

The Voice

The magazine of the Friends of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs

***Explore the
National Park
by Boat***

**ALSO INSIDE
THIS ISSUE:**

News Updates; Friends of OUR park; Protecting the Bonnie Banks; Energising the National Park *and more*

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Chairman's Introduction

WELCOME TO THIS LATEST EDITION OF VOICE, which, as usual, is packed with topical news and features on different aspects of the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park. This edition includes updates on recent activities by the Friends and others working to make the Park a better place for people and nature.



This is an important time in the life of the National Park with a recent review by NatureScot on behalf of the Scottish Government concluding that the role and purpose of Scotland's National Parks should be refreshed with "leadership of nature recovery and a just transition to net zero" becoming the overarching purpose. This is considered necessary given the urgency of the climate and nature crises Scotland faces.

While the Friends are generally supportive of this overall purpose, in our consultation response we emphasised the importance of not diluting the current four aims of Scotland's National Parks especially those relating to promoting the social and economic well-being of local communities and responsible enjoyment of the area. We agree with NatureScot that an integrated approach to people and nature should remain at the heart of Scotland's National Park model.

There is a real danger that resources could be diverted away from actions to support some of the current aims of the National Park. There are some early signs that this could happen with the recent publication of the consultative draft National Park Partnership Plan for the next five years that, understandably, is placing greater emphasis on nature and climate emergencies and is lighter than previously on specific actions to support outdoor recreation, cultural heritage and social and economic development.

Ensuring there continues to be a focus on the 'back to basics agenda' remains a high priority for the Friends and, with support from partners, for the third consecutive year we have stepped in to plug some gaps in visitor infrastructure with the provision of temporary toilets at the busy Duck Bay and Arrochar visitor hotspots and the continuation of the successful 'Adopt a Bonnie Bank Bin Scheme' with the deployment and regular emptying of twenty litter bins in laybys along the A82 on Loch Lomondside. In the Trossachs we have been pleased to see through the completion of the first two phases of the Trossachs Visitor Management Project with partners, which has helped position the area as a more sustainable destination to explore by boot, bike and boat.

Sadly, the successful community-led village warden scheme operated in lochside villages is being scaled back due to a lack of support from NatureScot who helped fund the service for the past two years. On a more positive note with the emergence of a series of Place Studies led by the National Park, with input from local stakeholders, there are encouraging signs there will be significant investment in the provision of improved visitor infrastructure at a number of busy visitor sites where there are currently major shortcomings.

This is the latest edition of Voice that I edit, as after 13 years on the Board of Trustees of the Friends, including twelve years as Chair, I am stepping down at the AGM in early June. Several other Trustees will be stepping down too and I would like to place

on record my sincere thanks to them and the rest of the Trustees for their sterling selfless work over many years helping to ensure the special qualities of the National Park are protected and promoted with a range of practical initiatives aimed at making a difference for people and nature being delivered successfully. I would also like to thank our business supporters, members and various partners who have contributed to the work of the Friends over many years, which is greatly appreciated.

It is vital that there continues to be a vibrant independent charity championing the aims of Scotland's first National Park and supporting the provision of resources to deliver projects for the benefit of people and nature. I am confident I leave the Friends in good hands and with the support of members and other partners there is a bright future for the Friends and the National Park despite the many challenges that lie ahead.

Please enjoy reading this edition of Voice and hopefully the contents will inspire you to get out and about in the National Park over the summer 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 this special and cherished place.

All the very best.

JAMES FRASER

Chair - Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs



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Cover image by Paul Saunders www.paulsaunders.co.uk A view of the giant Sequoia trees saved at Benmore Botanic Garden.

FACELIFT FOR TOM WEIR'S REST

With sponsorship from Friends Business Supporter, Sandy Fraser of the Oak Tree Inn, and funding from the Hannah Stirling Loch Lomond Trust, the Friends are currently upgrading the popular Tom Weir's Rest site in Balmaha which is suffering from wear and tear due to high visitor numbers.

This previously run down picnic site overlooking Balmaha Bay on Loch Lomondside was transformed by the Friends and the Tom Weir Memorial Group in 2014 following major fundraising efforts to mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of the famous mountaineer, conservationist, broadcaster and writer, who was also one of the founder members of the Friends of Loch Lomond and lived locally at Gartocharn.

At a memorable event in December of that year a specially commissioned statue in memory of Tom Weir was unveiled in front of a bumper crowd, with many wearing his famous red toorie hats. Subsequently, further improvements were made to the picnic area with stone walling, new picnic benches and a mountain garden. The site has now been visited by more than 1million people with photos beside the statue being a must for most visitors.

Last year the view across the bay behind the statue, which had become overgrown, was opened up by volunteers participating in one of the Friends Make a Difference Days but it was evident that due to the impact of large visitor numbers and adverse weather conditions a more radical facelift was required.

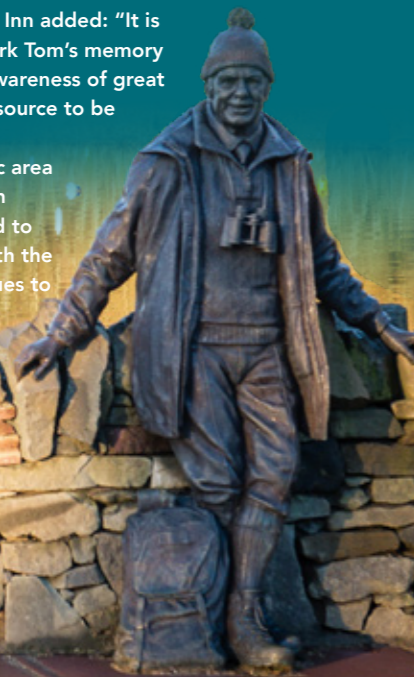
HEAVILY USED

A funding package has been assembled to resurface the heavily used paths and gathering area, repair walls and to give the Mountain Garden a makeover. The bulk of this work will be completed this Spring led by Sandy Fraser with his own landscaping team and, later in the year, another Make a Difference Day is planned to ensure the site is well maintained.

James Fraser, Chair of the Friends said: "We are not surprised the site has been a runaway success with what must be one of the most photographed statues in Scotland due to its careful positioning against the backdrop of Balmaha Bay and close to the West Highland Way.

"I have no doubt if Tom was still alive he would be thrilled that so many visitors have visited the statue and to enjoy the great outdoors on his beloved Loch Lomondside, which he did so much to promote in his popular Weir's Way TV series and for 50 years in the monthly editions of The Scots Magazine."

Sandy Fraser of the Oak Tree Inn added: "It is important we continue to mark Tom's memory and contribution to raising awareness of great outdoors as a recreational resource to be cherished and cared for by maintaining his popular picnic area and mountain garden on Loch Lomondside and I am pleased to be working in partnership with the Friends to ensure this continues to happen."



VOLUNTEERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE



Volunteers are pictured after another productive day

The dreich weather didn't dampen the spirits of the 17 volunteers who participated in the first in a series three Make a Difference Days this year, coordinated by the Friends with support from the National Park. The event took place on 29 March at the busy Trossachs Pier visitor hub at Loch Katrine. The volunteers worked on various tasks such as painting posts and rails along the restored covered pier walkway, helping clear the decks of the restored historic Steamship Sir Walter Scott in preparation for the return of sailings this season and tackling the removal of rhododendrons on the hillsides beside the large car park.

Volunteers from Terrenus Land & Water Ltd and Scottish Water joined forces with staff and volunteers from the Friends and the National Park Authority. Breakfast rolls and lunch were kindly provided by the Steamship Trust and everyone appreciated the short cruise on Loch Katrine after lunch, before recommencing painting, tidying and wrestling with rhododendrons.

There was great feedback from the volunteers, including the following from Iain Hughes, Scottish Water Project Manager: "It was a great day yesterday, a good turn out and effort by the volunteers, probably one of my most memorable days with Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs to date. Keep me posted as to future events, thanks."

John Urquhart, Vice-Chair of the Friends, who helps deliver these events, said: "We had a brilliant day with such enthusiastic volunteers who were all very keen to make a difference and we greatly appreciate their efforts and support."

Other volunteer Make a Difference Days are planned for the Loch Lomond Islands towards the end of June and at Balmaha at the end of September. Details of these events will be published on our website and Facebook page nearer the time.

LOCH VIEWS PROTECTED

With support from the Hannah Stirling Loch Lomond Trust and the Friends of OUR Park visitor giving scheme further work has recently been completed on clearing shrubs and small trees to maintain open views of Loch Lomond and Ben Lomond between Luss and Tarbet on stretches of the busy A82 and the adjacent cycle and footpath for the enjoyment of visitors. Most of this work has been undertaken by a local contractor and Transport Scotland has also stepped in to re-open views of the loch from the elevated long layby and viewpoint next to the northbound layby near Luss. Some other trees have been removed due to an outbreak of ash disease which is affecting the western part of the National Park.



ADOPT A BONNIE BANKS BIN SCHEME GATHERS MOMENTUM



The ground breaking 'Adopt a Bonnie Banks Bin Scheme' devised by the Friends to tackle the litter problem along the busy A82 corridor on West Loch Lomondside has attracted increased sponsorship this year from local businesses and funding from the National Park and Argyll & Bute Council as it is recognised that, along with other measures, the scheme is making a real difference.

It is now seen as a model collaborative initiative and is attracting interest from other parts of Scotland and national bodies such as Keep Scotland Beautiful. The Friends Chair, James Fraser, was recently invited to outline details of the scheme on a special BBC Radio Scotland programme following the publication of a report by Keep Scotland Beautiful on what they described as 'Scotland's Litter Crisis'. If you've been driving along the A82 recently you may have noticed the absence of litter on the verges between Arden and Tarbet. Things were a lot different a couple of years ago. Then the verges and laybys were in a dreadful state with litter and fly tipping which had built up over years of neglect and thoughtless acts by members of the public discarding rubbish from their vehicles.

PILOT SCHEME

The Friends decided to do something about this. With funding support from the NatureScot Green Recovery Scheme and the Hannah Stirling Loch Lomond Trust and a considerable amount of volunteer input, they introduced a pilot 20-bin scheme in 2021 as part of a wider initiative to improve visitor management on West Loch Lomondside

during the period following the COVID 19 lockdown.

In 2022 this pilot was developed into a successful 'Adopt a Bonnie Banks Bin' scheme with great success and strong support from local businesses, Luss Estates, the National Park, Argyll & Bute Council and Transport Scotland. The Friends have recently entered a third year of operating the scheme with support from a growing number of funding partners.

The scheme is not cheap and will cost £30,000 for the next 12 month period with recycling and emptying costs increasing significantly due to increased fuel and labour charges. The scheme involves weekly emptying of bins at quieter times of the year building up to twice weekly at busier holiday periods. Importantly, the scheme, along with other supporting initiatives by public sector partners and volunteers, has transformed the litter and fly tipping situation along the busy Loch Lomondside A82 corridor, which is the main gateway to the West Highlands with 6 million vehicle movements a year.

Since the scheme started two years ago, over 50 tonnes of litter has been collected from the Bonnie Banks Bins with an impressive 97% of it being recycled or baled for use as industrial fuel stock. This equates to the equivalent of 12,000 bin bags of litter collected overall. The general public have responded well to the initiative with a noticeable drop in litter being discarded out of vehicle windows and greater use of the bins to help keep the Bonnie Banks much cleaner.

The Friends would like to acknowledge the financial support of the following bin sponsors:

- CRUISE LOCH LOMOND
- DUCK BAY HOTEL & RESTAURANT
- ENVA
- FOREST HOLIDAYS
- LOCHS & GLENS HOLIDAYS
- LODGE ON LOCH LOMOND HOTEL

- LUSS ESTATES
- SLANJ BAR & RESTAURANT
- SWEENEY'S CRUISES

Sponsorship from the National Park and support from Argyll & Bute Council is also welcomed and acknowledged.

Temporary Toilets to the Rescue Again

The Friends have stepped in for a third year to coordinate the provision and maintenance of temporary toilets between April and October at the two busy visitor hotspots of Duck Bay on Loch Lomondside and the popular Cobbler Car Park at the head of Loch Long in Arrochar. These much needed toilets are being jointly funded by the National Park, Argyll & Bute Council, the Hannah Stirling Loch Lomond Trust and the Friends through the Friends of OUR Park visitor giving scheme. The Cawley Group through Alan Cawley is also providing sponsorship in kind, with staff from the Duck Bay Hotel & Restaurant regularly cleaning the Duck Bay toilets and stocking them with toiletries, while Sam Newell of Honeywagon has also provided significant in kind sponsorship by discounting the cost of temporary toilet units hire and the effluent emptying service he provides.

Luss Estates are funding the provision of additional temporary toilets in Arrochar which are cleaned by seasonal wardens employed by the Friends working in partnership with the local Development Trust and Luss Estates. Based on surveys undertaken last year it is anticipated these toilets will be used by over 100,000 visitors this year. There are also positive signs that a more permanent toilet scheme will be progressed at the Cobbler site in Arrochar by Argyll & Bute Council who are drawing up plans that include extending the car park and the careful siting of a new toilet block. It is anticipated later in the year they will bid for Rural Tourism Infrastructure Funds to build these new facilities in 2024. Sadly, there is little progress with plans for much needed toilets and other improvements at Duck Bay which has more than 300,000 visitors annually.

Disappointingly, a bid by the Friends to secure funding from the NatureScot Green Recovery grant scheme to provide an expanded village warden scheme for the villages of Arrochar, Tarbet and Luss was recently unsuccessful despite the high level of visitor pressures these small communities suffer from. Over the past two years a very successful community led warden scheme, with support from NatureScot, the Friends, the Hannah Stirling Loch Lomond Trust, was delivered in Tarbet and Arrochar in partnership with the local Development Trust.

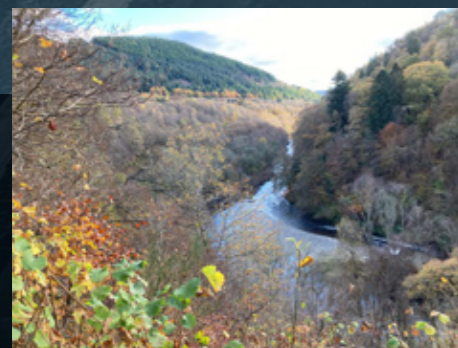


Sam Newell (left) from toilet suppliers Honeywagon is pictured handing over the keys to the temporary toilets sited at Duck Bay Car Park to Darroch Cawley (right) from the Cawley Group.

HOW TO PROTECT THE BONNIE BANKS

The Friends Vice-Chair and Convener of Helensburgh and District Access Trust (HADAT), John Urquhart, has been leading the campaign to get the Scottish Parliament to think again about the seriously flawed plans to upgrade the A82 between Tarbet and Ardlui which would have a disastrous impact on the Bonnie Banks. A petition was submitted to the Parliamentary Petitions Committee last year calling for a re-think and consideration of an alternative High Road and local MSP Jackie Baillie successfully presented this on behalf of HADAT and the Friends to the Committee last December with members readily agreeing to invite evidence from a number of parties before making recommendations to the Scottish Parliament later this year. Below we re-print a letter from John published in the Herald and he provides an update on progress and makes an impassioned plea for more people to sign the petition to save the Bonnie Banks, which has now re-opened.

John said: "As you will see from the letter, shown we are awaiting the next stage of the Parliamentary Petitions Committee process but very pleasingly the Committee agreed our case merits further examination and is now seeking evidence from Transport Scotland, Argyll & Bute Council, Lochaber Chamber of Commerce and the National Park. We think they should also be inviting evidence from other key bodies too such as NatureScot, the Scottish Campaign for National Parks and important local tourism businesses such as Cruise Loch Lomond and Lochs And Glens Holidays as well as local



Built on a viaduct above the railway the old road and the ancient woods, the new A9 gives superb views of the historic Pass of Killiecrankie.

This photo of the Pass of Killiecrankie shows why the Loch Lomond A82 upgrade 'Low Road' plan is a mistake. When the A9 at Killiecrankie was upgraded in 1980, the engineers chose a 'High Road' solution which left the historic pass, its military road and ancient woodland untouched. They also by-passed Pitlochry and Killiecrankie, freeing them from heavy traffic. The old road was left for local traffic, cyclists and access to the walking trail, from which the busy A9 above can neither be seen nor heard.

community organisations such as Arrochar and Tarbet Community Council. We will be allowed to attend the sessions where evidence is taken and to respond to what is said. A welcome development is that petitions can continue to collect signatures until an outcome is determined by the Petitions Committee and a recent post (see link below) by prolific blogger Nick Kempe has stimulated some further support. Of course, the call to tackle the Nature Emergency is now so much more to the fore that the political environment surrounding decisions made ten years ago must now be quite different. Ministers have come and gone since decisions were originally made about this project and the current Scottish Government, which is now a coalition of SNP and the Green Party, has committed to adopt a range of green policies as part of a major shift to tackle the nature and climate emergencies. Dr Heather Reid is also now the Chair of the National Park and has made tackling these emergencies a priority for the National Park and there are signs of possible changes to the overall purpose of National Parks from a recent NatureScot review requested by Lorna Slater, the current Minister with responsibility for National Parks.

All these factors point to the need for an urgent review of the options for upgrading the A82 and the original seriously flawed decision-making progress which led to the disastrous 'Low Road' option being taken forward to detailed design stage which, if implemented, will have a number of major disbenefits for people and nature including major traffic delays and greatly threatening the character of eight miles of beautiful shoreline between Tarbet and Ardlui.

Importantly, one of our members, Geoff Riddington, who is a specialist in the cost benefit analysis of major road projects has identified a number of major flaws in the original costings of the 'Low' and 'High Road' options. He has concluded the construction costs of the two alternatives would be similar and the benefits in terms of no construction delays and benefits to the environment would be huge.

PLEASE SUPPORT OUR CALL FOR A MAJOR RETHINK AND HELP SAVE THE BONNIE BANKS FROM IRREVERSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE. TO SIGN THE PETITION GO TO [HTTPS://PETITIONS.PARLIAMENT.SCOT/PETITIONS/PE1967](https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1967)

Nick Kemp article <https://parkswatchscotland.co.uk/2023/03/29/transport-scotlands-proposed-a82-upgrade-along-loch-lomond-and-the-protection-of-ancient-woodland/>

HERALD LETTER, MARCH 2023

As we await the Parliamentary Petitions Committee's next move on our A82 upgrade petition (A82 Petition-PE1967) offering Transport Scotland a High Road escape route out of its disastrous Low Road plan which threatens yet more of the country's priceless and diminishing temperate rainforest, I wondered if anyone in the Scottish Government would have bothered to watch the latest episode of David Attenborough's Wild Isles series (March 19).

In case you hadn't heard, Transport Scotland plans to put the upgraded A82 on more or less the same line as the existing road which closely follows the shoreline of Loch Lomond between Tarbet and Inverarnan, thereby doing untold damage to the rare and priceless Atlantic Rainforest remnants which make those particular banks so Bonnie and so valuable. We are trying to point out that it would be far better to do what was done at Killiecrankie in the 1980s when the upgraded A9 was put above the old road and the railway line, thereby leaving the old road for local traffic and recreational access to the ancient woodland along the banks of the River Garry. They also bypassed Pitlochry and Killiecrankie, just like the new A82 should by-pass Tarbet and Ardlui.

John Urquhart



Some years ago I was contacted by George Boyd, and invited to consider becoming a trustee with the Friends, but it was at a time when I was very involved with the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS), having just become the first lady President. A few years later the University of Strathclyde was contacted by Hannah Stirling, the founder of the Friends, who had decided that the Trustees should have a Strathclyde representative on the Board, if for no other reason than that Ross Priory, the Staff Club of the University, sat on the shores of Loch Lomond. The Principal of the University decided that representative should

STALWARTS STEP DOWN AFTER 45 YEARS SERVICE

Four stalwarts of the Board of Trustees of the Friends are stepping down at the AGM being held on June 6th at Ross Priory after a combined service of 45 years and here the longest serving member, Dr Joyce Deans CBE reflects on her 15 years as a Trustee.

be me! Even so, when I turned up for my first meeting I was very politely asked to sit outside the meeting room in order that who I was, what my skills were and why I might become a trustee, were explained to the Board. This to allow them to decide whether or not I should be accepted as a Trustee. Fortunately, I was accepted and I have now enjoyed some 15 years of involvement with the Friends. The Board is made up of energetic members who have a wide ranging variety of skills and have one thing in common - a real passion for, and the well-being of, the area covered by Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park. I have watched and participated in various aspects of the Friends work. From the early days of designing new notepaper, obtaining permission of landowners for 'right to roam' paths being opened up to the public, keeping an eye on planning

applications and most recently the very successful anti-litter campaign and provision of much needed toilets in busy places. These latter two exercises have involved enormous amounts of time in obtaining funding in order to install bins in laybys along the A82 on Loch Lomondside and temporary toilets at Duck Bay and Arrochar while we campaign for more permanent arrangements. I have also been pleased to organise many memorable and well attended pre-Christmas events for members at Ross Priory. I had planned to retire from the Board some three years ago but Covid 19 struck and it was not a good time for change. My successor on the Board, has all the skills for the world we now live in. Dr. Roddy Yarr is a sustainability expert. He is Executive Lead for Sustainability at the University of Strathclyde. Among other involvements Roddy advises the Sustainable Glasgow Partnership

and is Interim Chair of Climate Ready Clyde. He will be a great asset to the Friends ... and to Loch Lomond and The Trossachs. I leave the Friends in good health and wish the Board every success with their ongoing work helping care for the Bonnie Banks and the wider National Park area. Other Trustees stepping down at the AGM include Bill Dalrymple (12 years service), Paul Saunders (5 years service) and James Fraser (13 years service) who all, along with Joyce, have made a great contribution to the work of the Friends. If you are interested in being considered as a Trustee please come along to the AGM and contact our Support Officer, Jennifer Plunkett in advance with some background details and what you think you can contribute to the work of the Friends. Jennifer can be contacted by email - info@lochlomondtrossachs.org.uk

TROSSACHS TRAILBLAZING SUCCESS

Over £1 million was secured over the past two years by the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs and the Steamship Sir Walter Scott Trust, working in partnership with local communities and others, to invest in the Trossachs Trail sustainable tourism initiative which encourages visitors to enjoy the area by boot, bike and boat and has led to improvements in basic infrastructure such as signage, paths, toilets, cycle repair stations, campervan facilities and car parks.

This latest initiative has been a great success, building on the original trailblazing and award-winning Trossachs Trail tourism and the environment project developed in the early 1990s to improve visitor infrastructure as part of Scotland's first ever geographic trail. The Trail is based on the famous Trossachs Tour, popularised by Sir Walter Scott and other writers in the 1800s, which led to the growth of Callander and Aberfoyle and the development of tourism in other villages around the 40 mile scenic circular route. In the early part of 2021 the focus was on refreshing the 'tired' Trossachs Trail road signs and this was followed by the production of attractive information & map panels with details of things to see and do, which are now sited at 40 different locations throughout the area including in the foyer areas of local tourism businesses and in laybys and car parks, to assist

visitors with making the most of their stay in the area. The signage and panels were complemented later in 2021 and 2022 with the launch of the website www.trossachstrail.co.uk and an informative leaflet and map. These elements of the initiative were largely funded by Love Local and local charities including the Friends, Steamship Sir Walter Scott Trust and the Strathard and Callander Community Hydro Funds, with some funding coming later from VisitScotland to assist with the production of extra information map panels. VISITOR INFRASTRUCTURE As part of phase two in 2022/23 a sum of £600,000 was invested in doubling the size of the Ban A'an car park in partnership with Forest & Land Scotland; creating a new woodland car park, campervan and cycling hub facilities at Stronachlachar Pier; and developing extended car parks and toilets at the busy Trossachs Pier hub which, along with the reinstatement of a historic viewpoint path, are due for completion by June. This package of works would not have been possible without securing a £375,000 grant from the VisitScotland Rural Infrastructure Fund (RTIF), facilitated by the National Park, with the balance being provided by the Steamship Trust, Forest & Land Scotland and the Friends. The third and final phase of the sustainable tourism initiative involves the construction of a stunning landmark scenic lookout tower and two viewpoint platforms above the busy Trossachs

Pier at the exact spot where Sir Walter Scott and other famous writers and painters captured the magic of the Trossachs landscapes, which triggered the birth of Scottish tourism. A sum of £231,000 has been secured from the VisitScotland RTIF and was facilitated by Stirling Council. The £100,000 balance required is being provided by the Steamship Trust. While these early action improvements have been led by local charities, the National Park has recently commissioned a series of studies to review other desirable visitor infrastructure improvements in the Strathard, Trossachs and Callander areas and costed detailed design proposals are currently being finalised in consultation with local stakeholders. This will involve a mix of improvements to signposting, car parking and paths and a priority is being given to piloting a public transport shuttle link between Callander, Aberfoyle and busy visitor locations in the heart of the Trossachs where there currently is no public transport service. It is hoped a pilot service will be in place this summer.



CANOE MARATHON

The popularity of the lochs in the National Park for paddlesports has been on the increase in recent years but Nick Evans and Martin Tunstall from Edinburgh Canoe Club took this to a new level earlier this year. They are pictured here at Tarbet on Loch Lomondside by Friends Vice-Chair, John Urquhart on a paddling expedition from Erskine Bridge to the Forth Bridge the long way round via The Firth of Clyde, Lochs Long, Lomond, Arklet, Katrine, Achray and Venachar, and rivers Teith and Forth and then down the Firth of Forth to finish at the Forth Rail Bridge at South Queensferry.





Young Friends Enjoy the Great Outdoors

Young Friends Enjoy Outdoors Tullochan



Friends of Our Park Projects Supported

A growing number of businesses have re-activated their participation in the Friends of OUR park visitor giving scheme after the Covid19 lockdown and a period of business recovery. Businesses collect donations from visitors by a variety of mechanisms including voluntary supplements on overnight stays, menu items or purchases of goods and some host collection cans. Sponsorships with the funds are ringfenced to spend on a range of conservation, heritage, access, youth and community projects within the local area where they are collected.

Projects supported recently include the Trossachs Trail refresh, the Windows on the Loch initiative, provision of temporary toilets at the busy visitor hotspots of Duck Bay and Arrochar and youth outdoor adventures in the National Park. The latest grant awards confirmed include contributions to a new red squirrel hide at Cashel, operation of the community-run Callander Visitor Information Centre, Breadalbane Park Play Area improvements in Killin and a life-saving defibrillator at Rowardennan beside the busy Ben Lomond path. Any business interested in participating in the Friends of OUR Park visitor giving scheme should contact Friends Support Officer Jennifer on (m) 07496 433134 or by email info@lochlomondtrossachs.org.

Rowardennan Life Saver

Lucy Fraser, who until recently operated a very successful guest house at Rowardennan, has impressively raised over £1,000 in a week to help fund a life saving defibrillator beside the busy West Highland Way and Ben Lomond path in the village. This funding was largely raised from her previous guests who had stayed with her over the years as they walked the 96-mile West Highland Way. The Friends stepped in to provide a top up grant of £600 from funds raised through the Friends of OUR park visitor giving scheme and they organised a link with Trossachs Search and Rescue to install and maintain the defibrillator which has now been purchased and sited at Rowardennan.

Lucy Fraser said: "Rowardennan is a popular visitor destination with a large number of West Highland Way and Ben Lomond walkers and I was keen to improve public safety with the provision of a life-saving defibrillator here as the nearest ones are some distance away at Balmaha and Inversnaid."

"I was delighted with the amazing response from my previous guests who reacted so quickly to my crowd funding appeal and made very generous donations to help with the purchase a defibrillator. I was also pleased to receive prompt support from the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs and Trossachs Search and Rescue to make this happen so quickly."

James Fraser, Chair of the Friends, is pictured handing over a defibrillator to Lucy Fraser who raised over £1,000 for the purchase and installation of this life saving equipment at Rowardennan beside the busy Ben Lomond path and the West Highland Way.)



Thanks to funding support from the West Dunbartonshire Council's Year of the Young People Legacy Fund and the Friends of OUR Park visitor giving scheme, it has been possible to organise outdoor events in the National Park for another 65 young people from youth groups in the West Dunbartonshire area. Three days of activities were arranged with West End Adventure during the Easter school holidays for young people from the youth groups Y-Sort-It, Tulloch and Benview who all enjoyed bushcraft, weaselling, canoeing, paddleboarding and archery in the National Park.

Feedback from all groups has been extremely positive, with the young people enjoying all activities whilst also learning about the natural environment and acquiring new skills. Over a two-year period the Friends have organised outdoor adventures and experiences in the National Park for more than 200 young people from urban areas.

Red Squirrel Support for Cashel

Support from Duff Christmas Tree Farm and St Mocha Coffee Shop in Balmaha, who both participate in the Friends of OUR Park Visitor Giving Scheme, has contributed to several red squirrel projects, including the new £6,000 red squirrel hide and footpath link planned in the ancient woodland oak woodlands at Cashel Forest on East Loch Lomondside.

The hide will be built this year by Cashel Forest Trust so visitors can observe the red squirrels that regularly scamper along the branches of a giant oak tree near one of Cashel's woodland paths. A grant of £1,000 from the Our Park scheme has formed part of the funding for this planned addition to the ancient bluebell woodland.

Emma Sandhu, Cashel Forest Ranger, said: "We are very grateful for this funding from the Friends which supports our work to create a sustainably and sensitively designed wildlife hide to enable visitors to get closer to red squirrels and other woodland wildlife. These sorts of wildlife encounters are very special, and the experience can be a highlight for visitors to our woodlands."

"This isn't the first time Cashel's ancient oak woodland has benefited from the support of the Friends. A grant given in 2022 to plant young oak trees has helped with work to restore a healthy age-diversity to the wood. With the Friends' support, Cashel will continue to protect the future of this spectacular habitat within Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park."



James Fraser, Chair of the Friends said: "This is a good practical example of how we use the funds raised by local businesses to help projects that will enhance visitor enjoyment of the diverse nature in the National Park, while contributing to the efforts to conserve red squirrels along the Highland Boundary Fault Line which is an important stronghold for red squirrels."

For the last three years, Duff Christmas Tree Farm has supported the Friends' OUR Park scheme for red squirrel conservation as part of their 'Cut Your Own Christmas Tree' sales. The Loch Lomond Coffee Company at St Mocha Coffee Shop in Balmaha raised funds from a percentage of the sales of small bags of ground coffee beans.

James Fraser, Chair of the Friends, is pictured handing over a cheque for £1,000 to Emma Sandhu, Ranger at Cashel Forest.



THE OAK TREE INN BALMAHA | LOCH LOMOND

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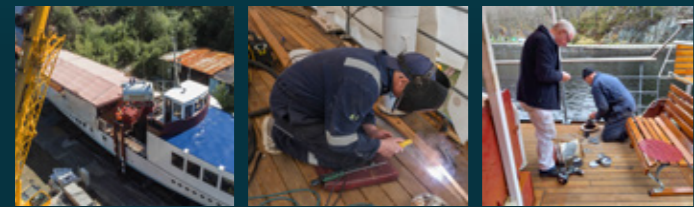
RESTORED STEAMSHIP BACK SAILING ON LOCH KATRINE



Following a three-year absence due to cracked boilers, the historic Steamship Sir Walter Scott, which was built by Denny's of Dumbarton in 1899, is back sailing on Loch Katrine this season. This follows the successful completion of a £750,000 restoration programme. The restoration works were led by the Steamship Sir Walter Scott Trust charitable organisation that was set up in 2005 to preserve the Steamship for the nation and the enjoyment of the public. At that time the future of the Steamship was in doubt due to the formation of Scottish Water to manage the reservoir at Loch Katrine. They were instructed by the Scottish Government to dispose of the steamer and the supporting recreational facilities as they were deemed as 'non-core assets' and there was a real danger of the historic ship being scrapped. Thankfully, the late Sir William McAlpine, a well known steam enthusiast and owner of a large construction company, stepped in and successfully negotiated with Scottish Government Ministers and Scottish Water to gift it to the Trust along with a dowry of £1 million for essential works required to keep her sailing. Local MSPs Sylvia Jackson and Bruce Crawford played an important role too in securing the dowry.

SOS PUBLIC APPEAL SUCCESS

The latest restoration works were delayed due to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and fundraising didn't get underway until 18 months ago with an initial target of £500,000. This sum was raised in record time due to a combination of the success of the SOS 'Save Our Steamship' appeal with donations pouring in from members of the public and the business community; grants from the National Heritage Lottery Fund, Hugh Fraser Foundation, Pilgrim Trust, Gordon Fraser Charitable Trust and Stirling Council; and Trust reserves. The cost of the restoration of the 123 year old Steamship rose by £250,000 in the interim and this is being covered by a re-energised public appeal and a substantial 10-year bank loan. The steamship was painstakingly restored by the Steamship Trust's own in-house team and specialist contractors over the last 12 months. The two new boilers are powered by the last surviving original triple expansion engine in daily use, which is now using more efficient and greener fuels, greatly reducing the vessel's carbon footprint. New decking, restored seating, improved facilities for disabled visitors, a refresh of the Trossachs Pier covered walkway and a new exhibition, 'The Story of Steamships on Loch Katrine' were all part of the restoration programme. Three classic steamship cruises of 2 hour and 1 hour durations are now available to book online along with shorter 45 minute cruises on the Lady of the Lake - see www.lochkatrine.com. The return of the Steamship Sir Walter Scott to service is being supported by a major marketing awareness campaign, including TV advertising.



A83 INVESTMENT A KEY PRIORITY

The Old Military Road in the foreground is used when the A83 at a higher level is closed due to landslides.



Argyll & Bute Council is continuing to keep up the pressure on the Scottish Government to ensure there is a permanent solution delivered for the major A83 Rest and Be Thankful road improvement as soon as possible.

Medium-term plans to improve the resilience of the temporary diversion route by making improvements to the Old Military Road are progressing while consultants press on with the £11.3 million contract to design the long-term replacement for this challenging section of the A83 which provides a vital link between Central Scotland and Mid and South Argyll.

The trunk road has been plagued by landslides for many years and, during heavy rain, traffic has regularly to use the single-track Old Military Road diversion.

CALEDONIAN SLEEPER FUTURE SECURED

The iconic Caledonian Sleeper that connects London to Scotland, with several stops along the scenic West Highland Railway in the National Park, is set to be nationalised this summer to safeguard its future.

The Scottish Government has decided to terminate current operator Serco's contract to run the franchise seven years early to provide certainty about the future of the service, which runs every night of the week apart from Saturdays.

Uncertain market conditions, travel behaviours and ongoing UK rail reform all contributed to the decision by the Scottish Government to terminate the franchise and for the service to be nationalised in line with their Operator of Last Resort duty.

The service includes stops at a number of communities in and around the National Park including Helensburgh, Garelochhead, Arrochar & Tarbet, Ardlui, Crianlarich and Tyndrum and the decision to nationalise and safeguard the service has been widely welcomed by local residents and business owners along the route at a time when there is a move to encourage accessing the Park in more sustainable ways.



UPPER CORMONACHAN PATHS ACHIEVEMENT



After a five-year campaign and hard work by the Cormonachan Woodlands Ltd, the charity which manages the Cormonachan Community Woodlands between Lochgoilhead and Carrick Castle, are about to open the latest phase of the Atlantic oak and hazel woodlands path network with a new path link to spectacular waterfalls and an old settlement with additional car parking.

The completion of this £253,000 project marks the realisation of the wishes of the first Chair of the Woodlands Association, Liz Evans, who sadly died of a short illness in 2017. The assembly and delivery of the project has only been possible due to the sheer hard work by her partner, Dee, who took on the challenge with the help of other office-bearers to see the project through to completion following extensive fundraising efforts.

The charity raised £253,000 from a public appeal and grants 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. Securing the funding and delivering the project, due to some of the grant funders conditions, was challenging and there were a number of setbacks along the way which

delayed the completion of the project by BL Groundworks who stepped in when the original selected contractor withdrew. Dee Locke, Secretary of the Cormonachan Community Woodlands said: "It has been a long and tortuous journey delivering this project but I am delighted we will be able to complete complete the project shortly which is a commitment we made to Liz Evans, my late wife, before she died. "She had great vision and drive and recognised what could be achieved in these special ancient woodlands for the benefit of people and nature and I am sure if she was still with us today she would be thrilled to see access to the Cormonachan Falls and Medieval Settlement opened up for current and future generations to enjoy and appreciate."

In 2022, Cormonachan Community Woodlands was awarded the Highly Commended Award in Scotland's Finest Woods Awards 2022. Cormonachan Community Woodlands is situated on the C6 road between Lochgoilhead and Carrick Castle with two car parks. It is designated as an 'Ancient Semi Natural Woodland', part of Scotland's temperate rainforest and is in the Argyll Forest Park and the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park.



NEW DESTINATION NATIONAL PARK GROUP CHAIR

Amanda Clark, former Chief Executive of Taste of Scotland and current joint owner of the former Bridge of Lochay Hotel in Killin now a large luxury self-catering holiday house, has recently been appointed Chair of the Destination National Park Group. She follows on from a successful spell by Neil Wells of Lochs & Glens Holidays who was Chair through the exceptionally difficult years of the Covid 19 pandemic when businesses in the National Park and elsewhere in Scotland struggled to survive. The group brings together a cross-section of tourism businesses throughout the National Park and senior staff from the National Park Authority. It meets regularly to discuss and share information on a range of tourism issues and to progress initiatives to strengthen the resilience of tourism locally and improve the appeal of the National Park as a leading and high quality destination. Current projects being progressed include a £100,000 staff retention and recruitment initiative and an Arrochar & Tarbet regeneration review. The Group is also providing input to a series of Park Authority led visitor infrastructure studies and the next Park-wide Partnership Plan.

Amanda, who has lived and worked in the National Park for 13 years, said: "I am delighted to be at the helm of the Destination Group which involves a great mix of tourism business operators committed to delivering high quality visitor experiences and making the most of the special qualities of the National Park, working in collaboration with each other and public sector partners. "During my term of office I hope to continue the good work of previous Chairs. In particular, I am keen to ensure there is a strong voice for tourism and hospitality businesses in the Park to deal with pressing issues, so they can flourish in what is an increasingly tough trading environment. "Both the UK and Scottish Governments need to listen and act on our pleas regarding business rates relief and VAT rates which are much higher than in other European countries and are acting as a major deterrent on re-investment plans"

PAUL MURTON OPENS HISTORIC KILMUN

Broadcaster, writer and Scottish adventurer Paul Murton recently officially launched the new tourist season at Historic Kilmun.

Paul, who recently had his 'Grand Tours of Scottish Rivers' aired on BBC Scotland, performed an opening ceremony with a recently discovered key for the Douglas Mausoleum at the ancient venue, dubbed the 'Rosslyn of the West', on the banks of Holy Loch.

The Douglas Mausoleum is dedicated to the memory of General Sir John Douglas who saw action in the Crimean War including the Battle of Balaclava and the Siege of Sebastopol in 1854. Born in 1817, he inherited the Glenfinart estate in 1871 and died in 1888.

Jennifer Bryson, a Trustee at Historic Kilmun, explained: "It was great to see Paul, a Patron of Historic Kilmun, open the mausoleum for the first time in front of so many friends.

"Historic Kilmun will be open from Thursday to Monday, 11am to 3pm, until the end of October. Expert guided tours will be available for visitors and we also have a busy programme of events including live music, book sales and recitals using our famous water driven organ."

For more information visit www.historickilmun.org.





NEW EXHIBITION OPENS ABOARD MAID OF THE LOCH

The Royal Yacht Britannia by James Watt RGI

An exhibition exploring canals, lochs, rivers, and seas opened on the Maid of the Loch paddle steamer for this season. The Life Aquatic features work by artists ranging from established big names to students and local makers, with 20% of the proceeds from sales going to the steamer's restoration fund.



The Royal Yacht Britannia has loaned a magnificent painting of their vessel by James Watt RGI and it takes centre stage in the exhibition.

Jean's Bothy, a mental health and wellbeing hub in Helensburgh, was also invited to respond to

the theme and members have their work on display on board the steamer in Balloch.

Programme manager and exhibition curator Charli Summers said:

"Locally or globally, The Life Aquatic will prompt old and create new memories, and the exhibition aims to enthuse artists and viewers and to enrich our maritime heritage."

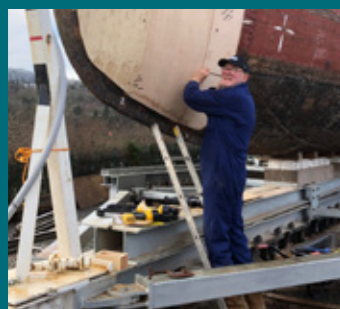
The exhibition, which is funded by an unnamed foundation, continues until October. Entry is £4 entry and most works are for sale.

The Maid is currently undergoing restoration on the slipway at Balloch and the charity Loch Lomond Steamship Company aims to repair the hull plating, refurbish the paddlewheels, and recast the hull and funnel in the original white, green and buff colours while it is out of the water.

A new bow crest will also be installed once the new hull coating has been applied and this is being sponsored by the Paddle Steamer Preservation Society as part of the 70th anniversary of the Maid's first sailings on Loch Lomond back in 1953.

Two substantial grants have recently been received from the Paddle Steamer Preservation Society and Barr Environmental Ltd via the Scottish Lanthfill Communities Fund which will allow completion of the hull work.

The work is being undertaken by a group of dedicated and highly skilled volunteers and the aim is to return the ship to full operation on Loch Lomond.



'The Ship on the Slip' attraction is open to the public every weekend. Interesting Hard Hat Tours of the Maid can be booked in advance on 07484 918659.



KILLIN'S SCENIC SETTING TRANSFORMATION

A £22.3 million underground cable project will see the removal of pylon towers around Killin by June this year.

Work is well underway on the removal of 32 electricity transmission towers and overhead cables which have dominated the skyline in the Killin area and along Glen Dochart for more than half a century. New underground cables will replace sections of the overhead line running from the Killin substation to Lix Toll.

The first of the transmission towers near Killin was successfully brought down recently as part of a wider project to remove historic electricity transmission assets in the National Park.

The first tower felling marks a major milestone for SSEN Transmission's Killin VISTA (Visual Impact of Scottish Transmission Assets) project, which is removing 7.8km of overhead line in the National Park.

The £22.3million project has been funded as part of a £500million scheme administered by the energy regulator, Ofgem. The scheme allows the three GB electricity transmission owners to apply for funding to mitigate the impact of historic electricity infrastructure in National Parks and National Scenic Areas.

Ahead of the tower felling, over the last 18 months, a team from SSEN Transmission and their principal contractor Morgan Sindall Infrastructure have been working in the National Park laying new underground cable to replace sections of overhead line running from Killin substation to Lix Toll. This allows removal of the towers at the most prominent section above Killin and the Falls of Dochart, as well as those crossing the A827.

SSEN Transmission's project manager Alistair McDonald said: "The electrical infrastructure in Killin was originally installed in the 1950s, and thanks to the funding from Ofgem we are able to remove this infrastructure and underground with cables instead, helping to reduce their visual impact in the area.

"Before we even thought about removing the first tower, we had to construct the new underground section of the network, excavating trenches and laying ducts in which we installed approximately 4.5km of cable. Only now we know we have a reliable new section of network can we turn our attention to the dismantling the overhead line."

Further potential work removing overhead pylons along Glen Dochart between Lix Toll and Crianlarich and creating a further link in the national cycleway network here has been identified as a future potential project as has the creation of a Loch Lomond Skyline trail which the Friends and Helensburgh & District Access Trust have been campaigning for over many years. SSEN is currently consulting on future priorities.

The first of the transmission towers near Killin was successfully brought down recently as part of a wider project to remove historic electricity transmission assets in the National Park.



NEW BRACKLINN BRIDGE OPENED

The replacement bridge over Bracklinn Falls was declared open in March by Dr Heather Reid, the new Convener of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority.

Work to install a replacement Bracklinn Bridge was completed earlier this year, providing locals and visitors with a safe place to view the spectacular Bracklinn Falls and a means to complete the popular full circular path once again.

It is the latest Bracklinn Bridge to be built across the Keltie Water at the falls. According to Callander Heritage Society, the first ever bridge to span the gorge at consisted of two logs, covered with branches and overlaid with turf.

The new bridge is made from 'weathering' steel which will develop over the next few months and gives it its distinctive rusty colour. The material was selected due to its longevity, giving up to 120 years design life, and the bridge is rated as highly sustainable due to the efficient design and use of materials.

Dr Heather Reid, Convener of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority, said: "Bracklinn Falls is a beautiful place and I am delighted to see a robust, sustainable bridge in place that will ensure the people of Callander, and visitors to the area, can enjoy the location for many years to come."

"Replacing a bridge in an environmentally sensitive location like this is not an easy task. The design and construction of the replacement bridge required a bespoke solution, which responded to the unique environment at Bracklinn Falls and the challenges in getting access through the ancient woodland and over the Keltie Water. "It is fantastic to see projects such as this completed as part of the Park Authority's new National Park Place Programme, which brings a focus on the Park's visitor infrastructure. I look forward to seeing how it is enjoyed in the years to come by the local community and visitors to this special place." A recent upgrade to the path connecting Callander town centre, Callander Crags and Bracklinn Falls makes it easier for visitors to park in Callander and walk to the falls from there.



LOMOND BANKS ON THE ROCKS

A revamped and scale down package of proposals to develop imaginative tourist facilities on the west bank of the River Leven, where there used to be extensive derelict railway sidings and a large caravan park, along with the restoration of the façade of the nearby derelict former Hamilton House Hotel is continuing to face strong opposition due to an online social media campaign and petition.

In a recent article Ross Greer MSP described the proposed development as: 'a garish, unwelcome and destructive development...which would be an environmental disaster, and act of cultural vandalism against one of Scotland's most beautiful and iconic landscapes.'

These comments are clearly designed to encourage people to sign the online petition which they have in their thousands, yet the petition is silent on the range of former industrial and tourist uses that occupied large tracts of land at the southern end of the loch before substantial sums of public money was spent restoring some of the land which lay derelict for many decades and remains heavily underused in an area zoned for tourist development in various planning policy documents.

Meanwhile, the Friends have confirmed conditional support for the £40 million Lomond Banks tourism and leisure development in Balloch at the southern gateway to Loch Lomond. In a detailed submission to the Park Authority the Friends have set out eight reasons why the development should be given the go ahead, subject to stringent planning conditions being attached relating to the adoption of a travel and transport action plan and a requirement for the developer to enter a legally binding agreement to guarantee community use of the indoor and outdoor recreational facilities.



LOMOND
BANKS



NEW NATURE TRAIL LAUNCHED

Luss Estates has launched a new Loch Lomond Nature Trail which follows the same route as the popular Loch Lomond Faerie Trail, but with a new nature orientated booklet and trail markers filled with interesting facts about the animals and plants through the beautiful woods on the edge of the village of Luss. Faerie Trail Farm has also been recently opened and is home to alpacas, goats, donkeys, Highland cows, sheep and much more.

Joint tickets for both attractions are available online at www.lochlomondfaerietrail.com



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LUSS HIGHLAND GAMES

- Traditional heavies
- Open athletics events
- Piping
- Highland Dancing
- Shopping, food & drinks
- Live music performances from Clann An Drumma!

SATURDAY 1st JULY 2023
10.30 AM TO 5 PM
THE GAMES FIELD, LUSS

TICKETS: Adult £9, Child / OAP £4, Family £20
www.lusshighlandgames.co.uk

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

27th May STRATHENDRICK AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY'S DRYMEN SHOW

A fun family day out on the banks of Loch Lomond where there will be a wide range of entertainment and educational attractions.
Full details at www.drymenshow.com

2nd - 4th June FYNEFEST, ACHADUNAN, CAIRNDOW

An award-winning, family friendly beer, food and music festival set in Glen Fyne. Further details at www.fynefest.com

2nd-3rd June STRATHYRE MUSIC FESTIVAL

This event is held over three days, with a wide and varied programme of music ranging from traditional and folk to jazz, blues and rock - plus fun workshops for all ages. Further details can be found at www.strathrefestival.com

10th June BIG HIKE LOCH LOMOND

Explore the great outdoors at Cancer Research UK's Big Hike. Take part in a one-day hiking marathon through the breath-taking scenery of Loch Lomond. Start and finish venue: Drymen Show Field, Drymen Bridge, Drymen, G63 0EY
www.cancerresearchuk.org/get-involved/find-an-event/big-hike-loch-lomond-2023

16th-18th June KILLIN MUSIC FESTIVAL

A three-day festival of music featuring live bands and artists, fringe events, bar sessions, kids activities and competitions throughout the village. Further details at www.killinmusicfest.com

Saturday, July 1st LUSS HIGHLAND GATHERING

From 10.30am at the showground close to Luss Village - More details on the Luss Highland Gathering Facebook page.

Sunday, July 16th

LOCH LOMOND HIGHLAND GAMES

Balloch - More details on the Loch Lomond Highland Games Facebook page

Tuesday, July 18th

INVERARAY HIGHLAND GAMES

Inveraray Castle Grounds - More details on the Inveraray Highland Games Facebook page

Saturday, July 22nd

BALQUHIDDER, LOCHEARNHEAD & STRATHYRE HIGHLAND GAMES

Lochearnhead - See more on their Facebook page.

Wednesday, August 2nd

KILLIN HIGHLAND GATHERING

More details on the Killin Highland Gathering Facebook page

Sunday, August 6th

BRIDGE OF ALLAN HIGHLAND GAMES

More details on the Bridge of Allan Highland Games Facebook page

Saturday 19th August

KILLIN AGRICULTURAL SHOW

Breadalbane Park, Main Street, Killin. There will be sheep and cattle judging, a fancy dress parade, races, competitions and demonstrations, followed by a dance in the evening. Full details can be found on the Killin Agricultural Show facebook page or by calling 07745 947910

Saturday, August 19th

STIRLING HIGHLAND GAMES

see more on the Facebook page and at www.stirlinghighlandgames.com

Sunday, August 20th

CRIEFF HIGHLAND GATHERING

see more on the Facebook page and at www.crieffhighlandgathering.com

24th - 26th August

COWAL HIGHLAND GATHERING

See more on the Facebook page and at www.cowalhighlandgathering.com

A WALK IN THE PARK

IMPROVING THE CURVING WATERS TRAIL

In the latest in a series of articles covering some of the best walks in and around the National Park, Friends Vice-Chair, John Urquhart, reports on recent major improvements to a popular stretch of Three Lochs Way Great Trail that he coordinated in his role as Convener of Helensburgh and District Access Trust (HADAT).



Moira and Susan, from Kilmarnock walking group "Take a Hike", try out the newly improved trail.

The Three Lochs Way long distance walking route links Balloch, Helensburgh, Garelochhead, Arrochar, Tarbet and Inveruglas, all communities on the shores of beautiful freshwater and sea lochs on the south western edge of the National Park. It is promoted by NatureScot as one of Scotland's Great Trails and is popular with walkers and mountain bikers alike.

The section nearest to Helensburgh sees in excess of 100,000 users a year!

As the route mostly parallels the West Highland Railway, people can walk from one station to another and use the train to get back to their starting point. The walk between Helensburgh and Balloch lends itself to this approach too, although you do have to change trains at Dalreoch. The ascent from Balloch to the outlook at Goukhill Muir gives great views over Loch Lomond, while on the other side, you have the Firth of Clyde and Arran's distant 'Sleeping Warrior' skyline continuously in view for most of the descent through the Camis Eskin plantation towards Helensburgh. As ever, the place names tell their own story - Goukhill is in the Lowland Scots - 'Gouk' meaning lop sided - from the same linguistic root as the English, awkward. The hill, streamlined by flowing ice, is indeed distinctly lop sided. Being right on the Highland Boundary Fault, we are on the historical cultural boundary between the English-speaking Scottish Lowlands and the



Gaelic speaking Highlands, so it is no surprise to find place names in both languages. 'Camis Eskin' is in the Gaelic and means something like curving waters, perhaps a reference to the winding course of the Red Burn here. The 2 kilometre long Camis Eskin section of Three Lochs Trail was created about 15 years ago by Scottish Woodlands as a public access condition of their forestry grant. It was never fully surfaced and had been deteriorating recently under the pressure of increasing numbers of walkers and mountain bikers. However, all that was about to change when, in December 2022, an email arrived from NatureScot saying HADAT had been successful in its request for funding from the National Walking and Cycling network budget. This was a Christmas present the Access Trust could hardly refuse, so the pressure was on to get contractors lined up to meet the funding deadline for completion of the work by mid-March. Luckily the Trust had sufficient reserves of its own to meet the funding contribution required by NatureScot.

We gave the job to the groundworks contractor, Gartocharn farmer David McKenzie, who not only found himself working against the clock, but also the weather. January and February were wet and mud soon became a serious issue on the lower reaches of the job. Despite that, by the 5th of March the work was complete and when I went on an inspection that afternoon, as the photos show, there were lots of folk out walking the trail and all of them delighted with the improved surface. Thomas Janich, the leader of the Glasgow University walking group (pictured) put it very well when he said, "The walk yesterday was a perfect opportunity to get away from our desks, get some exercise and experience the beauty of Scotland. "Some of us just recently came to Glasgow so it was their first hiking experience in Scotland, which they thoroughly enjoyed. "Others are a bit more experienced and enjoyed starting this year's hiking season with a lovely trip from Helensburgh to Balloch." Later, when I contacted NatureScot to thank their Recreation, Access and Paths Officer, Fiona Cuninghame, she said, "We are delighted to have supported this project to improve 2 kilometres of the Three Lochs Way, making it easier for more people to use and enjoy this picturesque and popular route."



John (near left) met these Glasgow University PhD students on the newly improved Camis Eskin trail. A truly international bunch, hailing from China, India, Paraguay, Spain, Portugal, Germany.... and Glasgow!

Why not venture over by the curving waters of the Red Burn to check it out for yourself? An excellent guidebook to the Three Lochs Way is available to buy online at Helensburgh and District Access Trust's (HADAT) Three Lochs Way www.threelochsaway.co.uk/

ON THE WATER...

Exploring the National Park by Boat



Take the Steamer to Stronachlar and cycle back



The Osprey provides the opportunity for a bespoke cruise

One of the best ways to enjoy the special scenic qualities of the National Park is by boat, and here local photographer and writer Paul Saunders provides an overview of the wide range of opportunities available to relax and ply the waters of the many lochs by taking a trip on historic steamships or more modern passenger boats. He also provides details of boat hire operators in the National Park for the more adventurous traveller and fishing trips.

We start at Loch Katrine in the Trossachs, where wooden boats took early Victorian visitors, flocking to see the wondrous scenery vividly brought to life in Sir Walter Scott's 1810 poem, *The Lady of the Lake*. Steamships have sailed here since 1843, and a new exhibition at Trossachs Pier celebrates their history, coinciding with the recent welcome return this spring of the beloved 123-year-old Steamship Sir Walter Scott after a £750,000 restoration programme.

One of the most popular activities is taking a bike (cycle hire at Trossachs Pier) onboard at Trossachs Pier and cruising to Stronachlachar, returning by cycling along the 14-mile smooth loch-side road. Loch Katrine has three other cruise boats, including the small Osprey boat for private charters.

lochkatrine.com



One of the best waters for fishing in Scotland is at the nearby Lake of Menteith, where you can hire a small boat and see if you can catch fish before the resident osprey do!

menteith-fisheries.co.uk



Loch Goil in Argyll is also ideal for fishing, and Loch Goil Cruisers, located between Lochgoilhead and Carrick Castle rent motorboats. Out on this dramatic fjord-like sea loch, you could see seals, otters and even dolphins and whales.

lochgoilcruisers.co.uk

At the northern end of Loch Lomond, an on-demand ferry allows walkers of the West Highland Way to raise a buoy and indicate that they'd like the ferry to take them to Ardlui Marina and Hotel.

ardlui.com

If these aren't enough, there are plenty more opportunities to enjoy the waters of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs, including stand-up paddleboarding, sailing, canoeing, and wakeboarding!



Another long-established cruise operator is Sweeney's Cruise Co, with water bus services and cruises from Balmaha and Luss. They have cruises frequently departing from Balloch, including evening sunset ones on high quality boats carefully maintained by several generations of the Sweeney family.

sweeneyscruise.co.uk

The Macfarlane family runs the historic wooden ferry boat service between Balmaha Boatyard to Inchcailloch island. This short crossing enables visitors to access nature trails meandering across the island to the popular Port Bawn beach

balmahaboatyard.co.uk

Portnellan Farm at Gartocharn offers motorboat tours, an excellent way to see, or visit some of Loch Lomond's 22 islands

portnellanfarm.co.uk

Loch Lomond Leisure also offers motorboat tours.

lochlomond-scotland.com

The hotel on the largest Loch Lomond island, Inchmurrin, operate a bookable ferry to take customers from Arden to the island for a meal or to stay.

inchmurrin-lochlomond.com



PS Waverley, the world's last sea-going paddle steamer, has recently run a successful fundraising appeal to help its struggles with rising fuel and annual refurbishment costs. Sailings are scheduled around Glasgow and the Clyde Coast each spring and autumn, calling at Dunoon and Blairmore's Victorian Pier for cruises up Loch Long.

waverleyexcursions.co.uk

Cruise Loch Lomond, with an impressive fleet of boats, runs a series of water bus services with routes that include connections with Rowardennan (for Ben Lomond), Tarbet, Luss, Balmaha, Inchcailloch island and Inversnaid. They also have cruises departing from many of those locations.

cruiselochlomond.co.uk



THE Clans

of LOCH LOMOND & THE TROSSACHS

The Scottish Highlands, which begin at Loch Lomond & The Trossachs, were once a very different society, where land tenure was closely linked to kinship and loyalty. Members of the clan had an allegiance to their chief, a kind of mutual protection whereby the clan folk lived securely in their territories but would unswervingly answer the chief's call to arms if it came.

A clan's wealth was measured in cattle (as a means of seeing them through the harsh Highland winters). Many of the clans around Loch Lomond and The Trossachs were within easy reach of the prosperous farms of the Lowlands and had a reputation as cattle thieves. At the very least, they had expertise in cattle droving or protecting cattle from other marauding clans. The most famous drover, dealer and protection operator was, of course, Rob Roy Macgregor.

Here is a brief history of some of the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs clans.

Clan Campbell



The Campbells were the most powerful clan in Scotland, with many branches, holding a significant swathe of land across and beyond the top end of today's National Park. The traditional burial place of the Campbell chiefs is at Kilmun.

Clan Macfarlane



This clan is primarily associated with the landscapes beyond Luss on Loch Lomond and the northwest around Glen Sloy. In medieval Scotland, Inveruglas was the headquarters of the chiefs of the clan, where their ruined stronghold can still be seen on an island in the bay.

Clan Buchanan



Giving their name to the parish in the southeast part of Loch Lomond, the Buchanans gradually dispersed. However, in 1725, a society was set up and known as 'The Buchanan's Charity, kept at Glasgow'. This, in turn, evolved into the Buchanan Society, claiming to be the oldest society of its kind – and is still active. The Loch Lomond Island Clairinch – which gave the clan their battle cry or slogan, 'Clar Innis' – was acquired by Clan Buchanan in 1934.

Clan Macnab



The Macnabs were a considerable force in the Southern Highlands. They sided against Robert the Bruce (King Robert I) in the Scots Wars of Independence and, consequently, had their lands ravaged. The clan's chief memorial is the small island on River Dochart in Killin.

Clan Galbraith



The clan is associated with Inchgalbraith, an island on Loch Lomond near Luss, one of their early strongholds.

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Clan Graham



Buchanan House and its successor, Buchanan Castle, became the clan seat of the Grahams. The 4th Marquess acquired the title Duke of Montrose in 1707 for his part in

promoting the Union with England.

The seat of the Clan Graham is still Buchanan Castle, dating from 1854 and built by the 4th Duke of Montrose. The castle became a hospital in World War II, its most famous occupant being the Nazi Rudolf Hess, who was taken there after his mysterious flight to Scotland. After that, the roof was removed, and the building fell into disrepair.

Clan Gregor



Over time Clan Gregor lost much of their land to the mighty Clan Campbell. Gradually, they became notorious cattle raiders, surviving by preying on their neighbours.

Finally, they were outlawed after the 1603 Battle of Glen Fruin (against the Colquhouns). Even the clan name was banned.

Rossdhu House (right) on the banks of Loch Lomond south of Luss is now the home to Loch Lomond Golf Club but has long associations with Colquhoun Clan.

Clan Colquhoun



This old-established family in Dumbartonshire had extensive landholdings around Loch Lomond. One famous historical event connected with them is the Battle of

Glen Fruin in the winter of 1602-3.

Accounts vary, but the episode started when two Macgregors, travelling back to their lands near Inversnaid, were refused accommodation by the local Colquhouns near Luss. They then killed and ate a Colquhoun sheep. For this, they were subsequently hanged, some say, after having payment for their 'dinner' turned down. Later, Sir James Colquhoun, 23rd Chief of Clan Colquhoun and 1st Baronet of Luss, was one of the earliest officers in the famous regiment, the Black Watch. He went on to form the town of Helensburgh, named after his wife, Lady Helen Colquhoun.



HERE. NOW. ALL OF US

Small window of opportunity to reshape our National Park and protect it for future generations

Gordon Watson, Chief Executive, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park



Scotland's first National Park may only be 20 years old but its landscape has been here for millennia. Now, with the impacts of the twin climate and nature crises becoming ever more apparent, while local communities and businesses recover from the challenges of the pandemic, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park is at a crossroads.

Over the next 12 weeks, residents, businesses, communities and visitors are being asked to help imagine the future of the National Park.

A draft National Park Partnership Plan was published in April, marking the start of a 12-week consultation asking everyone with an interest in the National Park about their priorities for its future.

The draft five-year plan puts forward a 2045 vision and a wide range of proposals to prompt discussion, driven primarily by the scale and urgency of the nature and climate crises.

It also recognises the changes in how people live, work and visit the National Park in recent years, particularly post-Covid 19.

The draft plan highlights opportunities to set a new direction for the National Park as a 'climate-resilient place where people and nature thrive together', focusing on three key areas:

- >> restoring nature
- >> creating a sustainable, low-carbon visitor destination
- >> enabling a greener economy and sustainable living



Measures including more tree planting, sustainable transport services, affordable housing for local people and a 'nature first' approach to development are just some of the proposals put forward as options to ensure Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park has a sustainable future for generations to come.

The impacts of the climate emergency are becoming increasingly real to those living, working and visiting the National Park with more frequent flooding and landslips seriously damaging people's homes, communities and businesses.

Forecasted increases in extreme weather events and rising temperatures mean that more of these impacts are likely - more blue-green algal blooms in lochs, more tree diseases affecting our forests, challenging conditions for agriculture and more storms, wildfires and drought.

A warmer and wetter climate, as well as water scarcity events, threaten nature and some habitats and species are struggling to adapt to these snowballing changes.

Despite this being a National Park, nature is in real trouble here with nearly a fifth of even our most special, designated sites for nature being in decline.



79% OF VISITORS

ARRIVE IN THE NATIONAL PARK BY CAR

The National Park has the potential to become a major carbon sink for Scotland but in reality, damaged peatlands are emitting carbon instead of absorbing it and some of our most precious native woodlands remain isolated and unable to regenerate due to pressures from animals grazing.

With nature underpinning human existence through the benefits and services it provides - food, air, water,

materials, health and economic wealth - its decline impacts us all. So tackling the nature and climate crises is crucial if we want to future proof the rural economy and our communities.

To capture and store more greenhouse gases in the National Park, it is proposed that the pace and scale of peatland restoration and new woodland creation steps up considerably.



Recognising that urgent action is required to restore nature, proposals in the draft plan set out where new habitats and networks for wildlife could be established to reverse the alarming decline in important species and features.

Low carbon local living, more affordable homes and opportunities for jobs and businesses in sectors such as sustainable travel, woodland creation and ecotourism are all proposed for National Park communities.

The National Park is also an incredibly popular visitor destination, enjoyed



by millions of visitors every year and we need to help our visitors enjoy the National Park with less impacts on climate and nature.

During the Covid-19, numbers increased as people reconnected with nature and many of those visitors who discovered the beauty of the landscape during those years continue to visit.

Going forward, it is proposed that the National Park is transformed into a more sustainable visitor destination, supporting people to access the outdoors in a way that is more in harmony with nature and supports the reduction of emissions.

Low emissions travel will be a significant part of that and as well as benefits for climate, improved public and active transport options also make it easier for people who don't own a car to access the Park. Around 79 per cent of visitor journeys to the National Park are made by car and with volumes of car traffic only increasing, there is an urgent need to improve public and active transport options in the Park.



The National Park Partnership Plan is a five-year plan that guides how all of those with a role to play in looking after the National Park will work together to manage the Park and achieve a shared vision for the area.

The draft plan is available on the National Park Authority website and will be refined after the 12-week consultation period, using the feedback from partners, stakeholders and individuals to finalise the plan before it goes to Scottish Ministers for approval before coming into effect in 2024.

To take part in the conversation about the future of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park visit www.lochlomond-trossachs.org/future



GIANT SEQUOIA TREES AT BENMORE BOTANIC GARDEN SAVED

Described as one of the finest entrances to a botanical garden anywhere in the world, the magnificent 159-year-old Redwood Avenue at Benmore Botanic Garden, at the south west entrance to the National Park just north of Dunoon, has been saved from an early demise through a daring conservation exercise to ward off its susceptibility to plant pathogens.

When the 49 giant redwoods (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) started showing signs of distress, Curator Peter Baxter and colleagues at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) agreed radical action was required. As branches defoliated and the crowns of the trees started to thin, there was a real risk the trees of the 350m avenue, would succumb to diseases such as phytophthora, the group of plant pathogens capable of inflicting rapid devastation to trees. The race was on to save the stunning specimens and the experts believed the answer was to tackle the situation from the roots up.

Peter Baxter explained: "We were observing the trees going into decline from about 2016. However, the process accelerated worryingly and by 2020 they were existing, rather than growing. My concern was that we were reaching a point of no return."

"The reasons for the decline were complex and multifaceted but soil compaction was thought to be central to the problem. Planted in 1863 by the wealthy US landowner James Piers Patrick, the trees were among the first redwoods introduced to Europe from California and the Avenue was planted along the main driveway to Benmore House. Only a very thin layer of topsoil was supporting the turf over the original hard-core road and this, combined with a typically wet west coast climate and limited drainage, caused serious waterlogging and puddling around the roots, creating a favourable habitat for pathogens, and increasing trees' disease-susceptibility through stress.

"We believed the best approach would be to employ a combination of breaking-up compacted soil and applying a drainage layer of specialist growing medium to prevent future puddling and waterlogging around the trees to significantly reduce

the pathogen pressure they faced. But, that would be an expensive exercise and we didn't know whether available equipment could work in our climatic conditions."

Briefly halted by the covid lockdown, the £110,000 project finally took off at the start of the decade. The process involved killing off the grass around the redwoods, then utilising a geo injector to puncture the ground and blow air beneath the surface, breaking-up the compacted soil and making room for the addition of granular materials to largely reduce the likelihood of re-compaction. Breaking the soil improved its structure and aeration, allowing the roots to have the stimulation they need to strengthen and thrive.

RBGE's Director of Horticulture Raoul Curtis-Machin said the need to save the iconic feature was beyond debate. Noting the virulence of plant pathogens, he also urged those responsible for gardens and estates to work together: "The Avenue is a great responsibility for us, and one we don't bear lightly. These are landmark trees in the UK landscape, their statuesque dark green heads rising above most others. It has been



a joy to see the fresh green growth re-appearing on the branches.

"We are very open to sharing our learnings and experience with other gardens and landowners because we are all in this

together now. Climate change and pest and disease threats are coming thick and fast and they don't respect national borders, county lines or property fences."

While this battle looks to have been won, RBGE plant health and biosecurity scientist Matt Elliott, concluded on a salutary note on the challenges ahead: "Plant pests and pathogens have become a significant issue in the last 30 years. Gardens contain a wide range of hosts and, therefore, can be particularly susceptible to pest and disease outbreaks. The condition of the host is also crucial, if plants are stressed for some reason, such as climate, pollution and/or soil compaction, they will be more likely to become infected and the resulting disease more likely to be fatal. It is for this reason that we provide plants with the best growing conditions we can, to enable them to fight off diseases."



The process involved killing off the grass around the redwoods, then utilising a geo injector to puncture the ground and blow air beneath the surface, breaking-up the compacted soil



Benmore Botanic Garden is part of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE). It sits on the A815, seven miles north of Dunoon on the Cowal Peninsula. Western Ferries sail from Gourock. It is open daily to the public from March 1 to October 31.

In its magnificent mountainside setting, Benmore is steeped in history and surrounded by dramatic scenery. The Garden's 120 acres are home to a world-famous collection of plants from regions ranging from the Orient and the Himalaya to North and South America. In particular, it is renowned for its collection of more than 300 species of rhododendron.

The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) is a leading international research organisation delivering knowledge, education and plant conservation action around the world. In Scotland its four Gardens at Edinburgh, Benmore, Dawyck and Logan attract a million visitors each year. It operates as a Non Departmental Public Body established under the National Heritage (Scotland) Act 1985, principally funded by the Scottish Government. It is also a registered charity, managed by a Board of Trustees appointed by Ministers. Its mission is "To explore, conserve and explain the world of plants for a better future."



CLEAN ENERGY IN THE NATIONAL PARK



Dr Roddy Yarr, Executive Lead for Sustainability at Strathclyde University and a new Trustee of the Friends, provides some thoughts on what the Climate Emergency means for the people living and working in the National Park and how more could be made of renewable energy opportunities on our doorstep.

The impacts of climate change present very real challenges to our native habitats and species and to our communities and economy. Increasing frequency of flood events and the loss of biodiversity are becoming more and more apparent. In this critical decade of change, it is clear that action is needed.

So what does the Climate Emergency that was declared by the UK and Scottish governments mean for the National Park and for the people, businesses and organisations living, working and operating in the Park? With terms like net zero, just transition, social inclusion, green recovery, nature-based solutions, or sustainable economic growth to contend with and try to understand, it can be confusing. People can often disengage when faced with the multitude of definitions that must be understood and the obvious scale of the challenge and what does all this mean when there are other priorities, like a series of global crises in a post-pandemic world that involve higher energy costs and a higher cost of living? Some may observe that this pattern of events and crises seems to be the new 'Business As Usual'. In early April the IMF declared that Britain would be one of the worst performing major economies in the world this year, shrinking by 0.3%. So, it seems that we have to resolve the climate and biodiversity crisis despite these

other pressures – but how and where?

Ross Priory

For businesses and organisations operating in the National Park, energy costs exemplify how exposed we are to global issues at a local level. For instance, the University of Strathclyde's facility at Ross Priory in Gartocharn has been subject to substantial increased costs for energy, food and consumables. In fact the University, like most organisations that rely on retail energy markets and pricing has experienced a doubling of energy costs in the past few years. This has direct impact on operating costs which has a ripple effect on other revenue costs and core functions and services.

One way of tackling energy cost increases is to generate more renewable energy for local use. Solar panels on roof areas or hydro-electric schemes. Rivers, lochs, roofs, rough grazing land can be used to generate heat and power. So, there is an abundance of natural resource available that can be used to generate clean heat and power at a price that is competitive with retail energy costs and if installed at a domestic or business level, the benefits are direct to the consumer. The Oak Tree Inn at Balmaha adopted alternative clean energy solutions some years ago and are reaping the benefits. The Fraser family, who are the owners, invested

heavily in a biomass boiler and ground source heating systems to connect the cluster of properties they operate in the village. Sandy Fraser said: "Through our involvement in the electrical and hospitality industries in a rural area we were conscious that to develop and sustain our growing business we needed to contain, and ideally reduce, our escalating energy costs and we have done this successfully by investing heavily by generating our own power on site. I am glad we did given the recent crippling rises in energy costs which has led to the daily closure of 12 hospitality businesses."

Community Benefits

Communities have also adopted solutions that tackle the cost of energy. On page 30 of this edition of The Voice there is an article on how the community at Callander, the National Park's largest settlement developed their own hydro scheme. This is one of several community hydro schemes that have been developed in the National Park and is a great example of a self-help community initiative. The 425-kilowatt Callander Community Hydro Scheme, believed to be the first fully community developed hydro scheme in Scotland, is in Stank Glen above Loch Lubnaig. It is a run-of-river scheme, in which water is diverted from a river, piped down to the generating turbine then returned to the river.

The scheme has been generating electricity into the National Grid since September 2014 and has consistently performed ahead of forecasts with very few periods of dry weather affecting energy production. Callander Community Development Trust owns the scheme and is gift-aided profits to allocate to projects and activities that will benefit the people and community of Callander.

However, domestic and business scale renewables are one thing. It is another thing entirely to scale this technology to benefit everyone and to enable clean heat and power that makes a significant difference to climate mitigation for communities right across the area. Some of whom have little or no access to the natural resources or financial capital needed to develop energy schemes and to become empowered to take action. This latter aspect is a key theme of the Scottish Government's Draft Energy and Just Transition Strategy and indeed the new National Planning Framework. So how can this be achieved at the scale that is necessary in a National Park and its environs where other important aspects must be considered and balanced against or even put ahead of sustainable economic growth? The Draft National Park Partnership Plan 2024-2029 notes that,

"... the National Park could have a thriving and resilient landscape, with returning native wildlife and improved natural habitats coexisting alongside regenerative land uses such as modern farming, forestry and renewable energy production that is more sympathetic to nature but still produces high quality local food, energy, natural products and the jobs that go with them." Sounds sensible but what does this mean in real terms and is the scale of change needed adequately addressed and balanced with other priorities?

Large-Scale Wind Farm

For instance, just outside the National Park boundary, the current application for a large-scale wind farm at Vale of Leven on Auchenroch Muir is a 'once in a generation proposal' that will generate 70MW of power that is supplied onto the grid. If approved the asset will use the wind resource to generate enough to power 50,000 homes according to the developer. There will be a community benefits package for local communities to benefit from which is in line with the aims of the Draft Energy and Just Transition Strategy. However, one must ask, "does this sort of development actually benefit everyone in the community in the area of the windfarm should it

receive approval?" Does it enable significantly reduced power costs for the citizens and businesses in the area including in the National Park? There are more questions to be answered as part of a just energy transition and in a climate emergency. Should the public sector take a direct financial stake in these sorts of commercial projects to enable more affordable energy for our communities and businesses? What new financial and investment models would be needed to achieve this sort of change? Can the electricity system in its existing form enable this without significant rural investment? We have been here before when the regional authorities operated energy systems to generate energy using the resources to hand. The difference now is that we have the technology and natural resources to do this without the same climate impact and crucially for the benefit of citizens and businesses as part of a new sustainable economic growth model.

I hope we can find answers to all these questions because the current energy cost crisis is one that needs to be addressed if we are to secure a socially just society that makes full use of Scotland's natural resources sustainably for the benefit of all.



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CYCLE IN THE PARK

LOCH LOMOND & THE TROSSACHS COUNTRYSIDE TRUST 

NEW CYCLE IN THE PARK WELCOME SCHEME



Cycling is one of the most efficient, low carbon, healthy and fun ways to get around and explore the contrasting landscapes of the National Park. The extensive network of gravel trails, cycle paths and quiet roads of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park enables everyone to journey through landscapes that tell a story of people and history since prehistoric times, connect with nature and enjoy local hospitality.

Cycling is worth over £500 million pounds a year to the Scottish economy and to help businesses in the National Park engage with this growing sector the Loch Lomond and Trossachs Countryside Trust have created a new free to register 'Cycle in the Park Welcome' scheme.

As well as the Business Toolkit booklet the first 30 businesses to register receive a 'start-up pack' containing all the essentials to make cyclists welcome.

Why Cycling Matters?

Cycling is a type of active travel that can help all of us in the transition to low carbon transport.

The business toolkit contains a wealth of information for any business that wants to find out how to make the most of sustainable cycle tourism and create a Cycle in the Park Welcome. It has sections on the cycling market, it's value, bikes on buses, trains and boats and some of the basics of making the most from this important sector. It also provides, some case studies and some top tips in making cyclists welcome and much more!

Getting Ready for the World's first ever cycling mega-event in 2023!

In August, Scotland is set to host the first ever cycling mega event in the 2023 UCI Cycling World Championships showcasing Scotland as a cycling nation. Balloch is the start point for the Under 23

Men's on the 12th August and the Women's Road Race on the 13th.

Time trial events will take place in Stirling District heading out towards the National Park before finishing at Stirling Castle. Perthshire will host the Gran Fondo, a long-distance, mass-participation event – which organisers say "celebrates competitive cycling for everyone, not just the professionals". So lots going on in and around the Park.

The 2023 UCI Cycling Worlds will combine 13 existing UCI World Championships into one mega-event creating history by uniting the global cycling family and making it one of the world's top 10 sporting events. With around one million spectators anticipated in Scotland over 11 days.

This is a unique opportunity to showcase all aspects of cycling in the National Park including links with local businesses participating in the new **Cycle in the Park Welcome scheme**.



When businesses register, they receive support which includes:

- Our **FREE Business Toolkit booklet**
- A **FREE web listing** on our website
- and, become a **feature businesses** in our promotion campaign



COMMUNITY PLACE PLANS TAKE CENTRE STAGE

"I have lived in this village my whole life and over the years it has become a desolate mess."



Community led groups throughout the National Park have been busy preparing new 10-year Place Plans for their communities. The plans are aimed at demonstrating support for community aspirations and outcomes. Once adopted and published, these plans provide a route map for Development Trusts and Community Councils to facilitate positive change in their communities, working with their Council, the National Park Authority, other agencies, landowners, and funders. As part of the process, neighbouring villages are finding new ways to collaborate on projects that will benefit their communities. Below a flavour of the plan for the lochside villages of Arrochar, Tarbet and Ardlui is provided by Nick Wright who worked closely with local community groups during the plan development process.

Since last year, Scottish planning legislation has enabled local communities to prepare Local Place Plans. These are similar to the Community Action Plans already prepared by many communities around the National Park but there is one crucial difference: Local Place Plans are statutory plans, whilst Community Action Plans are not. That means that

the National Park is legally obliged to take Local Place Plans into account as it prepares the next Local Development Plan - the Park-wide planning policy document that will be published later this year for public consultation.

The National Park has been providing support to communities preparing Local Place Plans and a number of communities have already completed Plans including Callander, Killin, Drymen, Luss and Arden, and Arrochar, Tarbet and Ardlui. More information on Local Place Planning in the National Park can be seen here: www.lochlomond-trossachs.org/planning/planning-guidance/local-development-plan/local-place-plans/

In Arrochar, Tarbet and Ardlui over several months, the local community prepared a door-to-door community survey to find out people's aspirations for the future, then held a series of drop-in events to tease out priorities and solutions based on those aspirations. This led to a draft plan, published for community feedback, and then an amended final version.

Local landowner Luss Estates Company provided financial support to the community, helping to fund survey printing, hall hire, website hosting and the services of independent consultants. Luss Estates Company worked in conjunction with the community, so that they might better understand community aspirations and to inform their own future 10 year Estate Plan.

293 people shared their aspirations for Arrochar, Tarbet, Succoth & Ardlui. The survey responses are a fascinating insight into the community as it is now, and what we want it to be.

Affordable Housing

Some of the issues raised in Arrochar, Tarbet and Ardlui will be familiar in other parts of the National Park. Making sure local families and workers have access to affordable housing, for example: average house prices increased in Arrochar and Tarbet by over 70% between 2019 and 2021 and a high percentage of the houses that have come on the market in recent years were snapped up for second homes or holiday letting further reducing the housing stock available for locals. Similarly, concerns about the effects of trunk road traffic through villages, being able to get about safely on foot or by bike, and having good opportunities for young people, will be echoed in other parts of the National Park.

The plan highlights specific things for Arrochar and Tarbet too. Tackling dereliction and vacancy is one issue, with the villages blighted by buildings and sites in poor repair. This neglect acts as a drag on the community, who are hoping that the Local Place Plan will be a tool to generate new collaborative ways of tackling the problem.

Time will tell whether that will bear fruit. But without the plan identifying the issue, the chances of something happening would be much slimmer.

You can see more detail about how the community prepared the plan - and of course the plan itself - at bit.ly/three-villages-LPP



Enjoying the new slide at Camp Place Play Park, which benefitted from the Callander Community Hydro Fund

GENERATING CASH FOR CALLANDER

A conversation in the pub on a rainy day led to a group of locals building a hydro-electricity scheme that generates cash for projects that benefit Callander, the National Park's largest settlement. This is one of several community hydro schemes that have been developed in the National Park and is a great example of a self-help community initiative.

The 425-kilowatt Callander Community Hydro Scheme, the first and largest fully community developed hydro scheme in Scotland, is in Stank Glen above Loch Lubnaig. It is a run-of-river scheme, in which water is diverted from a river, piped down to the generating turbine then returned to the river. It cost £1.65m to build and is expected to earn £3m for the local community over its first 20 years. It will continue to generate electricity after this but the Government subsidy (feed-in tariff or FIT) will end and income will be reduced. The scheme has been generating electricity into the National Grid since September 2014 and has consistently performed ahead of forecasts with very few periods of dry weather affecting energy production. In its first summer alone, it produced four times its predicted output for July.

Callander Community Development Trust owns the scheme and allocates the profits to projects and activities that will benefit the people and community of Callander. Most recently it has set up a hardship fund in partnership with Stirling Citizens Advice Bureau to support some of the most vulnerable residents.

Around £50,000 a year also goes to the Callander Community Hydro Fund. Anyone can apply to the fund - the important thing is that projects should benefit Callander.

Since late 2015, £342,232 has been drawn down from the Community Hydro Fund to support a wide range of projects, from festivals and youth work to hanging



Building the turbine house in 2014



Inside the turbine house

baskets and toilet refurbs. Many have attracted significant funding from other sources to benefit Callander.

Frank Park, Chairman of Callander Community Hydro Ltd and Callander Community Development Trust, said, "It all started back in 2008 with a conversation in the pub about harnessing the rain for the benefit of Callander.

"A small group of volunteers, set up in 2010, spent the next few years measuring river flow, sourcing loans, agreeing contracts with the bank and Forestry & Land Scotland's predecessor (the landowner), completing more than 30 studies, getting planning permission then appointing a project manager, technical specialists and a hydro construction company. In the warm sunny summer of 2014, the scheme was completed within four months.

"We were determined to pay back the loans that would limit the funds available as soon as possible. So, we're very pleased to have paid off more than half of the 15-year loans already."

The hydro scheme is maintained by another team of trained volunteers who regularly go up to the site to check that everything is working as it should. It's thanks to all of these local people that funds are now able to support so many community projects.

More information about the scheme and application forms for the Hydro Fund are at incallander.co.uk/ccdt_hydrofundgrants.



Here are just a few projects that the fund has enabled:

- CAMP PLACE PLAYPARK IMPROVEMENTS
- CALLANDER'S ANNUAL JAZZ & BLUES FESTIVAL
- CALLANDER LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP
- CALLANDER COVID RESPONSE GROUP SUPPORT AND MEALS TO VULNERABLE RESIDENTS
- STIRLING CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAU OUTREACH WORKER BASED IN CALLANDER
- INDOOR SOFT PLAY IN COMMUNITY-RUN MCLAREN LEISURE CENTRE
- CHRISTMAS LIGHTS IN ANCASTER SQUARE
- COMMUNITY-RUN VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE THAT REPLACED VISITSCOTLAND'S CENTRE
- CALLANDER YOUTH PROJECT YOUTH CLUB ACTIVITIES AND FULLY ACCESSIBLE GLAMPING POD
- MCLAREN HIGH SCHOOL PIPE BAND COACHING
- GREENER CALLANDER FLORAL DISPLAYS AND COMMUNITY GARDEN
- CRAIGARD CLUB LUNCH CLUB FOR ELDERLY RESIDENTS
- TROSSACHS TRAIL INFORMATION PANELS, WEBSITE AND LEAFLET PRODUCED BY THE FRIENDS OF LOCH LOMOND & THE TROSSACHS

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Telephone: 0800 2300391
www.hpb-trossachs.co.uk

Tigh Mor Trossachs is the Scottish flagship of the Holiday Property Bond (www.hpb.co.uk). It was formerly the Trossachs Hotel which by 1990 had fallen into a state of disrepair. Tigh Mor was completely renovated in 1992 and now has 76 properties, an indoor swimming pool and extensive leisure facilities.

• OPTICAL EXPRESS & MOULSDALE FOUNDATION

Telephone: 0800 023 20 20
email: enquiries@opticalexpress.com
www.opticalexpress.com

The Mousdale Foundation & Optical Express are proud to support the Friends of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs. For 35 years, the friends have been working to protect the area's environmental heritage, promote it as a most special part of Scotland, and provide for its future through a range of projects for people and for wildlife.

• ROSS PRIORY

Gartocharn G83 8NL 0141 548 3565

Ross Priory, on the banks of Loch Lomond, the Staff Educational and Recreational Centre of the University of Strathclyde, is proud to support the Friends of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs.

• LOCHS & GLENS HOLIDAYS

School Road, Gartocharn, G83 8RW
Tel: 01389 713 713
email: enquiries@lochsandglens.com
www.lochsandglens.com

Lochs & Glens Holidays are proud to support the Friends of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs

• LODGE ON LOCH LOMOND HOTEL

Luss, Argyll, G83 8PA
Tel: 01436 860 201 Fax: 01436 860 203
email: res@loch-lomond.co.uk
www.loch-lomond.co.uk

The 4-star Lodge on Loch Lomond Hotel has a unique lochside setting. It offers stylish accommodation, some with en-suite saunas and private balconies, Colquhoun's, a 2 AA rosette restaurant with panoramic views of the Loch and mountains and leisure facilities with swimming pool.

• THE INN ON LOCH LOMOND

Inverbeg, G83 8PD 01436 860678
Email: res@innonlochlomond.co.uk
www.innonlochlomond.co.uk

Set back on the main A82, three miles north of Luss and surrounded by amazing scenery, the 4-star Inn offers delicious food, drink or a relaxing overnight stay. Unwind, relax and enjoy the wide selection of local and seasonal dishes and fantastic range of drinks in our restaurant and bar.

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• LOCH KATRINE

Trossachs Pier, Loch Katrine, By Callander, Stirling FK17 8HZ
Information and Reservations - (01877) 332000
www.lochkatrine.com

Loch Katrine - a special experience for everyone to enjoy. Cruising Loch Katrine in the heart of The Trossachs is a special experience - on the classic steamship 'Sir Walter Scott', or on 'Lady of the Lake'. Visitor amenities include lochside walks, shopping, cycle hire and Katrine Café. Cruises depart daily year round subject to weather and demand..

• LUSS ESTATES

Luss Estates Company, Arnburn Arden Argyll, G83 8RH
email: estateoffice@lussestates.co.uk
www.lussestates.co.uk

One of Scotland's greatest Estates, spanning 40,000+ acres and eight centuries of continuous ownership by the family of Colquhoun of Luss. Today we combine farming, forestry, tourism, property and power generation - protecting, preserving and developing the estate to enrich and ensure the future of the land, resources, villages, communities and people which are at our heart.

• ARGYLL HOLIDAYS

Lochgoilhead PA24 8AD 08454596412
www.argyllholidays.com

Argyll Holidays have 8 award-winning holiday parks across Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, including one on the banks of Loch Lomond itself. From developing green energy sources to creating wildflower habitats, Argyll Holidays care deeply about protecting our beautiful part of the world and are delighted to be supporting the work of the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs..

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Glasgow, G63 0JQ Tel: 01360 870 357
email: info@oak-tree-inn.co.uk
www.oak-tree-inn.co.uk

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• 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 8SS
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
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www.lochlomond-holidays.co.uk

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• 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

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www.poppieshotel.com

• VENACHAR LOCHSIDE

Loch Venachar, Callander FK17 8HP
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www.venachar-lochside.co.uk

• WHEELS CYCLING CENTRE - BIKES / HIRE

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Tel: 01877 331220 www.deliecosse.co.uk

• COTTAGES AND CASTLES

Tel: 01738 503601 holidaycottages.co.uk

• MAID OF THE LOCH

The Pier, Pier Road, Balloch G83 8QX
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• LOCH LOMOND GIFT HOUSE

Balloch Road, Balloch G83 8LQ Tel: 01389753437
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• WWW.HOLIDAYCOTTAGES.CO.UK

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

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