined the costs and benefits of both schemes while the DMRB assessment is only concerned with basic engineering matters. We believe this is an environmental disaster waiting to happen.

We are arguing for a delay until an independent body can carry out a Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) exercise to allow a proper cost/benefit analysis to be done on the two options, including an assessment of the cost of the years of traffic hold ups that will be caused by the low road option. As well as the cost of viaducts and bridges along the shoreline and over deep water we want to see account taken of the cost of environmental damage to the ancient oak woodlands, the shoreline and the peace and quiet on the Loch. We also want to see a serious effort made to evaluate the high road benefits we have identified.

We recognise that a reappraisal will delay things, but this will be the single largest investment ever in the National Park - a once in a lifetime opportunity which should not be missed - decisions over it should not be hurried. Money is clearly going to be tight in the short to medium term, so delaying the project might be an attractive option for hard pressed policy makers.

HADAT's "High Road" proposal (North and South)





THE OAK TREE INN BALMAHA LOCH LOMOND

Muddy Boots Welcome



The Oak Tree Inn is an award winning pub and restaurant, on the West Highland Way in the beautiful loch side village of Balmaha. Great Scottish food and drink, plus accommodation. Village Shop, St Mocha Coffee Shop & Ice Cream Parlour and loch cruises.

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DISCOVER DRYMEN



I am pleased the Friends were one of the first funders to step forward to help achieve a series of improvements in the attractive square in the village centre of Drymen, which is a popular focal point for residents and visitors. Drymen Community Council matched the Friends £1,000 donation which, in turn, helped secure over £16,000 of NatureScot funding, allowing Drymen Community Development Trust to resurface badly potholed parking bays with stone setts and, with other funders, supported the introduction of a new village website (drymen.org) and an interesting heritage trail.

The quality of the heritage trail, which starts at the square, is very impressive and has been developed by locals who have a great knowledge of the village history and of specific buildings. A map helps guide people along the route, with links to audio story podcasts on the new website recorded by residents. This new interactive trail will allow locals and visitors to discover the rich history of Drymen in an easily accessible way.

Meanwhile, the National Park awarded the Development Trust a £28,000 grant as part of their Green Recovery Fund, to refurbish the bus

Paul Saunders, a Friends Trustee and Chair of Drymen Development Trust, describes some of the great work that has been going on to improve this attractive conservation village and to make visitors more welcome.

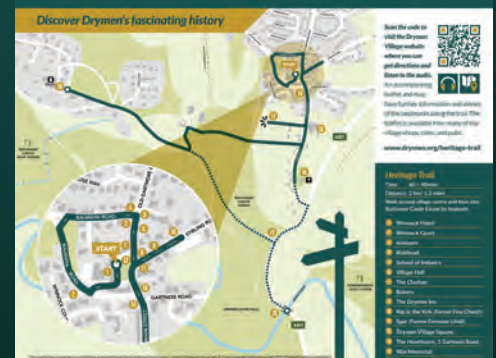
shelter at the square. Solar panels were introduced to power lighting inside the shelter and an e-bike charging station alongside it. There is also bike maintenance equipment and a mural celebrating the start of the Rob Roy Way, a long-distance trail that begins at Drymen and ends at Pitlochry in the Perthshire Highlands.

Active travel was at the heart of all these developments, with the Development Trust also introducing a new cycling meanders group with several residents trained as leaders. RSPB Scotland created new information panels specifically for Drymen. These panels, displayed by the Square, show the birds likely to be seen in the village and at the nearby Loch Lomond National Nature Reserve each season of the year. There is also a helpful map, replacing an outdated one.

The Development Trust also requested Stirling Council improve and extend the pavements in the square area, with the results a much safer and better-looking village centre. The Trust and Drymen Community Council are now seeking to introduce public toilets to the village to cater to the ever-increasing number of visitors on foot and bike, following Stirling Council's ending the previously successful Comfort Scheme in partnership with the Winnock Hotel.



Drymen Heritage Trail



Drymen Heritage Trail, is a walk back in time to discover Drymen's fascinating history, brought to life with short podcasts.

Through locations in the village, visitors can discover the village's history through a series of short podcasts.



ECHOES OF THE PAST

ON EAST COWAL'S TRAILS



*Puck, the mischievous sprite from Shakespeare's **Midsummer Night's Dream**, would be suitably impressed by the idyllic Argyll woodland trail that bears his name. Puck's Glen, just a five-minute drive from Dunoon with its ferry links to Greenock and Gourock, is one of a number of historical and natural landmarks that form part of the recently launched East Cowal Heritage Outdoors (ECHO) trails. Dotted around a small peninsula that forms part of the spectacular Cowal area of the National Park, the ECHO trails and landmarks represent an effective 'packaging' of an area that really could lay claim to being a geographical and geological gateway to the Scottish Highlands.*

Accessed by both foot passenger and car ferries, as well as by car through the stunning Rest & Be Thankful mountain pass, east Cowal comprises of a number of small settlements including Kilmun, Ardentinny, Strone, Blairmore and Lochgoilhead and loops around the banks of Holy Loch and Lochs Long, Goil and Eck.

This is an area that has played a pivotal role in the moulding of Scotland through the ages with early Christian faith playing a part alongside some truly gruesome clan rivalries.

Lush Habitat

The gorge that Puck's Glen meanders through was developed by the Laird of Benmore, James Duncan, in the 1870s. The 2.8km walkway, categorised as a strenuous trail, is an enchanting and mystical journey through a lush habitat that is rich in mosses and ferns and punctuated with delightful waterfall after delightful waterfall. It also showcases the finest aspects of the Argyll Forest, the UK's oldest managed forest dating back to the 1930s. Just down the road in Kilmun there is a clearly signposted arboretum with a number of trails of differing length and challenge that features trees from five different continents. A showroom, if you like, for the forest as a whole but one that reflects the international roots associated with Argyll and this corner of Cowal specifically.

There's Elizabeth Blackwell for starters. Starter of a revolution in the field of healthcare as well as being a social reformer and genuine changemaker. She forged a path in the mid 19th century as one of the first female doctors in the world, opening up opportunities for millions of women ever since and breaking down barriers wherever she worked in the US, France and across the UK.

Elizabeth was laid to rest just a few yards beyond the arboretum at St Munns Church, now home to the Historic Kilmun community and heritage organisation. It also hosts Faith in Cowal, an organisation that established a number of popular pilgrimage trails across the entirety of the Cowal peninsulas.

A wealth of local stories are to be found at this church-come-museum, with visitors exploring Kilmun's fascinating heritage as well as the resting place for countless dukes and clan chiefs.



Kilmun Church



Lauder Monument dedicated to John Lauder, the son of Sir Harry Lauder



PIER PRESSURE

Further on, the A880 coast road, pier pressure begins to tell with Kilmun, Strone and Blairmore's marine promontories piercing the shoreline of the Holy Loch. All date back to the Victorian era when this part of the world became the 'go to' place for thousands of Glaswegians. They still do but are now joined by visitors from across the UK and much further afield enticed by that mystical grip that Scotland's lochs and mountains exert on the human soul.

Further on, the village of Ardentinny has a wealth of history and nature to draw the visitors in. From the beach, a wild camping magnet for responsible campervanners with a network of different walks, to the Dun Daraich stone age fort that's all but hidden from sight.

From here, overlooking the Coulport nuclear submarine base, there's a 4-mile shoreline walk to the 17th Century Carrick Castle, another site resonant in conflict as a focal point for the many grisly feuds between the Campbell and the Lamont clans. Time it right and you'll be able to get the minibus back!

Follow the road over to the Whistlefield Inn and you'll be rewarded with some truly iconic vistas over Loch Eck. It's money shot after money shot for those photographers with a fondness for exquisite natural compositions... as well as a decent pint and quality food in what is a supremely located, 17th Century drover's inn! It's up there with the Clachaig in Glencoe and the Sligachan on Skye as Scotland's finest hostelrys

LAUDER MONUMENT

Turn right here onto the A815 and you'll soon be at Lauder Monument, an impressively positioned shrine to John Lauder, a victim of World War One and son of Harry Lauder who purchased the Glenbranter estate in 1916. Harry was an international superstar at the turn of the 20th Century, performing all over the world and becoming the highest paid entertainer on the planet. Glenbranter, just beyond the conclusion of Loch Eck, also offers a range of paths for all abilities that snake their way through a vibrant forestscape.

Head back towards Dunoon past the exquisite, picture postcard Coylet Inn and you'll soon be back at Puck's Glen but not before coming across the fantastic Benmore Gardens. It's a large botanical paradise spread across the foothills of Beinn Mhòr and a heavenly haven for anyone with a passion for plants in their myriad forms.

There are 20 key locations within the ECHO Trails (all featured on a free to download app) along with countless woodland walks, hikes and cycling trails across this small part of a small part of Argyll but there may as well be hundreds. There is so much to see and do in what is a microcosm of everything Scottish Highlands... but a wee bit closer to home.

When describing the humans entering his woodland fairy realm, Puck utters one of his most famous lines, "What fools these mortals be". You'll beg to differ. Spend a few days exploring this forested and loch-fringed world and you'll be feeling far from foolish ...and decidedly pucker!



The East Cowl Heritage Outdoors (ECHO)

Trail project highlights and showcases the rich heritage and spectacular scenery of the east Cowl peninsula. It is an ambitious endeavour aimed at revitalising the outdoor trails and heritage sites in the area.

The intention is to encourage people to visit the heritage sites all around them. It not only targets visitors but also looks to increase the sense of involvement and ownership by the local communities.

The first step was to identify heritage sites and devise suitable walking trails, which is the purpose of their website - echotrails.org.

The next steps involved exploring ways of bringing local people; contemporary and traditional skills; and cultural, natural & built heritage together. We aim to connect our local communities and their visitors with the rich and ongoing history of the places and landscapes to which we belong.

Why not become an ECHO Trails blazer today and uncover over 3000 years of human history as well as some of the most impressive vistas on Scotland's west coast.

To find out more about the regularly updated landmarks, places of interest and the many walks on the ECHO Trails please visit www.echotrails.org. You can also download the free "ECHO Trails" app from your app store.



echotrails.org



Future Nature is now

Dominic Hall, Future Nature Development Manager, at Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority



There is growing recognition and understanding that we are facing not only a climate crisis, but also a nature crisis, with biodiversity declining faster than at any time in human history.

Every bit as concerning as climate change, the rapid decline in biodiversity impacts every part of our lives. Nature provides oxygen, water and food and is crucial for our economy and our climate.

Protected areas like National Parks are not immune to this global crisis and even here in Loch Lomond and The Trossachs, nature as a whole is in real trouble.

Pressures from over-grazing, pollution, invasive non-native species and a rapidly changing climate mean that many of the National Park's iconic habitats and species are in danger.



Despite our collective efforts to date, vitally important native woodlands are under-represented in the Park and up to 10,000 hectares of peatlands are degraded and emitting greenhouse gases.

Such is the decline in biodiversity here, and across the world, that it is no longer enough just to protect nature. What we need now is bold, systemic change on a landscape scale that will not only halt the decline but reverse it and restore nature.

In 2020 the National Park Authority committed to its Mission Zero plan as a direct response to the climate emergency. We are now making the same level of commitment to addressing the nature crisis.

Future Nature is our ambitious new strategic vision for restoring biodiversity and the natural environment across Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park.



Ultimately, we are striving for a resilient, nature-rich National Park, where abundant wildlife and a healthy natural environment provide a wealth of benefits through an extensive, well-connected living network of natural habitats.

Our Future Nature vision



We will collaborate with partners and stakeholders to publish a full Future Nature route map which will describe in detail how we will work as a Park Authority and in partnership with others to deliver this vision.

Work is already underway to expand delivery of nature restoration initiatives, building on the success of existing projects such as The Great Trossachs Forest – one of the largest nature reserves in the UK.

A shift in land use will be crucial - away from activities and conditions that erode nature and contribute towards climate change, towards supporting land managers to actively restore nature and climate.

Increased management of wild deer populations and also livestock in some parts of our uplands will be key to this, as they can negatively impact on the ability of forests and peatlands to regenerate.



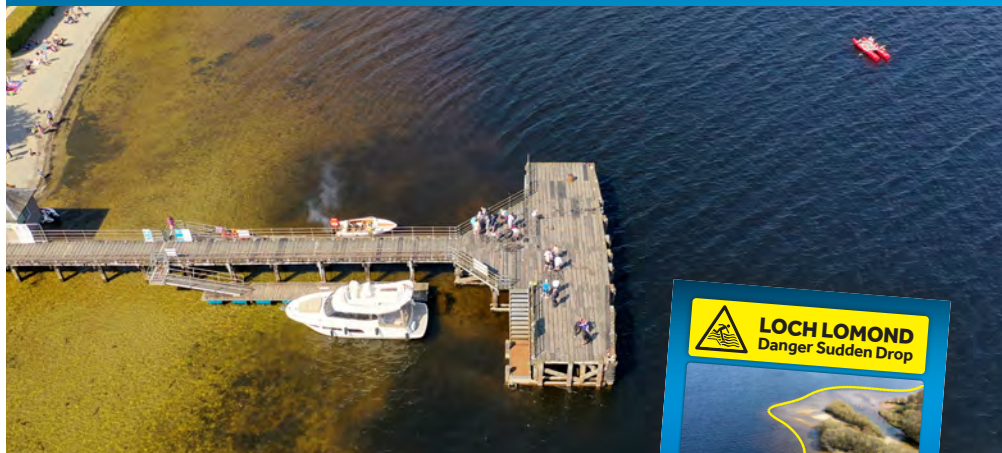
Support will be required for our rural economy and communities to transition to a place where there is better balance between our food production needs and those life-support systems so crucial for nature and climate.

There will be an emphasis on up-scaling efforts to work at landscape scale, mainstreaming nature into planning and development and providing clear calls to action to show how everyone can help.

Now is the time for ambitious action and Scotland's National Parks can be at the forefront of tackling the nature crisis.

Water safety in the National Park

The National Park Authority is urging visitors to keep themselves safe by knowing the risks, even if they aren't planning to go into the water.



A focused campaign has begun to raise awareness of water safety advice among people spending time by lochs and rivers in the National Park.

The Water Incident Database (WAID) figures from 2021 show that there were 58 accidental water-related fatalities in Scotland last year.

Leigh Hamilton, Ranger Service Manager, said: "We know from experience that those people who aren't coming to take part in a specific water activity like swimming or kayaking, are less likely to be aware of the quite specific risks that apply to our lochs.

"Going into a loch is very different to going into the sea, where the water gradually gets deeper. Lochs often get deep suddenly with steep drops close to the shore. Lochs are also very, very cold, even on a warm June weekend and cold water shock can be life threatening.

"Tell your friends about the steep drops close to shore and the risk of cold water shock even for experienced swimmers. If you have teenagers heading out to the Park with friends make sure they know these risks and that if someone in their group gets into difficulty, they should call 999 and ask for the Police."

A programme of enhanced water safety measures has been rolled out by the National Park Authority ahead of this summer, including:

- installation of new water safety signage and public rescue equipment (PRE) at key visitor sites
- waterside responder training for people working around loch shores
- education materials and in-school sessions for young people in surrounding schools
- a programme of weekend water safety information events at popular waterside locations including Luss, Balloch and Milarrochy Bay

The Park Authority is also working with local authorities, landowners and businesses to identify popular water sites they own or manage where safety signage and equipment can be improved. On the shores of Balloch Park and the River Leven area, 25 new Public Rescue Equipment stations and location signs have been installed.

Scan code for water safety advice or visit: www.lochlomond-trossachs.org/watersafety







LOCH LOMOND ARMS HOTEL





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SUPPORT FOR VISITOR MANAGEMENT ACTION

LUSS ESTATES is investing over £50,000 in visitor management initiatives in 2022. This includes funding the ongoing role of Luss Community Warden as well as contributions to support the Friends of Loch Lomond's A82 bin scheme and wardens, provision of public toilets in Luss and Arrochar and regular litter picks. In collaboration with the GRAB Trust (Group for Recycling in Argyll & Bute) a litter picking station has been installed on Luss Beach and will be maintained by Luss Estates. In addition to this Luss Estates is continuing with monthly litter picks from May to November and associated disposal costs.

In drawing up visitor management plans Luss Estates has worked closely with Luss and Arden Community Council through the 'Luss Summits', chaired by Jackie Baillie MSP. The aim of these meetings has been to try and address the visitor management issues faced in and around Luss Village and to work with relevant stakeholders on a coordinated and considered response.

The 'Luss Summits' were initiated as a result of lobbying by Luss & Arden Community Council and Luss Estates Company following two years of unacceptable anti-social behaviour and extreme levels of littering. The meetings are attended by Argyll & Bute Council, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs

National Park, the Police, Friends of Loch Lomond, Luss Estates Company and Luss & Arden Community Council.

One of the key outcomes of the Luss Summits is that Argyll & Bute Council and Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park have agreed to contribute £18,000 to help fund a second warden in Luss Village. A number of local businesses and the Friends have also agreed to contribute a total of £7,500 enabling this to become a second full time warden position.

Simon Miller commented: "We warmly welcome visitors to Luss and the surrounding area and are heavily committed to supporting local visitor management initiatives and taking direct action ourselves. We are privileged to have the stunning natural beauty of Loch Lomond. We urge all visitors to treat the community and the environment with the respect it deserves and dispose of their litter in a responsible manner."



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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday, 2nd July

LUSS HIGHLAND GAMES

1pm in Luss Village
 Come along and enjoy one of Scotland's oldest Highland Games events.
 Further details are at www.lusshighlandgames.co.uk

Saturday, 16th July

LOCH LOMOND HIGHLAND GAMES

Located in Balloch, the Loch Lomond Highland Games is one of Scotland's traditional highland games which attracts people from all over the world.
 Further details are at www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk

Saturday 23rd July

BALQUHIDDER, LOCHEARNHEAD & STRATHYRE HIGHLAND GAMES

10am at Lochearnhead.
 Experience a traditional highland games which has run for over 200 years.
 Further details are at www.lochearnheadhighlandgames.co.uk

Wednesday 3rd August

KILLIN HIGHLAND GAMES

10am at Breadalbane Park, Killin
 Enjoy a great day out at Killin Highland Games.
 Further details are at www.killingames.co.uk

Thurs 25th - Sat 27th August

THE COWAL HIGHLAND GATHERING, DUNOON

Join around 23,000 people who attend this event each year to enjoy highland dancing, pipe bands, international heavy athletics and other entertainment.
 Further information at www.cowalgathering.com

Sat 17th & Sun 18th September

SCOTTISH WILD FOOD FESTIVAL

Tir na nOg Holistic Centre, Nr Drymen
 This event encourages people to go outdoors to learn about local wild food and will involve foraging and lots of different experiences to suit everyone's tastes, all in beautiful surroundings.
 Further information at www.scottishwildfoodfestival.co.uk

30th September - 2nd October

THE CALLANDER JAZZ & BLUES FESTIVAL

Come along to the largest rural Jazz & Blues festival in Scotland. This year's event will feature over 60 gigs across 16 venues.
 Further information at www.callanderjazzandblues.com

Sunday 27th November

CHRISTMAS AT ROSS PRIORY

Begin your festive celebrations with a popular Friends informal gathering at Ross Priory. More details will be published in the autumn edition of Voice, but our annual reception is worth pencilling into your diary now



THE FOREST FOR A THOUSAND YEARS

The site was acquired by the Royal Scottish Forestry Society (RSFS) in 1996 With help from the Millennium Forest for Scotland Trust. The long-term aim is "to demonstrate the restoration and regeneration of Scotland's native woods through sound forestry practice for the benefit of the public." The footpath network provides public access to use the site for leisure activities.

ORIGINS

In 1996, the Royal Scottish Forestry Society decided it would create a native working Scottish forest.

Cashel Farm is a former hill farm located within the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park. Cashel extends to some 3,000 acre on the eastern side of Loch Lomond. The property rises from shore level to 580 metres, and therefore can represent most of the different woodland types which are native to Scotland following the last ice age.

DEVELOPMENT OF CASHEL

Between 1997 and 2005 around 300Ha of Native Broadleaves and Scots Pine were established together with a path network to facilitate access. The developing forest now provides a potential framework for many other activities, and mirroring the dynamic nature of woodland growth, Cashel Forest Trust is looking at developing the site further.

An Integrated Land Management Plan (ILMP) was developed in 2017 in partnership with the National Park, and this has provided a basis for access to grant support from the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP), as well as a stocktake of Cashel's many assets and suggestions for how these could be used to improve the financial, social and environmental sustainability of the project. The Trustees are currently exploring how best to take forward these ideas.



CASHEL FOREST

A LOCH LOMONDSIDE NATURAL TREASURE TROVE

Cashel Native Forest (Cashel) is a hidden gem, one of the most beautiful undiscovered attractions in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park.

Here we explore Cashel through the words and lens of well-known photographer Paul Saunders who is also a Trustee of the Friends

Located on the eastern shores of Loch Lomond, just north of Balmaha, Cashel comprises 1200 hectares of a former sheep farm. In 1996, the farm was acquired by the Royal Scottish Forestry Society with funds from the Millennium Forest Trust to deliver on their ambitious plan to create a new native forest for Scotland.

Twenty-five years on, Cashel Forest Trust looks after 300 acres of ancient and restored native woodland, home to a rich diversity of wildlife, including adders, red squirrels, and badgers. Last year they received NatureScot funding to support a seasonal ranger to assist with the site's management, given the unprecedented pressures faced during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Emma Sandhu saw the job advertised and visited Cashel to have a quick walk to check it out. Emma's walk lasted five hours, taking in many of the paths and habitats, marvelling at the richness of the wildlife whilst falling deeper and deeper in love with the place.

Having been successful in getting that temporary job, Emma's focus was to raise the profile, gather a group of conservation volunteers and work with a host of groups from a wide variety of backgrounds, including many harder to reach visitors.





NEW VISITORS

Through these initiatives, new visitors to Cashel included Glasgow mental health charity Flourish House, the Vale of Leven Academy's Additional Support Unit, the Forest Therapy Institute, and the National Park's junior rangers.

I am pleased that further funding was secured by Cashel to allow Emma to continue her excellent work this year. Longer-term, it will require an increase in visitor numbers to be able to help fund future ranger support at this location. A new pay and display car park and a series of events to improve awareness and raise funds are helping.

A day parking pass for Cashel is £3. However, whilst the nearby honeypots of East Loch Lomond often have full car parks, Cashel's car park rarely reaches capacity. Its visitor centre has two free of charge accessible toilets.

There is a network of 5 circular walking paths leading from the visitor centre. These are well-made and maintained footpaths, with picnic benches and many outstanding viewpoints scattered along the trails.

The Pine Path, also known as Grand Lomond View, has similarly stunning elevated views of Loch Lomond and cluster

of islands as nearby Conic Hill, but without the enormous crowds that its more famous neighbour attracts.

The Ardyle oakwood at Cashel is an ancient woodland site that was managed to produce oak timber for the textile industry along east Loch Lomond and at Balloch. Though the site is ancient, the oak trees are only 200-300 years old, and due to the way they were planted, they are too close together to maintain a healthy woodland structure.

CANOPY GAPS

It may seem paradoxical to be felling old trees to look after a woodland, but that's what the Ardyle wood needs now. When trees are felled, it opens a gap in the canopy, allowing light through to the forest floor to enable the regeneration and establishment of young trees.

With a recent donation from the Friends, they have been able to fence off an enclosure in the Ardyle wood where felling has taken place. This enclosure will protect any natural regeneration from deer and allow them to plant new trees to actively restore the depleted woodland understorey, creating a high-quality woodland habitat with trees at all life stages.

It is good to see that the population of red squirrels along the crucial Highland

Ranger, Emma Sandhu visited Cashel after seeing a job advertised and fell love with the place

Boundary Line is generally increasing, and the Friends are working with the Trustees of Cashel to help fund a new squirrel hide. A potential location has been identified, and we are keen to support it through funds raised through 'Our Park' visitor giving scheme by business supporters such as St Mocha Coffee Shop, Duff Christmas Tree Farm and Cruise Loch Lomond.

As well as another way of supporting red squirrels in the National Park, a new hide will also help attract visitors and allow them to enjoy this stunning forest and allow Cashel to become more sustainable.

As we've seen with the Trossachs Trail, there is an important job to be done in helping to disperse visitors more evenly across the National Park to avoid the problems experienced at the most popular locations. As in Cashel's case, there can be a stunning location that is not as well-known as others and therefore be very quiet whilst its neighbour suffers from too many visitors. Cashel seems the perfect solution to help disperse visitors throughout East Loch Lomond.

Photography by Paul Saunders



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PHYTOPHTHORA RAMORUM TO CHANGE COWAL LANDSCAPE

One of Forestry and Land Scotland's tree specialists explains why there is going to be a dramatic change in the forest landscape in Argyll Forest.

Phytophthora ramorum is a tree disease affecting larch that has been prevalent in South West Scotland for many years, with sporadic outbreaks elsewhere in Scotland. It can't be eradicated. The only way to slow the rate of spread is to fell the infected trees and those surrounding them. Felling operations and site closures are ongoing in order to remove infected trees and reduce the risk of spread to other woodlands in Cowal and Argyll. Felling operations mean certain areas and paths throughout Corlarach Forest, Benmore Forest, Puck's Glen and Kilmun Arboretum will be closed to the public for safety reasons. Areas that are closed change frequently throughout the works and we often need to close multiple areas at the same time. If you are planning to visit, we recommend checking online first to make sure the wood you plan to visit is open. Our response to Phytophthora ramorum will not result in long-term deforestation. Felled areas will be replanted but depending on the species chosen, some sites might be left fallow for three years. This is to reduce the likelihood of a particular insect pest from attacking newly planted trees. Surveys are carried out to identify new infected areas and once confirmed Statutory

Plant Health Notices (SPHNs) are issued requiring the felling of infected larch stands and susceptible hosts within a 250 metre buffer zone, within a specified period. Felling of larch and other trees affected by the Statutory Plant Health Notice has been approved by Scottish Forestry. Although we were already working to deal with the felling required in 24 SPHNs, the end of 2021 saw us served with a further 17 SPHNs relating to approximately 50 infections. These new infections were found across Cowal, from Corlarach Forest in the south west to Glen Loin, near Arrochar, in the north east. Scottish Forestry (the Regulator for the forest industry in Scotland, which also has responsibility for tree health issues) introduced two new zones in response to the spread of the disease over the last couple of years. The Risk Reduction Zone (RRZ) covering most of Cowal recognises that the disease is present in most woodlands, and allows a longer time period for felling larch trees. The Priority Action Zone (PAZ) covers the area from Glen Croe (Arrochar) eastwards, in which the disease is currently limited to localised outbreaks. Felling of larch in this zone should be carried out much more quickly to minimise the further spread of the disease, therefore

will be the focus of FLS felling as and when SPHNs are served in this zone. All felled areas will be replanted with a range of species, except larch, to maintain the visual diversity of the forest, which is such a hallmark of the Cowal landscape. This will be an opportunity to introduce a wider range of native species, however given that the average age of the trees being felled is around 40 years old these newly-planted trees will take decades to have the same visual impact. We will work on the removal of infected larch trees as SPHNs are served on us and aim to fell additional larch areas over the next four years to reduce the potential for infection in this area. To achieve this increased felling, new forest roads will need to be built, as well as existing forest roads upgraded and harvesting facilities constructed. We appreciate that this will have a big impact on the landscape and recreation facilities but we are working on replanting plans that will reduce the visual impact as much as possible. Visitor trails will only be closed when there is no other option and will be reopened as soon as is practically possible. You will find more information on the tree disease and an information video on our website at www.tinyurl.com/yu2a6me9.

Any sightings of suspect larch should be reported to enquiries.central@forestryandland.gov.scot. We have ongoing obligations to manage regeneration of larch and Rhododendron for three years following an SPHN. Argyll Forest visitor information: www.forestryandland.gov.scot/visit/forest-parks/argyll-forest-park

Forestry and Land Scotland | Coilltearachd agus Fearann Alba

Larch Disease in Argyll Forest Park

Tree Felling
Statutory Plant Health Notices mean we will have to fell, and will continue to fell infected larch trees to try and prevent the spread of this disease.
The timber we cut may still be useful for construction, fencing, panel products and so on.
When we have finished the larch felling here the forest will be able to start to recover and will be managed under the normal forest management techniques. We appreciate you working with us and your patience whilst this work has been ongoing.

Disease Facts
Phytophthora ramorum is a fungus like infection that affects more than 150 plant species, including Rhododendron and Blueberry. It's especially destructive on larch trees and has the potential of killing many of the Argyll Forest Park larch within a year of infection.
Phytophthora ramorum is not harmful to humans or animals.
Infected larch needles produce spores that are carried by the wind in the mist and rain drops. This, together with soil on footwear, wheels and animals, spreads disease to other plants in other areas.
There's no cure - but felling infected trees helps control disease spread.

Nature bounces back
Nature is resilient. Forests have adapted to large disturbance by wind, fire, disease or insect attack from time to time. Woodland Ecosystems are good at repairing themselves. Felled areas will soon start to green up. We'll be replanting and using natural regeneration too, with a greater mix of broad-leaves and conifers than before.
The felled sites might look untidy for a time, but the wood and branches we've left provide valuable habitats and nutrients for new trees and other plants.
Wildlife still has a home. It looks dramatic - but we've only felled a small percentage of the whole forest.

We're dealing with other tree diseases too
Phytophthora ramorum isn't our only tree health issue in Scotland, we've also been dealing with Dothistroma needle blight in pine forests and other diseases too.
Tree diseases move around the world. It's not new - but climate change is one likely reason why foresters across the world are tackling an increasing number of tree health issues at once.
Forests are adaptable and resilient and because of this Argyll Forest Park has a great future.

For more information
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A LONG WALK IN THE PARK

THREE DAYS ON THE HILL

In the latest in a series of articles covering some of the best walks in and around the National Park, Alistair McIntyre vividly describes the flora and fauna he came across on this three-day hike.

GLORIOUS SUNNY WEATHER in late March tempted me to make up for lost time and get back onto the hills. I cycled along the forestry road that snakes its way from Coilessan, above Loch Long, into the heart of the rugged tract of country known as Argyll's Bowling Green. Leaving the bike near the road, I then took to the historic old track known as the Duke's Road. This climbs uphill from Mark, Loch Long, crosses the lower slopes of the hill known as the Saddle, then slopes diagonally down towards Lochgoilhead. It was a well-used route until the late 18th century, but today lies neglected and forgotten.



Alistair's route to Corran Loch (in red)

Having reached the high point of the old track, I then cut down towards the tiny Corran Lochan, where I planned to have a leisurely late lunch. I traversed a wide expanse of heather moor, which looks a perfect place for grouse, yet I've never once seen any hint of their presence hereabouts. Shortly before reaching the lochan, I arrived at a modern track called the Duke's Road. This probably converges with the line of the original route of that name as both slant down towards Lochgoilhead. Arriving at the shallow weedy northern end of the lochan, the water was boiling with activity, which I initially thought might be due to small trout, until I discerned amphibian heads popping up. My guess was that these were toads rather than frogs, as in my experience, most frogs have gone through their breeding cycle by this time, but I couldn't be certain.

TOADS ON THE MOVE

I parked myself down just where sloping ground reaches a level area of short grassy sward by the water's edge. Enjoying my picnic in the sunshine, I suddenly saw a curious bundle of movement out of the corner of my eye. This turned out to be a female toad with a smaller male clamped firmly to her back. Progress was slow - a couple of feet, then a pause before the next stage. They were evidently heading for the lochan, and I thought of helping them on their way, but then decided they knew best. After about quarter of an hour, they

reached the water's edge, and I walked over to see the double act swimming off. This is a deeper part of the lochan, but in the clear water, I could see many toads swimming around - toad heaven!

Bird-wise, I've spotted pairs of red-throated diver here in the past, as well as the occasional teal, but this time I could see only a male and female mallard paddling sedately along. Suddenly another male appeared, precipitating a burst of spectacular fly-pasts by all three, before they landed and splashed about frenetically. Finally, the intruder had to admit defeat, and harmony once more returned. All this while I was sitting tight, time and again the proven best way to observe wildlife.

The following day saw me on the Fairy Hill (Cruach an t-Sithean), which might be termed a western outlier of the Luss group of mostly rolling hills. At 684 metres, it sits right on the edge of the National Park, and my approach was from Glenmullan Bridge, by the shores of Loch Long. The hill is characterised by a long ridge rising gradually from Glen Douglas to a distinctive cone-shaped summit at the far (south) end. Traditionally, the "Wee Folk" were often associated with mounds or hillocks of a particular form, and I've often wondered if it was the shape of the summit that led to the name.



Argyll's Bowling Green

Toad heaven!

EARLY NESTER

On this occasion, my route took me straight up the hill to the top, and as I plodded on, I caught the distinctive deep croak of a raven. Nothing was visible, until at length I saw a pair briefly soaring the summit before they vanished behind it. Still the croaking continued, more spirited than before, and I marvelled at just how far-carrying is the call of this largest member of the crow family. Then no fewer than five of them appeared. All seemed fairly amicable, and I wondered if this was a family group, after all, the raven is a very early nester.

I also found myself pondering just how such a large bird manages to make a living in terrain like this. The stocking density of sheep seems low, and carcasses must be few and far between. There are few wild animals up here, save for red deer. The last time I spotted mountain hares on these hills was around 2010, and while there used to be rabbits on the lower ground, these are long gone. Up here, bird life can be elusive, and save for the ravens, I saw only one or two meadow pipits. However, the raven, like all corvids, is extremely intelligent, and obviously more than manages to survive. I recently had a fresh insight into just how versatile corvids are. My garden forms part of the territory of a pair of carrion crows, and I recently witnessed one catching and devouring toads from my garden pond on three separate occasions. A scrap of warty

skin and some stringy toad spawn on the bank underlined that toads had indeed been the target.

Having got the bit between my teeth, the third day was centred upon another member of the Luss group of hills, namely Ben a' Mhanaich, which translates as the Monk's Hill. At 709 metres, it is on nodding terms with both the Saddle and the Fairy Hill, and like the latter, sits at the edge of the National Park. My approach was by way of the Strone ridge, which climbs up gradually from the top end of Glen Fruin. There is a good path, and it must be one of the easiest of these hills to surmount. The route initially took me through a stretch of new conifer plantation, and here I saw a buzzard soaring over, and was hopeful of a variety of bird life higher up, though it was not until a couple of skylarks burst into that glorious song of spring that the silence was broken. Other than that, only a couple of meadow pipits were seen.

BOG POOLS

Bodies of standing water, large or small, have always fascinated me, and I made a short detour to examine one or two high level bog pools. The sight of some frog spawn was the reward. I marvel at just how hardy frogs must be, to brave such a harsh and exposed environment.

The summit of Ben a' Mhanaich is unusual in that it coincides with a basaltic dyke, and indeed the summit cairn is composed of this rock. One of the plants I hoped to

find here was the purple saxifrage, and I wasn't disappointed. One of our mountain glories, it is surely the earliest species to flower. A remarkable plant, it is known as the highest flowering species of the Alps, being found at over 14,000 feet, and is about the most northerly occurring flowering plant, having been spotted at some 83 degrees north, on an island off Greenland. It is not unknown elsewhere on the Luss hills, and John Mitchell, in his book "Loch Lomondside", refers to its presence on a hill forming part of the headwall of Glen Finlas. As he points out, it is a lover of lime-rich terrain, and I would wonder if the basaltic rock on Ben a' Mhanaich provides a base-rich flush.

As I looked at the purple saxifrage, I was astonished to see a tree bumblebee feeding on it. This species was unknown in the UK before 2001, but its spread since then has been nothing short of phenomenal. Only the other year, Friends Vice-Chair John showed me a colony which had commandeered a nestbox at his house, and I've seen a number in my own garden. There were a number of other large bumblebees around, but as they weren't for hanging around, I couldn't be sure of identification.

This hill is known as providing an outstanding viewpoint, but on my visit, the vistas were somewhat hazy. I had my lunch there, and in the warm sunshine, it was hard to drag myself away. Considering it was a Sunday afternoon, I was surprised to see only one other walker on the hill.



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Family run inn on east side of Loch Lomond adjacent to WHW, serving good food all day with bunk, standard and deluxe accommodation available

• THE WINNOCK HOTEL

The Square, Drymen, Loch Lomond, G63 0BL
Tel: 01360 660 245
email: info@winnockhotel.com
www.winnockhotel.com

The Winnock Hotel in Drymen is the perfect choice for everything from a delicious bar meal through to a fun-filled party-night, ceilidh or special event.

• SWEENEY'S CRUISES

Balloch, Loch Lomond, G83 855
Tel: 01389 752 376
email: info@sweeneyscruises.com
www.sweeneyscruises.com

Scottish Tourist Board 4-star tours on Loch Lomond. All cruises have live commentary, bar and toilet facilities. Open 7 days a week all year round.

• CRUISE LOCH LOMOND

The Boatyard, Tarbet. Loch Lomond, G83 7DG
Tel: 01301 702 356
email: enquiries@cruiselochlomond.co.uk
www.cruiselochlomond.co.uk

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Tel: 01436 674 922
email: anne@balmillig.co.uk
www.balmillig.co.uk

Superb 4 star accommodation minutes from the National Park's southern edge. An environmentally committed business also offering bespoke guided tours - day walking and mountain guiding.

• LOMOND LUXURY LODGES

Croftamie, By Glasgow G63 0EX
Tel: 01360 660054
email: info@lochlomond-holidays.co.uk
www.lochlomond-holidays.co.uk

5 Star luxury lodges located within the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park making this family-run business an ideal base for touring this truly exceptional area.

• CALLANDER ENTERPRISE

email: cal-ent@incallander.co.uk
www.twitter.com/incallander
www.incallander.co.uk

Callander Enterprise is dynamic business group with ambitious objectives to benefit the entire business community in the area. The 200+ members cover the largest settlement within the National Park

• LOCH LOMOND SEAPLANES

PO Box 26613, Helensburgh G84 9YG
Tel 01436675030
info@lochlomondseaplanes.com

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Leny Road, Callander FK17 8AL
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www.poppieshotel.com

• VENACHAR LOCHSIDE

Loch Venachar, Callander FK17 8HP
Tel: 01877 330 011
www.venachar-lochside.co.uk

• WHEELS CYCLING CENTRE - BIKES / HIRE

Invertrossachs Rd, Callander, FK17 8HW
Tel: 01877 331 100
www.scottish-cycling.com

• MAID OF THE LOCH

The Pier, Pier Road, Balloch G83 8OX
Tel: 01389 711865 www.maidoftheloch.com

• LOCH LOMOND GIFT HOUSE

Balloch Road, Balloch G83 8LQ Tel: 01389753437
www.lochlomondgifthouse.com

• WWW.HOLIDAYCOTTAGES.CO.UK

Tel: 01237 426287
www.holidaycottages.co.uk/scotland

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2 Ancaster Square, Callander FK17 8ED.
Tel: 01877 330370

• PAUL SAUNDERS PHOTOGRAPHY

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Tel: 01360 661029
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• FORTH INN

Main Street, Aberfoyle.
Tel: 01877 382372 www.forthinn.com

• DELI ECOSSE

Ancaster Square, Callander FK17 8ED.
Tel: 01877 331220 www.deliecosse.co.uk

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