

The Voice

The magazine of the Friends of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs



*Winter in the
National Park*

ALSO INSIDE
THIS ISSUE:

Loch Katrine Heritage Stories; Walking and Cycling Initiatives; Bonnie Banks Bins Success *and more*

CAWLEY

HOTELS & RESTAURANTS



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

DUCK BAY HOTEL & RESTAURANT

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



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

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

WINDOWS *on the* LOCH

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

Duck Bay Loch Lomond G83 8QZ Tel: 01389 751234

COAST

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

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

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

LOCH HOUSE

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

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

Largs Road, Lochwinnoch PA12 4JF Tel: 01505 843848

BOARDWALK

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



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

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

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

DUCK BAY LUXURY COTTAGES

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

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

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

Duck Bay Loch Lomond G83 8QZ Tel: 01389 751234

RIVER HOUSE

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

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



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

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

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

CAWLEY
HOTELS & RESTAURANTS

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

Chairman's Introduction

WELCOME TO THIS WINTER EDITION OF VOICE, as usual, is packed with topical news and features about different parts of the 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.



During an increasingly challenging time with the financial crisis facing the UK and the growing scale of global climate change problems impacting on the weather and other aspects of nature, the role of the National Park on the doorstep of more than half the population of Scotland as an outdoor recreational resource, a source of employment and net contributor to tackling climate change with practical initiatives on the ground, is taking on greater significance.

It is vitally important the National Park Authority and other bodies, like the four local authorities covering the National Park, are empowered and properly funded to tackle the current and future challenges in partnership with local communities. The next five-year Partnership Plan for the National Park, which binds a range of partners into taking specific actions is currently under preparation, requires to be a bold document with the key issues identified clearly and a range of actions that can be resourced and delivered over the timescale of the Plan. It requires to strike the right balance between people and nature-related issues and actions and we look forward to influencing the content during the consultation process along with others.

What a difference a year can make, and it was encouraging to see a return to some form of normality with no restrictions on travel and a welcome return of overseas visitors from many countries to the National

Park, along with UK visitors who weren't here in such large numbers due to being able to travel abroad. Many thousands of visitors have enjoyed their time in this special place and it was good to see many local businesses beginning the slow road to recovery after two years peppered with closures due to Covid 19 restrictions. Many businesses that have survived are facing difficult trading conditions due to rising costs and shortages of staff and it is disappointing to see a number, particularly in the hotel sector, closing permanently. However, there have been some encouraging signs with the re-opening of an extended Cameron House Hotel and some other tourism businesses either expanding or opening up.

On the visitor management front there have been some notable examples of improvements and better collaborative working which has been helped by the National Park receiving additional visitor management funding from the Scottish Government and the re-introduction of NatureScot's Green Recovery grants scheme which has helped to ensure there have been more 'boots on the ground' this year.

Good examples of collaborative working have included the Friends' Two Lochs Visitor Management Project and the Adopt a Bonnie Banks Bin Scheme, which involved 14 public and private sector funding partners. They delivered major improvements in basic visitor services and a cleaner and more welcoming Loch Lomondside A82 tourist corridor and head of Loch Long at Arrochar. Employment of additional seasonal wardens engaging with visitors and helping keep the area

tidier with local partners also made a big difference.

An important consultation on the 10-year review of the Loch Lomond Byelaws has recently been completed. In an effort to address growing water safety concerns arising from the irresponsible use of motorised craft, and jet skis in particular, the Park Authority is sensibly recommending the introduction of exclusion zones at busy hotspots such as Luss Bay and Milarrochy Bay for certain type of craft, which we have welcomed. However, we have stressed the importance of stepping up enforcement of the byelaws and ensuring the National Park Authority staff and police have the necessary powers to take enforcement action, including the use of fixed penalties and bans. We have also suggested the introduction of some additional byelaws covering motorised craft emissions and noise levels which should be relatively easy to do with recent technology advances. We believe this would help ensure Loch Lomond is a safer and quieter place for everyone to enjoy responsibly.

Please enjoy reading this edition of Voice and, on behalf of the Trustees of the Friends, have a Merry Xmas and a happy and healthy 2023. If you are not already a member of the Friends, please consider joining and supporting our efforts to help protect, provide for and promote Scotland's first National Park.

All the very best and stay safe.

JAMES FRASER

Chair - Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs



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

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The Voice is the magazine of the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs, the only independent conservation charity working to protect, promote and provide projects and services for this most precious part of Scotland – The Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park. To join us or to find out more about our work please visit www.lochlomondtrossachs.org.uk or use the form inside.

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Cover image by Paul Saunders www.paulsaunders.co.uk A winter view from Conic Hill on East Loch Lomondside where £900,000 is being spent by the National Park Authority over three years to upgrade the popular hill path.

ADOPT A BONNIE BANKS BIN SCHEME SUCCESS



YOUNG FRIENDS ENJOY THE GREAT OUTDOORS

The imaginative Adopt a Bonnie Banks Bin Scheme introduced earlier this year as a follow on from the pilot A82 Loch Lomondside layby litter bin scheme in summer 2021 has proved to be a great success and is being continued on a year-round basis.

The 20-bin scheme is being coordinated by the Friends but enjoys the financial backing of nine local tourism businesses, Luss Estates, the National Park Authority, Argyll & Bute Council and ENVVA, the waste disposal and recycling partner. It includes twice weekly uplifts during busy holiday periods and once weekly collections at quieter times. This, along with regular additional litter and fly-tipping clearance work by Argyll & Bute Council's local Community Service team and 'Staycation' warden as well as National Park and Luss Estates staff efforts around the busier loch shore camping areas and laybys, has helped keep verges and lay-bys along the busy 13-mile tourist corridor between Arden and Tarbet looking their best.

To cope with extra pressure at three of the busier southbound laybys, three bins were relocated to double up provision there. According to Friends Vice-Chair, John Urquhart, who coordinated these adjustments, this generally worked well, though the double bins near the busy Firkin camping zone have still at times been overwhelmed.

Over a 10-month period, over 20 tonnes of litter was 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 a staggering 5,500 bin bags of litter collected overall (160,000 litres) with 5,000 bags of litter being re-purposed. It is anticipated over the first full year of the new Adopt a Bonnie Banks Bin Scheme that an estimated 6,000 bags of litter will have been removed from the lochside.

Back in 2019, the Friends were successful in obtaining a grant from West Dunbartonshire Council's Year of the Young People Legacy Fund with the aim of encouraging young people in West Dunbartonshire to enjoy outdoor experiences and learning opportunities in the National Park. Arrangements were in full swing to encourage young people living with a disadvantage to get out-and-about when Covid struck. This sadly meant all plans were put on hold.

This year the Friends Support Officer, Jennifer Plunkett, has worked hard to resurrect the project and so far over 80 young people from local youth groups Y-Sort-It and Benview Youth Club have participated in outdoor activity programmes in the National Park. Two groups of young carers from Y-Sort-It enjoyed a range of outdoor activities, including canoeing and climbing, at Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre in Lochgoilhead. A group of young people from the Youth Connections strand of Y-Sort-It enjoyed an activity day with In Your Element at Loch Lomond that included an aerial tree-zone adventure and canoeing. The day also incorporated an educational element on the topics 'Trees for Life' and 'Leave no Trace'. A trip to the Loch Lomond Bird of Prey Centre was also organized, which everyone enjoyed, especially the quiz sheets and flying show. A second trip to Ardroy took place in November.

Plans are being progressed to provide further outdoor experiences in the National Park for another 100 disadvantaged young people from West Dunbartonshire next year.

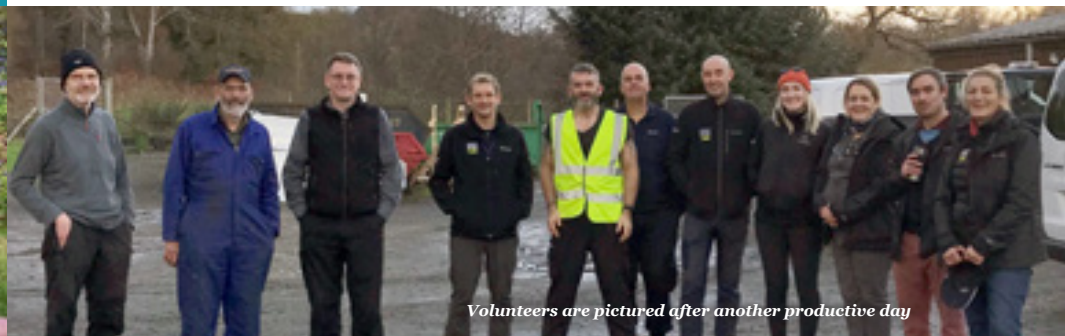


VOLUNTEERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The latest in a series of four volunteer Make a Difference Days in the last year, coordinated by the Friends with support from the National Park, took place on 16 November on West Loch Lomondside and attracted 20 volunteers. They worked along various stretches of the lochside clearing litter and cutting back scrub to build on the successful Windows on the Loch and Adopt a Bonnie Banks Bin initiatives. Individual Friends volunteers joined forces with staff and volunteers from the National Park Authority. Lunch was kindly sponsored

by Niall Colquhoun of the Inn on Loch Lomond Hotel and the Lodge on Loch Lomond Hotel. Luss Estates kindly allowed the use of their meeting room and facilities. Other successful volunteer Make a Difference Days were organised at Loch Lubnaig in March and Balmaha in June. John Urquhart, Vice-Chair of the Friends, who helps deliver these events, said: "We had another successful day and it is encouraging to see so many enthusiastic volunteers helping us make a real difference and we greatly appreciate their efforts."

Installing bin sponsor posters



Volunteers are pictured after another productive day



TWO VILLAGES VISITOR WARDENS SCHEME A WINNER

A warden in action at Tarbet and Arrochar

LOSS OF HOTELS A REAL CONCERN

In comments submitted on several recent planning applications, the Friends have expressed concern about the growing number of small and medium-sized hotels being lost to private residential accommodation and other uses and there is a strong likelihood more will follow soon due to escalating energy prices and other cost increases.

This year, there have been four applications before the Park Authority in Balloch, Callander, St Fillans and Kilmun for change of use of hotels and this follows on from the loss of several hotels in popular villages, such as Killin, due to the impact of Covid 19, major increases in running costs, staffing difficulties and owner lifestyle changes with conversion to private residential, workers' hostels or self-catering holiday accommodation.

Friends Chair, James Fraser, said: "It is very disappointing to see the scale of loss of family run hotels in the National Park in recent times, but this is inevitable given the major challenges and pressures faced by owners in such a difficult trading environment

"With the loss of smaller hotels and the retrenchment of some of the larger hotel operations, the capacity to accommodate visitors in the more economically fragile parts of the National Park is being reduced and there is a real danger of more communities drifting towards becoming dormitory commuter and retirement retreats, lacking in the diversity and vibrancy derived from having a blend of enterprises locally with a range of employment opportunities. This follows on from the contraction of job opportunities in other traditional rural industries such as forestry and farming.

"The Park Authority is currently preparing a new five-year Partnership Plan for the National Park, which will set out key challenges and proposed actions. We fully anticipate the Park Authority will major on the climate and nature emergencies, but it is also vitally important that, along with partners such as the enterprise agencies and local authorities, they also try and tackle the people dimension and the wider economic development agenda and stimulate economic activity and employment in rural communities."

The Arrochar and Tarbet seasonal visitor welcome warden scheme has proved to be a winner, with high levels of visitor engagement at sites in both villages, improved litter management and over 80,000 visitors using the temporary toilets which wardens maintained at two busy car parks in Arrochar between April and October. The scheme was coordinated by the Friends in partnership with Arrochar & Tarbet Development Trust and Destination Arrochar Alps and built on the success of a pilot project in 2021.

This was a truly collaborative project with Luss Estates funding toilet provision and site maintenance works at the car park they own in Arrochar and a range of partners providing funding for the warden scheme across a number of sites and temporary toilets at the now Council-owned car park below the Arrochar Alps. Funding was provided by the National Park Authority, Argyll & Bute Council Staycation Fund, Hannah Stirling Loch Lomond Trust, Luss Estates and the Friends with top up warden funding being secured from the NatureScot Green Recovery grant scheme. The Park Authority also assisted with the training of the four part-time seasonal wardens recruited locally and there was close liaison between the team, National Park Rangers and Council and Luss Estates staff to deliver much improved coordinated visitor welcome services in Arrochar and at popular Tarbet Bay car park and picnic area.

COLLABORATION

Duncan MacLachlan, Friends Trustee and Chair of Arrochar & Tarbet Community Development Trust, who was heavily involved in coordinating the delivery of the programme locally, said: "It was great to see the level of collaborative working between the various partners this year with more emphasis on welcoming visitors to our popular villages and providing them with advice and guidance as well as ensuring basic services such as well maintained toilets and litter free areas were available for them to use.

"We were pleased to be working more closely with Park Authority, Luss Estates and Council staff and our four part-time seasonal wardens are to be congratulated on their hard work and efforts delivering improved visitor services locally. They proved to be great ambassadors for their local communities and took a great pride in their work which shone through.

"Importantly, we have received lots of positive feedback from visitors, local residents and businesses, which has made all the efforts that have gone into pulling this scheme together and delivering a range of services very worthwhile."

As part of the scheme the wardens had more of a presence at the busy Tarbet Bay car park where one of the priorities was to direct motorhomes and campervans to alternative nearby designated Aires and commercial camping and caravan sites as part of a pilot dispersal project organised by the Park Authority. This coincided with the introduction of charging at the car park.



Killin Main Street

WINDOWS ON THE LOCH BATTLE CONTINUES



Contractors at work opening up views

With support from the Hannah Stirling Loch Lomond Trust and the Friends of OUR Park visitor giving scheme over £5,000 has been invested this year 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 foot path for the enjoyment of visitors.

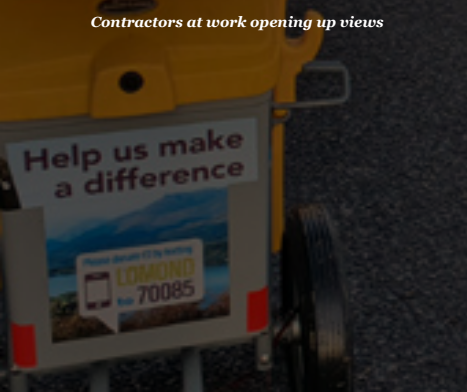
A local contractor undertook most of the clearance works and some additional maintenance work, mainly litter picking, was undertaken by volunteers, Argyll & Bute Council's Community Service team and National Park staff.

The programme of work was coordinated by the Friends with Trustee, Duncan MacLachlan, overseeing the work on a day-to-day basis, which has made such a real difference for the enjoyment of local residents and visitors travelling along the lochside.

The programme of works to maintain the views has been an ongoing battle

for over 10 years now and followed representations over many years by members of the Friends and the general public to open up some views of the loch on the 22 mile 'tree tunnel' between Balloch and Tarbet. Some initial funding was provided to the Friends to tackle this work by the National Park Authority and a grant condition included a commitment that the Friends should maintain the views for at least 10 years.

Discussions are ongoing with Transport Scotland to reopen views from the specially raised string of seven viewpoint laybys beside the northbound lane between Luss and Inverbeg, where the views are completely screened by uncontrolled tree and shrub growth. The Friends have also been campaigning for repairs to be undertaken to poorly maintained stone dykes beside the shoreline cycle and footpath and for other improvement works to improve the safety and appeal of the route.



DUCK BAY TOILETS STILL BEING WELL USED



The toilets here has again been described as 'a game changer for the public'

For a second successive year the Friends provided temporary toilets at Duck Bay Picnic Area in the south-west corner of Loch Lomond for the seven-month April to October period. They were well used by many of the estimated 300,000 visitors attracted to this site annually, with regular positive feedback from appreciative members of the public.

A funding package for the temporary toilet provision was assembled by the Friends, with welcome contributions from the Park Authority, Argyll & Bute Council, Hannah Stirling Loch Lomond Trust and the Friends of OUR park visitor giving scheme. Alan Cawley of the Cawley Group, who own the nearby Duck Bay Hotel and Restaurant, again kindly sponsored regular daily cleaning and the supply of toiletries and hygiene materials for the heavily used toilets.

Until the intervention by the Friends in 2021 there were no toilets at this important Loch Lomond site for 25 years, which caused considerable distress to many visitors and this became particularly noticeable in 2000 when some of the Covid 19 restrictions were lifted. Providing temporary toilets here has again been described as 'a game changer for the public' by Alan Cawley of the Cawley Group.

Meanwhile, the campaign to secure more permanent toilets and other much needed visitor infrastructure improvements continues. Duck Bay features as a priority in the recently completed West Loch Lomondside Visitor Infrastructure Study commissioned by the National Park Authority and funded by VisitScotland.

TROSSACHS TRAIL REFRESH HITS THE MARK

As part of a joint effort by the Friends of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and the Sir Walter Scott Steamship Trust charities, working in partnership with local communities, a major refresh of the popular 40-mile Trossachs Trail has recently been completed and is proving to be very popular with visitors and helping them to make the most of their stay in the Trossachs area.

An attractive new Trossachs Trail leaflet and map was launched earlier this summer and was complemented by the installation of 40 Trossachs Trail information and orientation map panels at busy countryside sites throughout the area as well as in the foyers of many local hotels, caravan park reception buildings, cafes and visitor attractions.

James Fraser, Chair of the Friends and CEO of the Steamship, said: "We reached a major milestone with Trossachs Trail improvements in good time to welcome the return of overseas visitors to the Trossachs. Last year we produced a website and a series of map panels and refreshed Trail signing to help visitors explore the Trossachs and make the most of their stay but, following repeated requests to convert the useful map into a handy leaflet, we printed and distributed 20,000 copies for use by local information centre staff and 100 other outlets in and around the Trossachs that welcome visitors.

"This would have not been possible without the funding support of the Friends and the Steamship Trust charities as well as the Strathard and Callander Community Hydro Funds. A grant award from VisitScotland's

Rural Infrastructure Fund has also enabled some large information and map boards to be installed at busy visitor hubs."

Anne Gordon, Joint Manager of Callander's community-run Visitor Information Centre, said: "The availability of such a useful map with details of the places to visit and things to see and do in the Trossachs has proved to be invaluable in assisting visitors. Visitors used to regularly take photos of the map panel showcasing the Trossachs in the Visitor Centre and we received repeated requests for a leaflet version of the map which thankfully is now available and has been flying off the shelves."

THE TROSSACHS TOUR

The Trossachs Trail is based on the famous Trossachs Tour popularised by Sir Walter Scott and other writers in the 1800s which helped the area become famous and led to the growth of Callander and Aberfoyle and the development of other small villages with hostelries along the way.

Meanwhile, work on major car park and visitor hub infrastructure projects at Ben A'an and Stronachlachar Pier were completed earlier this year and work on the reinstatement of the historic Roderick Dhu Watchtower path leading to a famous Trossachs viewpoint, credited with being 'the birthplace of Scottish tourism', and various other improvements at Trossachs Pier are on target for completion early in 2023 (see news section for more detail).

Cyclists making good use of the new Trossachs Trail orientation map panel at Trossachs Pier, Loch Katrine



SEE LOCH LOMOND BOOK SUPPORTS THE FRIENDS

Friends Trustee Paul Saunders collaborated with Nina Fraser to publish a book this summer. '101 things to do in Loch Lomond & The Trossachs' is on sale in outlets throughout the National Park, with many accommodation providers adding books to their rooms. It is also available in all Stirlingshire libraries.

50p from each book sale goes to The Friends 'Our Park' scheme, with the first payment of donations already received for bumper sales this summer. The photo-guidebook is available from Paul's See Loch Lomond website www.seelochlomond.co.uk

CHRISTMAS TREES CONTINUE TO SAVE RED SQUIRRELS

For the third year running, Duff Christmas Tree Farm near Buchlyvie is supporting the Friends 'Our Park' scheme for red squirrel conservation as part of their 'Cut Your Own Christmas Tree' sales.

The family business on the edge of the Trossachs has seen an increase in red squirrel numbers in recent years, not including the staff who dress in squirrel outfits each Christmas to greet customers! For many families, choosing and cutting a Christmas Tree is a much-loved annual tradition, marking the start of their festive activities. As well as 'Our Park', the farm supports RSABI.

This charity provides emotional, practical, and financial help to individuals and families in farming and crofting that need support.

Costumed red squirrel fundraiser





John Michael Baillie-Hamilton Buchanan is the new chieftain of the Buchanan clan.

Photo courtesy of Ian Georgeson

BUCHANAN CLAN CROWNS CHIEF OR FIRST TIME SINCE 1681

The ancient clans of Scotland reunited from across the globe in Callander recently to crown the first Buchanan chief in more than 340 years. The inauguration of John Michael Baillie-Hamilton as the chief of the Buchanan Clan took place at Cambusmore, the modern seat of Clan Buchanan and the chief's ancestral home.

It is the first time the clan has come together in centuries as the last Buchanan chief, John, died in 1681 without a male heir. The new chief was identified after more than a decade of genealogical research and was approved by the Lord Lyon in 2018 but the official ceremony was delayed by the pandemic.

The Buchanans claim to be the fifth biggest clan with more than five million members. Their clan lands border the eastern shores of Loch Lomond, extend north to Ben Lomond and eastwards into the Trossachs.

Clan Buchanan can be traced back to 1010 AD in Scotland and its global community includes members across the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa among many other countries. More than 120 affiliated family surnames are recognised as part of the clan including Watson, Morris, Richardson, Coleman, Gilbert, Walter and Harper.

The new chief of Clan Buchanan, John Michael Baillie-Hamilton, said: "This is a turning point in our clan's history.

"For centuries our traditions were confined to the history books so it's truly humbling that members of Clan Buchanan and our good friends from other clans have reunited to celebrate with us.

"I have pledged to bring Clan Buchanan into the modern era by restoring our ancient traditions and championing the values, relevance and importance of the global community we represent.

MAJOR INVESTMENT IN CONIC HILL PATH UPGRADE



Conic Hill is a much-loved destination that attracts huge numbers of visitors each year

The first phase of a £900,000 path improvement project on Conic Hill, one of the most popular hills overlooking Loch Lomond and its islands, got underway last month and will run to the end of March. It involves the use of helicopters bringing in 450 tonnes of stone to begin hand built path upgrades.

This winter the Park Authority is investing around £420,000 to repair and improve the Conic Hill path from Balmaha, with a similar level of investment likely to be made next year to complete the works. This is part of a wider commitment from the National Park Authority to investing in visitor infrastructure in the National Park.

Between January and March the path will be closed while the section from the ford to the forest boundary is upgraded, with timber steps being replaced by two metres-wide stone pitching.

The West Highland Way will remain open throughout, but walkers will need to follow the low-level route down Creityhall Road to Milton of Buchanan and along the B837.

Contractors ACT Heritage Ltd are carrying out the work.

LOCH LONG SALMON FARM PLAN REFUSED



Controversial proposals for a major salmon farm using new technology on Loch Long has been refused by the National Park Authority following a site visit and a planning hearing.

The Loch Long Salmon Company's plan for Beinn Reithe near Arrochar would have been the first in the UK to use a semi-closed containment system and was the first of five salmon farms they have plans for on the west coast of Scotland, each one creating 12 full-time equivalent jobs and contributing £100,000 annually to local community initiatives. This would also have been the first marine aquaculture development in the National Park.

There was a high level of public interest in the application with 202 objections and 72 comments in support. Local community councils were split on the proposal, with Arrochar & Tarbet Community Council in favour while Ardentinn and Cove & Kilreggan Community Councils objected.

Park planners, in a 100 plus page report considered by the full Park Board, concluded the proposals conflicted with the statutory aims of the National Park. They contended the development would not safeguard visual amenity and important views and would not protect or enhance the rich landscape character of the National Park. They were also concerned the technology proposed associated with the marine enclosures has not been trialled in Scotland with inherent risks of an escape incident to wild salmon populations, which are already fragile.



REST AND BE THANKFUL CONTRACT AWARDED

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

Consultants have been awarded a contract worth £11.3 million to develop a long-term replacement for the A83 in the Rest and Be Thankful.

The trunk road has been plagued by landslides for many years and, during recent heavy rain, traffic has again had to use the single-track Old Military Road diversion. Transport Scotland considered a wide range of alternative routes before finally settling on continuing to use Glen Croe. Five possible route options have been identified, potentially including a tunnel or debris shelter. They have been under considerable pressure to address current accessibility issues in the corridor as quickly as possible and the consultant will be required to advise on methods to shorten the development and promotion process.

Some options development and scoping is underway and the consultant is being encouraged to develop this work into a deliverable scheme to a short timeframe.

Recently, Argyll and Bute Council called for the new route to be complete before the next Scottish Parliament election in May 2026.

CORMONACHAN COMMUNITY WOODLANDS AWARD

The charity which manages the Cormonachan Community Woodlands between Lochgoilhead and Carrick Castle was presented with a Highly Commended award in Scotland's Finest Woods Awards at the Scottish Government's Pavilion at the Royal Highland Show in June.



This follows a number of years of hard work by the dedicated office-bearers of the charity and many volunteers who have preserved and maintained the 158 acres of ancient Atlantic oak and hazel woodlands. Works undertaken to open up the woodlands for the enjoyment of the public and the thousands of young people taking part in outdoor activity and environmental programmes at the nearby Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre have included the creation of 2.5km of paths, the installation of a squirrel hide and the erection of a memorial Contemplation Shelter in honour of the first Chairperson of the Woodland Association, Liz Evans.

Recently the charity has 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. This funding is being used for an ambitious Upper Cormonachan Heritage Paths Project, which involves extending the path network to a spectacular waterfall and an old settlement and providing additional car parking.

Work on this project is now underway and should be complete before the end of the year.



CHRISTMAS AT ROSS PRIORY

Pictured at the recent Christmas event held at Ross Priory courtesy of Strathclyde University are members of the Friends and guests who were entertained by music pupils of Lomond School, Helensburgh. Also pictured with the musicians are Lord John McFall and Sir Malcolm Colquhoun who are the Honorary Vice-President and Honorary President of the Friends. Everyone enjoyed a memorable afternoon in the pleasant surroundings of Ross Priory overlooking Loch Lomond. In addition to being entertained by Lomond School musicians everyone enjoyed mulled wine and mince pies and took part in a raffle which included a wide range of prizes including special days out in the National Park kindly donated by Friends Business Supporters and Trustees.



Pictured accepting the award from Màiri McAllan, Minister for Environment and Land Reform (centre) are Jacqui Matthews, Woodlands Manager (left), and Dee Locke, Secretary (right).

Photo credit : Julie Broadfoot



Trossachs scenic viewpoints funding boost

The Steamship Sir Walter Scott Trust has secured a £231,000 grant for a stunning landmark lookout tower and two high quality viewpoints with linking boardwalks above the busy Trossachs Pier visitor hub at Loch Katrine from the latest round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF), which is managed by VisitScotland on behalf of the Scottish Government.

This is the latest phase of the ambitious £1.5 million plans to upgrade visitor infrastructure and to showcase the birthplace of Scottish tourism in the heart of the Trossachs, as part of the Trossachs Trail Visitor Management Programme that enjoys strong support from local communities and businesses. The successful funding bid was submitted to VisitScotland on behalf of the Steamship Trust by Stirling Council while an earlier successful £375,000 RTIF bid for car park and other Trail signing and toilet infrastructure improvements was facilitated by the National Park Authority on behalf of the Trust and the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs.

The scenic tower, viewpoints and linking path secured planning permission last year and will be built on the spot where Sir Walter Scott was inspired to write his epic poem *The Lady of the Lake*, published in 1810, which is credited with triggering the

birth of Scottish tourism. They will provide a more accessible vantage point overlooking the loch for those unable to climb the surrounding mountains and help with the management of visitors around the busy Trossachs Pier site.

The site was visited earlier by other literary giants such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Wordsworths who stayed in wicker huts at this jutting headland that were built for 'the accommodation of strangers to admire and sketch this wild and picturesque landscape' and were made accessible by a new road blasted out of the rock in the 1790s. A 188-metre path from the Trossachs Pier car park to the new scenic viewpoints is due to be built shortly on part of this historical and now overgrown road with funding that is already in place.

UNPRECEDENTED SUPPORT

James Fraser, CEO and Trustee of the Steamship Trust, said: "We are delighted our latest funding bid has been successful in what was a very competitive application process with other projects around Scotland and this is the culmination of several years hard work and planning to improve visitor facilities at Loch Katrine.

"We are grateful to Stirling Council and the many local community groups and individuals who have provided an unprecedented level of support for this imaginative and high-quality project that will connect people with

an important cultural and natural heritage site in easily accessible, and safe and responsible ways in the heart of the National Park."

Neil Christison, VisitScotland Regional Director, said: "This is fantastic news for Loch Katrine and the surrounding area and will undoubtedly improve the visitor experience in the future. Over the last three years, the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund has played an important role in Scotland becoming a sustainable tourism destination.

"Increasingly, visitors are becoming more mindful of their impacts on the world around them, both socially and environmentally. Being a responsible visitor and respecting and protecting our environment and communities makes for a better experience for everyone. Projects such as this will help ensure our visitor destinations can be enjoyed by visitors and locals alike for generations to come."

Cllr Margaret Brisley, Convener of the Finance, Economy and Corporate Support Committee of Stirling Council, added: "I'm thrilled at the outcome of this application which has been given tremendous support from the local community. This project will provide a vital upgrade to one of Scotland's most iconic heritage sites which will benefit both tourists and residents alike. There is no doubt that this boost to sustainable rural tourism in Stirling is something that we should rightly celebrate."



A82 traffic at Tarbet Primary School which would remain a problem if the current A82 scheme is adopted

PETITION TO SAVE THE BONNIE BANKS LODGED

Helensburgh and District Access Trust and the Friends worked together during September to petition the Scottish Government to reconsider the flawed assessment process regarding the choice of route for the A82 upgrade between Tarbet and Inverarnan. Over 500 people signed the petition which was open for three weeks and closed on 18 October. It will now be considered by the Parliamentary Petitions Committee.

Transport Scotland favours a 'Low Road' proposal which will cause huge traffic delays and threatens 8 miles of beautiful shoreline between Tarbet and Ardlui.

The petition listed the following advantages of an alternative 'High Road' option:

- Preservation of precious oak woods and shoreline, allowing wildlife, residents, businesses and visitors to connect with the loch;
- No traffic delays and quicker construction as the old road could continue to carry traffic during the build period and afterwards would be available as a walking and cycling route as well as being available for access to property and for occasional use as a diversion when necessary;
- The Three Lochs Way Great Walking Trail could be linked to the West Highland Way at Inverarnan, making a round Loch Lomond trail possible;
- Tarbet and Ardlui would be by-passed by heavy traffic, improving quality of life for residents and alleviating road safety issues at Arrochar Primary School;
- The higher, straighter route would give stunning views of Loch Lomond and be faster and safer than any loch side route could ever be;
- Visitor management pressures alleviated along the whole length of the old road and in the congested Tarbet Bay area.

To support the campaign to secure a better alternative to the 'Low Road' option, you can write to the Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth at Jenny.Gilruth.msp@parliament.scot



CALLANDER WELCOME FOR VISITORS

Callander's community-led Visitor Information Centre welcomed more than 15,000 visitors during its second season in a former bank in Main Street. Staffed mainly by local volunteers with a wealth of local knowledge and foreign language skills, it was funded in 2022 by the Friends, Callander Community Hydro Fund and private donations. The most common requests are about local walks, cycle routes, places to eat and visit, public transport (to places where it doesn't exist) and, of course, public toilets.



GRAVELFOYLE CYCLING MECCA

Aberfoyle is hoping to become a mecca for gravel cycling with the opening of the UK's first waymarked trails earlier this summer.

Three new gravel cycling routes are now available for different levels of ability as part of a joint project by Bike Trossachs and Gravelfoyle, a new tourism brand for the area.

The 10km, 20km, 30km waymarked routes start and finish in the centre of Aberfoyle and venture deep into Loch Ard Forest, exploring the areas surrounding Loch Ard and Loch Chon.

Gravel cycling is a new discipline which aims to bring the experience of road cycling to the safety of mountain biking. Funding for the three waymarked gravel routes has come from Forth Valley and Lomond LEADER, Forestry and Land Scotland, Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park and The Strathard Development Trust.

Aberfoyle has previously run an annual gravel cycling festival in 2018, 2019 and 2021 under the name of Gravelfoyle, which will now be used as a term to describe the gravel cycling opportunities offered.

WALK IN THE PARK GOES FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH!

The Walk in the Park flagship project of the Countryside Trust, a Scottish environmental charity, utilises the beautiful and nurturing surroundings of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park. It is also recognised as one of the best examples of a successful health walk programme in Scotland, supporting over 280 people across the National Park. Working in partnership with physiotherapists, care homes and day centres, they celebrated the launch of a great new resource at Callander's GP practice offering the community more ways to stay active and well. This is all thanks to a set of new strength and balance panels on display in its grounds showing people how to perform

simple movements to improve their strength, balance and coordination. Coupled with regular walking such as the Countryside Trust's weekly Walk in the Park programme, the panels and the Countryside Trust's Strength and Balance sessions provide the key to an active, happy and healthy older age. The outdoor panels, funded by Paths for All, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park and Impact Funding Partners, were officially unveiled on 14 October by practice staff, walkers and volunteers from the Countryside Trust's Callander Walk in the Park health walk group and Strength and Balance sessions.

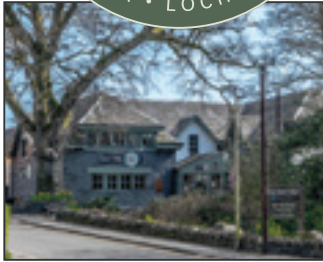
Strength and Balance Panels Launch (Photo credit: Euan Cherry)





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BRINGING BEAVERS BACK TO LOCH LOMOND

Paula Baker, RSPB's Loch Lomond Site Manager outlines the plans to relocate beavers to their National Nature Reserve at the south end of the loch despite the concerns of some local farmers and anglers.

Back in June, RSPB Scotland announced plans to apply for a licence to release a small number of beavers at RSPB Scotland Loch Lomond, which is part of Loch Lomond National Nature Reserve. Following a period of stakeholder engagement, on 7 October 2022, the RSPB's licence application was submitted to NatureScot for consideration.

Eurasian beavers are native to the UK but were persecuted for their fur, meat and 'castoreum', a secretion used in perfume, food, and medicine. This relentless hunting by humans led to their extinction in the UK by the 16th Century.

Beavers are adept natural engineers, with the ability to create wetlands, restore woodland and improve conditions for many species including dragonflies, fish and other mammals like water voles. Frequently coined as an 'Ecosystem Engineer' or 'Keystone Species', because of having significant positive influence on their environment, the benefits of beavers are well documented. Moreover, this enigmatic species attracts great opportunity for wildlife tourism, bringing social and economic benefits to areas where they are found.

In 2009, a reintroduction project, known as 'The Scottish Beaver Trial', took place at Knapdale which saw the first beavers living wild in Scotland for over 400 years. Out-with the official reintroduction there is a well-established population of beavers living in the Tay and Forth river catchments. In 2019, beavers were given

European Protected Species status in Scotland with the view that they should expand their range naturally with no need for further reintroductions. Despite this, up until 2021, any beavers that came into conflict with humans, where their activities couldn't be managed through mitigation measures, were killed under licence, or translocated to limited enclosed release locations in England.

In 2021 the Scottish Government made the decision to authorise licenced beaver translocations within the country, to reduce the need for culling.

The first successful licenced translocation took place at Argaty Red Kite Centre near Doune in 2021. Now other organisations and landowners are starting to follow suit including RSPB Scotland Loch Lomond which is applying to be a release site.

Loch Lomond National Nature Reserve is a fantastic area for a range of wildlife, and ecological assessments have shown it has potential to be particularly good for beavers. The areas of open water, woodland and aquatic vegetation make this an ideal location for them to thrive.

For full details of this project including FAQs visit our website www.rspb.org.uk/lochlomond and navigate to our beaver blog. You can also contact us with any questions: beavers.lomond@rspb.org.uk.

BEAVER MYTH-BUSTING

Myth: Beavers eat fish.

Reality: Beavers are vegetarians, mainly eating aquatic plants, grasses, tree bark, twigs and leaves. In fact, they can boost fish numbers because the pools they create provide excellent spawning grounds for fish which could help threatened species such as the Atlantic salmon.

Myth: Beavers destroy trees.

Reality: While beavers certainly do gnaw down trees the overall impact of this 'coppicing' process on woodland encourages new growth, a greater variety of tree species and increases biodiversity by providing more homes for insects, birds and mammals. There are also a variety of mitigation methods, such as wire around the base of trees, that can prevent damage to trees on private land.

Myth: Beavers cause damaging floods.

Reality: This one can be true, especially if beaver activity blocks drains on prime agricultural land but, in the right place, their floods create new wetland habitat that is immensely beneficial for biodiversity. Therefore, the translocation of beavers is important; moving animals from areas where their activity is causing issues to more suitable habitat, rather than using lethal control, is a win-win for both beaver and humans.





25 YEARS

BY YON BONNIE, BONNIE BANKS

The Oak Tree Inn is very much a family business, opened in 1997 by Sandy and Lucy Fraser. From little acorns, the company has grown both in size and in people's hearts, making Balmaha and The Oak Tree one of Loch Lomond's most popular destinations.

Sandy & Lucy's eight children: James, Stuart, Emma, David, Sandy Jnr, Nina, Holly and Ben have each played a vital role in the Oak Tree's growth. The Frasers are proud that their business is the area's largest employer, providing an array of jobs across different sectors, and offering the National Living Wage.



One of the earliest and strongest business supporters of Friends of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs, the Oak Tree Inn at Balmaha celebrated its 25th anniversary in November.

Sandy and Lucy Fraser built the Oak Tree in 1997, with all their eight children, James, Stuart, David, Emma, Nina, Sandy Jnr, Holly and Ben, each playing an essential role in its phenomenal success. Sandy and Lucy were determined to improve Balmaha's reputation by opening a quality hospitality business. So, they bought the site of the former bus terminus (if you visit St Mocha, you can see the 1954 planning application) and built the Oak Tree using locally quarried slate. Son James supervised the building works and was the night watchman for the site.

When the pub opened in 1997, James ran the bar, whilst brother Stuart took the opportunity to leave school and work in the kitchen. Tragically in 1999, James and his friend Dan lost their lives in a fire in the student accommodation they were staying in whilst studying in Glasgow. A preventable accident if only the landlord had installed a smoke alarm. Over the years, the family have used the opportunity to promote the importance of smoke alarms to the public, hoping to prevent similar tragedies from occurring again. Two accommodation cottages in Balmaha are named after James and Dan.



Building the Oak Tree



Early winter at the Oak Tree



Always a popular destination



The whole family



Lucy Fraser



Largest Employer

The Oak Tree is the largest employer in East Loch Lomond, with 150 staff. It has also given many young people their first work experience with weekend and holiday jobs. Sandy and Lucy created the perfect ambience for the pub and restaurant. Their first bank manager argued that there should be a TV, something that Sandy sensibly refused to do. The Oak Tree has grown significantly over the years, helped by the increasing popularity of the West Highland Way, which passes by. Their 'Muddy Boots Welcome' sign is appreciated by many walkers calling in for food, drink or a bed for the night. Recognition of the success of the Oak Tree has come in many forms, including a series of prestigious awards. Twice voted Scotland's Pub of the Year, finalist of Gastro Pub of the Year 2022, Family Business of the Year and most recently a well-deserved Lifetime Achievement Award, plus accolades for the business's sustainable initiatives. Perhaps the best endorsement came though when VisitScotland featured the Oak Tree in a global TV advert as the business with a warm welcome that typifies Scotland's hospitality. The site has 41 rooms with accommodation spread across a

Sandy Fraser



series of cottages and above the inn. The incredibly popular St Mocha Coffee shop opened in 2014, roasting its own coffee on-site. So popular was St Mocha that other outlets can be found at Aberfoyle and Carbeth, the first drive-thru artisan speciality coffee shop in Scotland. Also, in 2014 the Frasers played a significant role in the Friends-led project to create a memorial for Tom Weir. Working with other organisations a statue and gardens were created to pay tribute to Scotland's much-loved mountaineer and broadcaster, with the opening on what would have been Tom's 100th birthday. The Frasers look after the ongoing maintenance of the site which has been enjoyed by many people over the last eight years. Sandy, Lucy and their children certainly achieved their aim to dramatically improve the fortunes of Balmaha, and the Oak Tree has contributed to making it one of Scotland's most popular and beautiful villages.

Oak Tree Milestones

1997

The Oak Tree Inn opens for the first time, in a beautiful new building



2006

Additional B&B options open, in a series of nearby converted cottages

2009

Balmaha Village Shop opens, serving guests and the local community



2010

A new poly tunnel is introduced, producing fruit and vegetable for use in our meals

2012

The Oak Tree is named Scotland's pub of the year for the first time



2013

Loch Lomond Ice Cream is launched, homemade on-site in Balmaha



2014

The first St Mocha Coffee Shop and Ice Cream Parlour opens in Balmaha

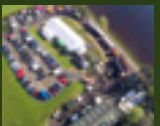


2014

The Tom Weir Statue opens in Balmaha, looked after by The Oak Tree Inn

2015

10,000 attend Balmaha's Braw Weekend, festival of food & music

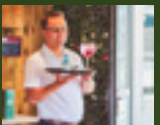


2016

The first St Mocha Coffee Shop outside of Balmaha opens at the seasonal kiosk on Luss Pier.

2016

VisitScotland features The Oak Tree in their global advertising campaign



2017

We introduce a new pontoon, which brings new water-based activities to Balmaha

2017

Loch Lomond Coffee Co., the National Park's first artisan coffee roasting facility, opens in Balmaha



2019

The Station, another St Mocha Coffee Shop, opens at Aberfoyle in the Trossachs.

2020

The latest St Mocha, the UK's first drive-thru artisan coffee shop, opens at Carbeth.



2021

Sandy Fraser wins a lifetime achievement award at the Scottish Pub & Club Awards.

Investing in the future

Projects to support communities and visitors

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

View from Conic Hill ©Elaine Hunter



Ensuring the National Park is a place that can be enjoyed by locals and visitors means staff on the ground every season, but also long term investment in visitor facilities.

It was another busy visitor season for the National Park and while the unprecedented visitor numbers of 2020 and 2021 did not carry into this season, visitor numbers remained high.

The National Park Authority worked closely again with partners such as Forestry & Land Scotland, local authorities and Police Scotland to support communities and visitors this season.

We recruited 58 Seasonal Rangers this year, two more than last year and 26 more than in 2020. Environment Officers were on the ground in the busiest visitor areas, dedicated entirely to litter and flytipping, and we had more Volunteer Rangers available to support staff this year after numbers dropped during the pandemic.

Alongside the immediate, short-term work to support visitors during the peak season, the National Park Authority is developing longer term plans to improve visitor services and infrastructure.

A new Place Projects team was formed last year and the focus of this team is on delivering change in the National Park and how investment can deliver the maximum benefits for both local communities and visitors.

This winter we are investing around £420,000 in a package of works to repair and improve the Conic Hill path from Balmaha, with a similar level of investment likely to be made next year to complete the works.

The projects are spread out across the Park and include upgraded facilities, paths and access routes, as well as projects to ease visitor pressures and to enable car-free travel.

Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development (STID) studies are being carried out in specific areas within the National Park to help inform these long term, strategic solutions. During 2022, these have led to plans and projects in areas including Tarbet and Balmaha.

Several projects are already underway and will make a lasting difference to the people who live, work and visit in the National Park.

Conic Hill, for example, is a much-loved destination that attracts huge numbers of visitors each year. However, the popularity of the hill has placed significant pressure on the hill path, especially in recent years.



A Balmaha Master Plan is now being developed, looking at improvements that can be made in and around the village to improve the visitor experience and ease congestion.

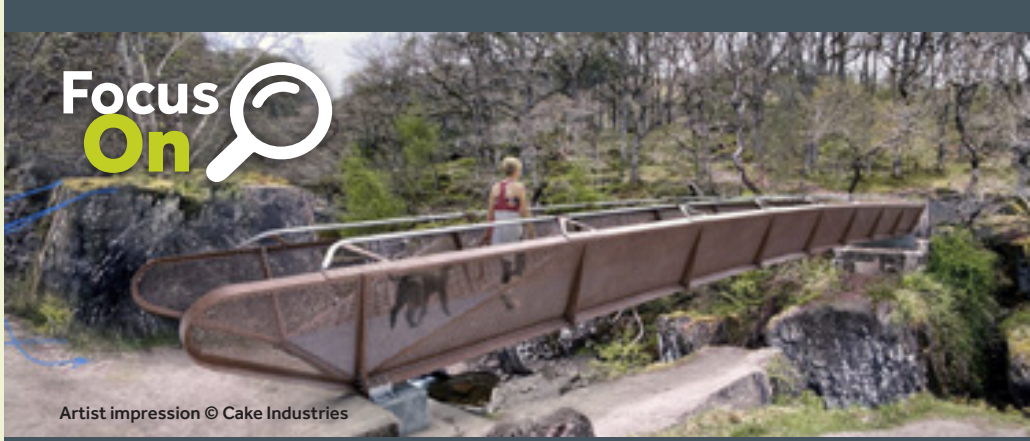
As a result of the STID study carried out for the west of Loch Lomond, a pilot project is now underway considering how an 'aires' approach could help manage motorhome and campervan visitors to the Tarbet area. Those visiting the area and camping in vehicles will be made aware of the various overnight stay sites but directed to the waste and water facilities available at Tarbet Pier Picnic Site.



The study has also resulted in a Tarbet Masterplan- a long term vision for Tarbet - which is near completion and Argyll & Bute Council has secured funding to make improvements to the car park at The Cobbler, a very popular hill near Arrochar.

The National Park remains a huge draw for visitors and we will continue to work closely with communities and partners to ensure people can enjoy a safe and responsible visit - now and in the future.

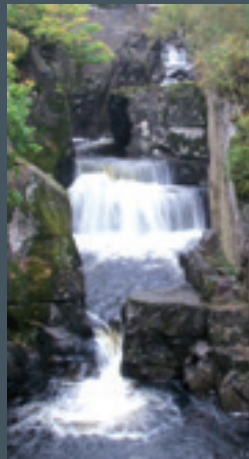
Focus On



Artist impression © Cake Industries

Bracklinn Bridge

Bracklinn Falls and the Bracklinn Circuit walking route are very popular with visitors to Callander in the east of the National Park. More than 70,000 people visit Bracklinn Falls every year and it is well loved by locals too.



The site is currently being upgraded, with fabrication of a replacement bridge underway this month and due to be erected on site in the new year. The new bridge (illustrated in the artist's impression above) will be a simple and robust structure that fits well with the landscape of the falls and is built to last.

Once complete, the bridge will provide a safe place to view the spectacular Bracklinn Falls and will connect up the Bracklinn Circuit walking route once more.

Benches, information panels sharing the history and culture of the area and new barriers are also being put in place as part of the project. The work is due to be completed early 2023.

Tarbet

The Tarbet Pier Picnic Site was originally envisaged as a site for day visitors arriving by car and in coaches. However, numbers of visitors arriving by both modes of transport have increased considerably in recent years, alongside the growing popularity of the site as a campervan / motorhome facility.



A number of projects are underway to upgrade the site for the various groups who use it, alleviate peak visitor pressures and improve the habitat and biodiversity on the site. The local community and businesses have been working with the National Park Authority to develop a Tarbet Masterplan.

This plan looks at short-term and long-term improvements to Tarbet including improved cycling routes and access to public transport, improvements to the pier, space for community events, helicopter access for Mountain Rescue, and expanded visitor facilities such as a toilets and café.

There is also a desire to establish the site as a Sustainable Travel Hub where visitors and locals could charge electric vehicles and switch from private vehicles to other modes of transport such as e-bikes and shuttle buses.

This masterplan comes on the back of measures introduced this summer, including dedicated motorhome spaces, additional staff on the ground and a pay & display charging system.

LOCH KATRINE HERITAGE STORIES

Paul Saunders charts the stories of some of the most impressive Victorian engineering wonders at Loch Katrine with the construction of Glasgow's main water supply infrastructure and the introduction of pleasure steamers, including the recently restored Steamship Sir Walter Scott which was built in 1899 and will make a welcome return to plying the waters of the loch in 2023 carrying many thousands of visitors again.



Since 1843 steamers have sailed on Loch Katrine, transporting visitors through what is now known as The Great Trossachs Forest National Nature Reserve, the second biggest NNR in the UK.

Trips on rowing boats began in the early 1800s to accommodate growing visitor numbers to Loch Katrine. These tourists were attracted by vivid descriptions of its scenery featured in the published works of Victorian writers and artists such as Sir Walter Scott, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Wordsworths.

That first steamer was Gypsy, followed by Rob Roy and then Rob Roy II, named after infamous outlaw Rob Roy MacGregor, born close by in 1671. Finally, in 1900 the Sir Walter Scott Steamship, the most recent, was introduced.

Sir Walter Scott Steamship was built in 1899 at William Denny & Bros. in Dumbarton on the River Leven at the cost of £4,269. She was dismantled for transportation to Loch Katrine after completing trials on the Clyde.

The Steamship arrived in sections at Stronachlachar, having been transported by barge up the River Leven and Loch Lomond. It took teams of horses to lug her the final few miles across hills from Inversnaid. Once reassembled, she commenced service in 1900.



The railways boosted tourism further, with stations opening at Callander in 1858 and Aberfoyle in 1882. In addition, new grand routes and tours, incorporating railway, horse and cart and steamship sailings, combined Loch Katrine with nearby Loch Lomond.





REMARKABLE FEAT

It was her predecessor Rob Roy II that Queen Victoria sailed on to visit the newly created waterworks on a very wet day in October 1859. Hailed as one of the world's most remarkable feats of engineering of its day, it required no less than the monarch to open it.

There are two aqueducts (the second was completed in 1901) that are 34 and 23 miles long respectively and take the form, along much of their routes, of tunnels through mountains and hills and bridges over valleys. After the success of Loch Katrine, Loch Arklet and then Glen Finglas were subsequently connected by tunnel to increase water supply capacity.

The introduction of fresh, clean water for the first time to Glasgow and much of west and central Scotland was transformational for the population's health. Still in operation, it supplies 1.3 million people, and up to 120 million gallons per day can be extracted from the loch.

The start of 2023 will see the reintroduction of Steamship Sir Walter Scott, thanks to the success of the SOS 'Save our Steamship' appeal launched by the charitable trust that protects and preserves her in response to boiler cracks and the need for other significant repairs.

Grants secured from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Hugh Fraser Foundation, Pilgrim Trust, and Gordon Fraser Charitable Trust helped enormously. However, public support allowed the restoration to commence, as donations poured in from visitors to Loch Katrine and local businesses, some of which have generously donated 'services in kind'.

The restoration process will also include the introduction of a new audio/visual exhibition at the pier and further enhancements to help disabled visitors, with the Steamship having wheelchair access.

As the Steamship enters her 123rd year, enjoy a New Year sailing on the historic Steamer that has been saved and preserved for the nation.

Loch Katrine and surrounding areas are steeped in history and is recognised as the favoured and much loved setting of some of Sir Walter Scott's most famous poetic works, as well as boasting links to Scottish legend Rob Roy MacGregor. But did you know it was closely linked to Queen Victoria too?

The loch itself is steeped in its own unique engineering history, providing fresh water to the city of Glasgow, a history closely linked with its own historic figurehead – Queen Victoria. In 1855 construction started on the Loch Katrine water project.

Built under the guidance of revered civil engineer John Frederick Bateman, the completed work was opened by Queen Victoria during her visit to the loch in October of 1859.

Her official visit and ceremony was not the only event to be remembered during her time on the loch. The monarch famously demanded a house and jetty be built for her use during her visit, a demand that was met by the site team. A beautiful Gothic Royal Cottage and jetty were built for the Queen but were never destined to be used for an overnight stay as the 21-gun salute that welcomed her shattered the cottage windows!





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Cycling Meanders

Jim Riach of the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs Countryside Trust supported four community groups to achieve Cycling Friendly awards from Cycling Scotland. Here Jim highlights the cycling groups and some of their favourite rides.



Working with the Cycling Friendly Communities of Drymen, Aberfoyle, Callander and Killin, we have pulled together a collection of favourite short cycling meanders, all starting from the heart of each community.

The meanders are designed to be short sociable rides, to be enjoyed in the company of friends and family and ridden in everyday clothes.

They often involve a café stop at the beginning, end or in the middle, and take in quiet roads, trails and cycle paths. These rides help us discover some hidden treasures, connect with nature, experience low carbon, independent travel, and enjoy some great, interesting company.

The rides are based on routes used by the local Meander Groups. Drymen (from May to September) and Callander have regular rides starting at 10am on a Tuesday, from the Village Square and Ancaster Square respectively. The rides are led by local, knowledgeable and qualified cycle ride leaders. No need to book and no costs involved, just turn up with your bike ready to go. Look out for rides starting again in the Spring in Aberfoyle and Killin, or drop us a message to let us know you are interested.



Cycling has something to offer everyone, allowing us to travel through nature and with nature, helping to mainstream low-carbon lifestyles and to have meaningful climate conversations with our peers. It can provide independent travel, adventure, fitness, health and social opportunities, the choice is yours.

WELCOMING CYCLISTS

Not only are our communities becoming more Cycling Friendly but many businesses within those communities are welcoming cyclists, because it is good for business and good for the environment. You will find many businesses have installed secure parking areas, may have an e-bike charging point, maybe a repair stand and pump, and many will provide free water bottle top-ups. See our website for locations throughout the Park at <https://bit.ly/34YBaw7>. We are also working on a new business toolkit to support more businesses realise the benefits of more cycling - more details soon from the Countryside Trust.



EXPLORING FURTHER

TRUST IN THE PARK Visit our website at <http://trustinthepark.org/tred-active-travel> to plan your own #cyclingmeanders or #cycleinthepark and make sure you share on Instagram @trustinthepark or Facebook @trustinthepark

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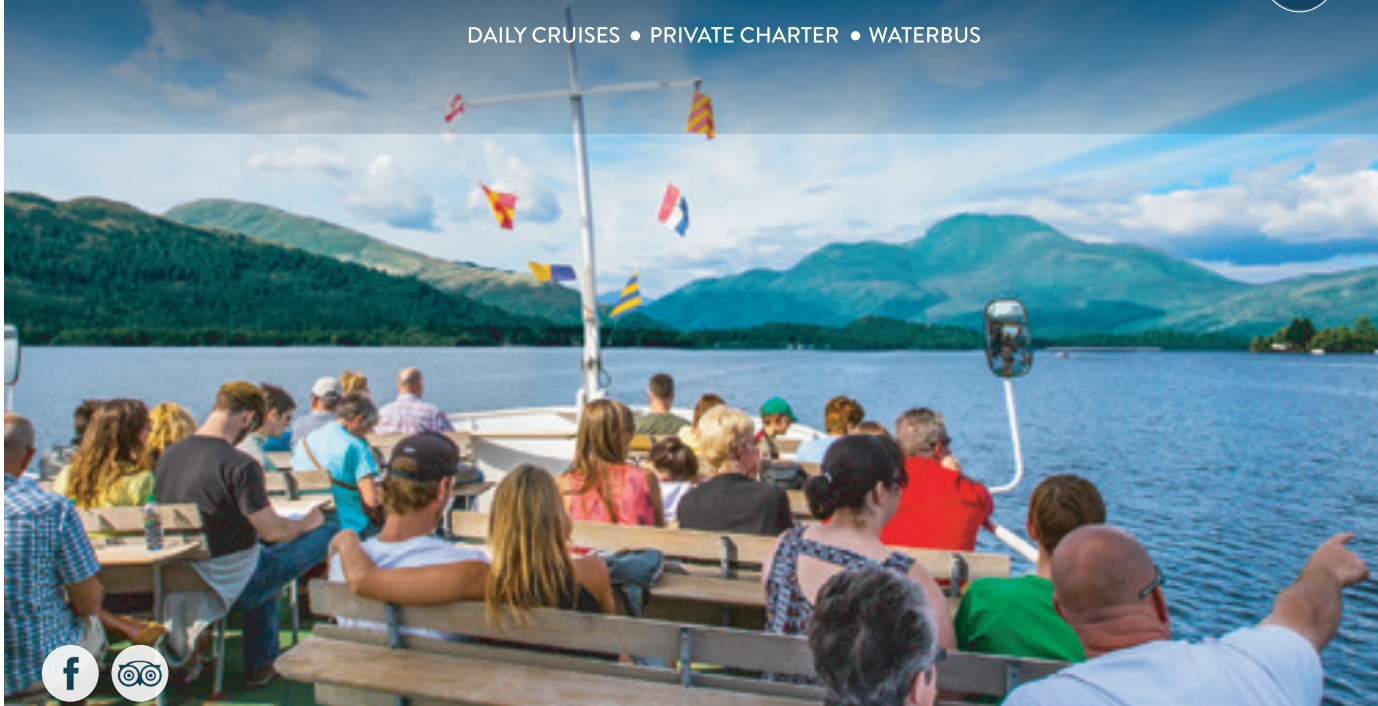
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A WALK IN THE PARK

In the latest in a series of articles covering some of the best short walks in and around the National Park, Friends Vice-Chair, John Urquhart, takes an Autumn walk along Glenbranter's Allt Robuic Waterfall Trail which he describes as 'The Trap or Snare', with good reason



Colour coded path map at Glenbranter



Strath Cur



Allt Robuic falls



Walking along by Allt Robuic falls

Place name authorities seem to be divided on the origin of Glenbranter's name. 'Branter' might be from similar sounding Gaelic words for things your great great granny might have been familiar with - a three-legged cooking pot, or an iron trivet for supporting a cooking pot over an open fire, or an iron for branding cattle. However, the similarly named Pass of Brander is supposed by one source to be derived from old Gaelic meaning 'trap or snare'. I like that idea as it fits nicely with the deep gorge cut by Glen Branter's Allt Robuic (roebuck burn?), as it cascades into Glenshellish. The waterfall by the way is a sure sign that Glen Branter is a glacial 'hanging valley'.

The famous entertainer, Sir Harry Lauder, bought Glenbranter House in 1916, but the mansion is no more, having been purchased by the Forestry Commission in 1921 and then abused throughout the 1930s as an 'instructional centre' for young unemployed men. During World War II it accommodated Italian PoWs and by 1956 was so neglected it had to be demolished. Forestry buildings now occupy the site where Forestry and Land Scotland provide parking, toilets and a map showing colour coded walking and cycling routes.

With the Autumn colours ripening under the slanting October sun, it was easy to see why Lauder fell in love with the place. Our destination was the lovely Allt Robuic gorge and waterfall and the plan was to use the upper part of the Green Route to reach it. Its zig-zags make for an easy ascent up through the oakwoods of Creagan Darach. After that the trail swings south and climbs steeply up beneath the near vertical cliffs of Creag Bhaogh. Pronounced Craig Voo-och, the name means 'Dangerous Crag'.



The picnic bench

At the high point a picnic bench looks south over Strath Cur (Heron Valley) where the River Cur winds through fields towards a distant Loch Eck (Horse Loch). We had sat at the bench 8 months before and listened with alarm to the news of war in Ukraine. Adrenaline heightens the senses and brought the surrounding tranquility and beauty sharply into focus - it all felt very fragile. Today, on the far side of the strath, we could see the sun illuminating the memorial the Lauders built to their son John after he was killed in France in 1917 (the Friends maintain the site and have a donation post there).

The Green route continues south on a forestry road and after about 1 kilometre we could hear the falls below us. To reach them you have to turn sharp left at the road junction and then almost immediately double back right again. After 100metres or so, a mountain biking trail on the left of the forestry road twists and turns down through the pines to the Allt Robuic path. As there is no waymarking, I've marked this link in magenta on the map. It had rained heavily overnight and the falls were at full bore, brown with eroded peat and earth. The narrow path is fenced where it hugs the overhanging edge of the deep ravine and 'The Trap or Snare' seemed just about the right name for the place.

LAKE OF MENTEITH SCOTLAND'S ONLY LAKE

Photographer and writer Paul Saunders visits the Lake of Menteith and speaks to some characters that live and work here. It is also a site of special scientific interest due to the exceptional flora and fauna.



Quint Glen, manager of the Lake of Menteith Fisheries, took me out on one of the boats to get up close to Scotland's only lake where we were soon entertained by a flock of Canadian Geese flying in circles around the edge of the water. Away from that spectacle, there is a good view of Ben Lomond and Inchmahome, the largest of three islands on the lake.

Inchmahome is home to the ruined priory founded in 1238, whose visitors include Robert the Bruce and Mary Queen of Scots. Sir Walter Scott's poems and novels of the Trossachs in the 1800s of The Trossachs included Inchmahome and raised its profile. Sadly, the island, managed by Historic Environment Scotland, hasn't re-opened after closures for Covid; hopefully, they will be able to do so next year.

In some of the published works in the 1800s Lake was substituted for Loch to make it read easier and it became known as Lake of Menteith, so when mapped in 1838 that made it officially 'Lake of Menteith', therefore creating Scotland's only lake.

Quint has worked for the fisheries for 25 years and is one of three staff for the community organisation. Shareholders are riparian or local landowners with historic rights to the Lake granted by the Duke of Montrose. Lake of Menteith is the most well-known stocked trout water in Scotland and home to the National Fly-Fishing Championship.

15,000 anglers visit annually, with all 36 fishery boats in action most weekends, no fishing is allowed from the banks, which are protected by SSI rules. 30,000 trout are grown in ponds and are stocked evenly each week across the 700-acre lake. Fly-fishing lessons are provided, with incentives to attract younger anglers. Kayaks and canoes can be launched but must be disinfected first to prevent introduction of unwanted pests and diseases such as freshwater louse.

On the water, we passed the fisheries boat specially adapted to accommodate wheelchairs, a project supported a few years ago by the Friends. In the distance, I can see my next stop, Lochend Chalets.





I first met Victoria of Lochend Chalets when she was chosen to feature in a series of films I produced for the Friends. The series 'Celebrating Park People and their Stories' profiled interesting people that live and work in the National Park.

Victoria, with her brother Topher and husband Chris, run the successful holiday accommodation business, a collection of 18 lodges in a peaceful location at the lake's south-eastern corner. Lochend Chalets are generous business supporters of the Friends 'Our Park' scheme, donating proceeds from sales of duck food bought by visitors staying at their lodges. The connection to nature draws customers to them from far afield to enjoy the tranquillity of the lake but stay within easy reach of the cities of Glasgow, Stirling, and Edinburgh.

Some of their lodges are named after ducks, and one of the newest, 'Nest' has a stunning panoramic view of the lake. Whilst admiring that view, Victoria told me that whilst working during Covid lockdown from the

lodges she witnessed an Osprey fishing from the lake, a wonderful but not unusual sight as there are four pairs nesting there each year. This time was unusual though with the arrival on the scene of a huge Sea Eagle who stole the catch from the talons of the Osprey.

Would you believe that Gordon Buchanan and the BBC's Springwatch team arrived just 10-minutes after this took place to film nature on the lake! Gordon was philosophical (it must happen not infrequently) to have missed it and set up cameras to be rewarded the next day with the return of the Sea Eagle, this time circling a Red Deer walking through the water. Much to everyone's relief (especially the deer), the Sea Eagle decided against taking it on.

Springwatch received special permission to film during the restrictions, capturing some fantastic footage. Having seen the wood carving skills of Victoria's husband Chris (from his own business), presenter Gordon challenged him to produce a life-size carving of the wingspan of a Sea Eagle to help



viewers understand the impressive size of the bird. Chris carved this in record time, with it and him featuring on the programme.

Another claim to fame of the lake is the occasions when it has frozen over. The Great Bonspiel of 1979 is unlikely to be repeated on that scale again. Organised by the Royal Caledonian Curling Club, it saw around 2,500 curlers playing on 8.5-inch-thick ice, with so many enjoying some drams whilst doing so that cars were left around the banks for days on end waiting for their drivers to sober up!

2010 was the last time the lake froze over to that level; however, the modern-day issues of parking, traffic management, etc., prevented a repeat of the 1979 event.

History, nature, wildlife, beauty, so many reasons to enjoy Lake of Menteith, part of the Trossachs Trail which has been recently revitalised by Friends of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs, supported by the local communities and Sir Walter Scott Steamship Trust.



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