

The Voice

The magazine of the Friends of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs

***Winter
is coming
to the
Trossachs***

**ALSO INSIDE
THIS ISSUE:**

Park News, Friends Updates, Visitor Management Focus, Nature of the Park, Walk in the Park *and more*



LOCH LOMOND ARMS HOTEL



ENJOY FRESH LOCAL PRODUCE

Join us for seasonal menus with locally sourced ingredients, a fantastic wine list and hand-pulled craft ales.

01436 860420 lochlomondarmshotel.com

LOCH LOMOND ARMS HOTEL MAIN ROAD LUSS G83 8NY  

LUSS SEAFOOD BAR



The finest Scottish seafood, served alongside a splendid wine list created by expert Matthew Jukes.

01436 860420 luss-seafoodbar.com  

LUSS SEAFOOD BAR PIER ROAD LUSS SCOTLAND G83 8NY

Inverbeg HOLIDAY PARK LOCH LOMOND



5* holiday park on the shores of Loch Lomond

Book your adventure now at inverbeg.com T. 01436 860 267 enquiries@inverbeg.com  



Join us on a magical adventure through the beautiful woodlands around Luss Village

LOCH LOMOND FAERIE TRAIL, LUSS, G83 8PA
www.lochlomondfaerietrail.com  

LOCH LOMOND ADVENTURES

- BIKES
- KAYAK & CANOE
- SPEEDBOAT
- WATERSPORTS
- GUIDED WALKS
- BOAT TICKETS
- CANYONING
- 4x4 ADVENTURE

LUSS CARPARK
WWW.LOCHLOMONDADVENTURES.COM  

Chairman's Introduction

WELCOME TO THIS SPECIAL ONLINE EDITION OF VOICE, *We have decided not to print and distribute bulk supplies of Voice on this occasion due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic crisis which has resulted in many of our traditional outlets either being closed or operating in a limited way.*



We are no different from other charities and businesses facing an uncertain future due to the catastrophic impact of COVID-19, which, not surprisingly, features heavily in this issue. We have tried to balance coverage of the impact of the pandemic on National Park communities and businesses with interesting articles on diverse topics, such as the ambitious Trossachs Visitor Management Project, and our submission to the Scottish Government calling for a more radical Alpine type construction scheme to solve the ongoing A83 road closure problems at the Rest and Be Thankful due to regular landslides and flooding.

Our activities over the past eight months have changed significantly due to the impact of COVID-19 with all our volunteer Make a Difference Days and other events cancelled and our programme of youth activities in the National Park with groups of disadvantaged youngsters postponed until next year. Sadly, we also had to suspend our popular grant awards from the successful Friends of OUR park visitor-giving scheme as participating businesses that normally generate income from visitors have been closed for lengthy periods and struggled with lower levels of trading at other times. Despite these setbacks we have continued to be busy. We stepped up our lobbying activities to support local tourism businesses decimated by the impact of COVID-19 and trading restrictions. This included coordinating regular meetings with Fergus Ewing MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Tourism and Rural Affairs, which were chaired by local MSP Jackie Baillie.

These meetings have been very useful to press the case for more financial support for the beleaguered tourism and hospitality industry which is the main employer in the National Park. We also used the forum to raise issues relating to visitor management following the massive surge in visitors to the area during and after lockdown.

We worked closely with local businesses and communities to encourage local public agencies to do more to manage the massive growth in visitors to the area more effectively and this included catering for basic human needs such as toileting which became a major problem with public toilets and car parks shut during the spring and early summer months. Littering and excessive road verge parking also became major problems as the area struggled to cope with the growth in visitor numbers which, at times, overwhelmed communities and popular countryside areas.

We had regular slots highlighting the issues and potential solutions on BBC Radio Scotland. We also led a feature on the flagship BBC TV Reporting Scotland news programme and secured regular coverage in the national press. We believe this did have a positive impact and we were pleased when the National Park and other bodies committed to funding the temporary siting of 40 mobile toilets at busy tourist locations while Councils and Forestry and Land Scotland took steps to re-open public toilets and car parks while all the agencies eventually increased litter clearance efforts.

A major positive arising from the pandemic has been growing recognition of the important role the great outdoors, and the National Park

area in particular, have played in providing recreational and other health and wellbeing opportunities for the general public, many of whom were cooped up for months in densely populated areas during lockdown. It was pleasing to see so many people enjoying simple pleasures such as walks and relaxing on the many loch shores in the National Park. It essential there is more investment in much needed basic visitor infrastructure and positive visitor management initiatives next year so the area can cope more effectively with what inevitably will be a busy period again with Scots rediscovering their own country in increasing numbers. We are continuing to lobby Government Ministers on this key topic. Please enjoy reading this edition of Voice and hopefully the contents will inspire you to get out and about in the National Park when travel restrictions are eased.

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. If you would like to make a donation to help our efforts please email our Support Officer, Carol Lloyd at info@lochlomondtrossachs.org.uk for bank transfer details or forward a cheque payable to Friends of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs, Carrochan, Carrochan Road, Balloch G83 8EG

All the very best.

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

The Voice is printed on 100% recycled paper supporting the re-use of forest resources and in accordance with FSC standards only using post-consumer recycled wood and fibre

Designed and printed by
The Inglewood Press Ltd, Alloa, Scotland
www.inglewood-press.co.uk
email: inglewoodprint@gmail.com



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. Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs; Carrochan; Carrochan Road; Balloch G83 8EG

Telephone: **01389 727761** Email: info@lochlomondtrossachs.org.uk
www.lochlomondtrossachs.org.uk

Cover photo – Loch Veil with reflections

Cover image by Paul Saunders www.paulsaunders.co.uk



Photo by Paul Saunders

TOM WEIR SITE TARGETED IN LOCKDOWN

Sadly, the three donation posts at the popular Tom Weir's Rest site in Balmaha were targeted by thieves during the COVID-19 lockdown earlier this summer with hundreds of pounds stolen. This is a disappointing setback for the Friends as we cover the annual site maintenance and statue insurance costs from the £3,000 normally collected from the donation posts each year. We have re-secured the posts, which are now emptied more regularly and have added QR codes which makes it even easier for visitors to donate as much or as little as they would like, without carrying cash. If you are visiting the area, please look out for them. Any donations, however big or small, are very much appreciated, and go directly towards supporting the site maintenance works and statue insurance costs.

Thanks to GiveTap for supplying the QR code stickers for free, and Donationboxes.co.uk who replaced missing parts of the donation posts at no cost, after hearing about the theft. We are also grateful to Sandy Fraser of the Oak Tree Inn for agreeing to waive the substantial site maintenance costs this year. Sandy's team maintain the popular picnic area and viewpoint to an exceptionally high standard for us, which is appreciated by the many thousands of visitors who visit the site.

DUCK BAY MIXED SUCCESS

Despite a massive downturn in trading income due to the impact of COVID-19, the Cawley Group, led by Alan Cawley, has stepped in to support the Friends by purchasing the important knoll area at the southern entrance to Duck Bay. It has also committed funds to restoring the Loch Lomond scenic lookout and circular path that was developed there by the Friends over 30 years ago, which fell into disrepair due to changes in local authority boundaries and management responsibilities in the mid 1990s.

This welcome move follows on from the campaigning by the Friends and the Cawley family who own and operate Duck Bay Hotel and Restaurant to secure badly needed new public toilets and other improvements at the popular Duck Bay picnic site that is used by an estimated 300,000 visitors every year. The purchase of the knoll is seen as an important first step in improving the situation at Duck Bay.

DESPERATION

In an effort to break the deadlock over the provision of public toilets, a special meeting was convened in August by Jackie Baillie MSP. Participants included the Cawley family and senior representatives from the Park Authority, Argyll & Bute Council and the Friends. They went on a site walkabout which served to reinforce how bad the current toileting position is, with evidence of thousands of visitors in desperation having to resort to toileting behind bushes and walls due to the absence of public toilets. This is a major public health hazard and simply should not be happening in this day and age and at an important gateway to Scotland's first National Park.

The Cawleys again offered to build and operate public toilets at their expense and also to take on the entire maintenance of the picnic area but it appears the Council, who own the site, is more interested in trying to secure consent for a mixed tourist development on the site, which is prone to flooding, with income generated from the development and associated controversial parking charges being used to cross-fund toilet facilities and the picnic site maintenance.

Sadly, little progress with breaking the impasse was made at the meeting and in a subsequent follow up call between Jackie Baillie MSP and the Chief Executive of the Council. As a holding operation to address the urgent toileting needs, the Friends



Chair, James Fraser pledged some funding from the Friends for temporary mobile toilet provision if other parties were willing to match fund. The Cawleys agreed to clean the temporary toilets on a daily basis but despite the passage of several months since the offer of the funding pledge there has been a stony silence amongst the agencies represented.

Some further follow-up work on lobbying and sourcing funding is planned by the Friends as this unsatisfactory situation, which is a major health and hygiene risk, should not be allowed to continue for another year. A plan to provide temporary toilets for a six-month period next year has already been costed.

In the meantime, work will get underway shortly on the restoration of Duck Bay Knoll by the Cawleys in memory of their late father, Bobby Cawley, who transformed Duck Bay Marina and invested heavily alongside the Friends in a much needed car park and viewpoint facilities several decades ago at what is the busiest entry point to Loch Lomondside.



Duff Christmas Tree Farm Support

The owners of the successful Duff family Christmas Tree Farm have generously agreed to donate 25p from every tree sold in their 'cut your own experience' to the Friends of OUR Park visitor-giving scheme, supporting Friends of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs initiatives for red squirrel conservation in the National Park. This is part of a range of environmentally supportive policies supported by the family and is a welcome addition to the OUR park scheme at a time that traditional sources of visitor giving for conservation, access and youth projects linked to tourism businesses have dried up due to the impact of COVID-19.

The Duff Christmas Tree Farm, close to Aberfoyle, is located on the edge of the Trossachs. The farm has around half a million trees, grown in fields that have magnificent views of Ben Lomond.

The farm supplies outlets throughout the UK, with Scottish-grown Christmas trees being in demand for their quality, thanks to the special climate and rainfall levels. The family also offer a popular 'cut your own Christmas Tree experience' each year. This is now a popular Christmas tradition for many families.

See more information at www.dufftrees.co.uk



The A83 has been affected by repeated debris flows from landslips

BACKING FOR NEW ALPINE-STYLE A83 IN GLEN CROE CORRIDOR

The Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs has come down in favour of building a new Alpine-style replacement A83 in the existing Glen Croe corridor in response to the recent Scottish Government consultation on alternative routes for the strategically important A83 road link between mid-Argyll and Central Scotland.

John Urquhart, Vice-Chair of the Friends, said: "For many years now the Scottish Government has regularly ploughed millions of pounds into a variety of measures, including large catch nets and roadside sinks, to try and protect the A83 which hugs the side of the steep southern slopes of Beinn Luibhean and The Cobbler, but this is increasingly proving to be wholly inadequate to cope with the scale and frequency of landslips and flooding that has occurred in recent months and repeatedly over the past decade and more.

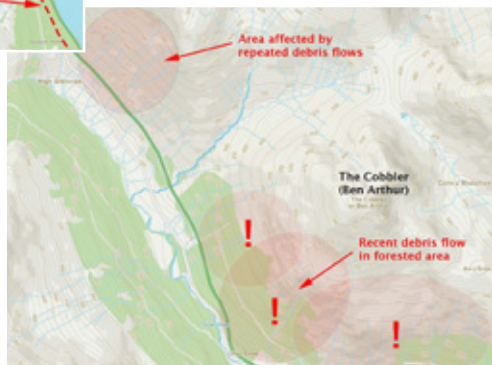
"We are proposing that a more radical Alpine-type solution is required which allows debris flows to reach the floor of Glen Croe unimpeded and involves possibly building a combination of cantilevers, viaducts and reinforced gallery canopies or tunnels on a new route not far from the existing Rest and Be Thankful route."

EUROPEAN LESSONS

Our European counterparts in more challenging mountainous areas, such as the Alps and the Dolomites, have for centuries used these various road building options with great success. We believe there is no reason why they would not work here, provided the Scottish Government is willing to invest at the right level in an engineering solution which respects the outstanding scenic qualities of the area. It is interesting to see the steps the UK Government has taken to protect Stonehenge with the recent announcement of £1.7 billion to divert the busy A into a tunnel around this World Heritage Site.

One of the benefits would be removal of the unsightly existing large catch nets which currently dominate the hillside landscape but, more importantly, this option would help to ensure economically fragile communities such as Tarbet, Arrochar, Cairndow and Inveraray continue to benefit from passing traffic upon which they are heavily reliant.

The Friends also propose, as part of a wider strategic review of the Loch Lomond to mid-Argyll A83 trunk route, that there would be significant benefits to be gained from exploring the potential to realign the route through the Tarbet-Arrochar corridor. We contend this would remove traffic bottlenecks and road safety issues as well as improving the quality of life for residents and enabling the area to prosper more as a flourishing tourist destination.



1. Map showing benefits of realigning A83 in the Tarbet-Arrochar corridor
2. Map showing areas of Glen Croe vulnerable to debris flows

CAMPING IN THE FOREST FAILINGS



At a critical time when there has been a surge in demand for camping facilities in both of Scotland's National Parks, Camping in the Forest operators of the large camp sites at Cashel (Loch Lomondside), Cobbleland (near Aberfoyle) and Glenmore (Loch Morlich) were posted missing as they decided to keep all the campsites they manage closed during 2020. This was despite considerable pressure from site owners, Forestry and Land Scotland and lobbying by bodies such as the Friends, who raised the matter with Scottish Government Ministers in regular COVID-19 impact conference calls.

Friends Chair, James Fraser, said: "The general public have been badly let down by campsite operators Camping in the Forest who steadfastly refused to re-open what are large scale campsites in strategically important places in both National Parks. This resulted in tens of thousands of members of the public being denied access to publicly owned camping facilities at the very time there was a huge surge in demand from July onwards following months of COVID-19 lockdown travel restrictions being lifted.

"I understand the operators were offered substantially reduced rental terms to help cover the costs of introducing COVID-19 hygiene measures required to operate the sites safely but they turned this down and decided to remain closed, which was very disappointing as the campsites have the capacity to accommodate up to 2,000 visitors on a nightly basis." The Friends are pushing for steps to be taken to terminate the campsite leases with Camping in the Forest if this is legally possible and to introduce more locally based operators who are more sympathetic and responsive to the needs of local communities and visitors seeking to enjoy the National Parks in responsible ways.



Obituaries

FAREWELL TO A TRUE FRIEND AND LOCAL HERO

*Friends Chair, James Fraser, pays tribute to Friends supporter and volunteer **Stuart Ballantyne** who sadly lost his fight with coronavirus.*



Stuart and others at the Oak Tree Inn to mark the installation of 100 defibrillators in and around the National Park



I was shocked and saddened to hear the recent tragic news that one of the Friends greatest supporters and lifesaving local hero

Stuart Ballantyne died suddenly in early November after contracting coronavirus. A month earlier I came across Stuart in the village of Doune on his regular rounds checking out one of the many life-saving defibrillators that he was responsible for helping to fund and maintain in his role as Secretary of Trossachs Search and Rescue. He was in good spirits as we had a blether about his current projects and activities in and around the National Park. Stuart, who was a former police officer and ambulance service worker, played a major part in founding the hugely successful Trossachs Search and Rescue Service. In his role with the Rescue Service he devoted a huge amount of his time in a voluntary capacity over many years which had a wide-

ranging impact on local communities and helped to save hundreds of lives. He was behind the successful roll out of more than 100 lifesaving defibrillators across rural communities and he coordinated the band of volunteers who helped fund raise and regularly checked out the various installations. It was in this capacity that I got to know Stuart really well as the Friends partnered up with the Trossachs Search and Rescue Service to help fund installations in popular visitor destinations and some of the more remote and less populated areas in the National Park. We also helped fund a handy defibrillator locator app developed for Trossachs Search and Rescue with monies raised through the Friends of OUR park visitor giving scheme. Over the years Stuart enthusiastically supported a range of Friends activities and events including the popular series of Weirfests at the Torn Weir site in Balmaha where he and some of his volunteers regularly provided a valuable first aid service. He also took on more and more activities and services under the umbrella of the Rescue Service to support local communities

and vulnerable residents. Not surprisingly, the tributes to Stuart flooded in after he bravely, but unsuccessfully, battled to beat the virus for weeks. His enormous contribution to community life was recently covered in a two-page spread in the Stirling Observer and among the many tributes was one from Jamie Grant, formerly of Stirling Council, who described Stuart as "a gentle giant with a kind heart, and always put his work and community first." In a tribute from Stirling MSP Bruce Crawford, he described Stuart as: "a marvellous human being and a legend among hikers, hillwalkers and villagers." He added: "His passing is heartbreakingly sad and my thoughts are with his family, friends and colleagues who I know will miss him deeply." I can only echo these sentiments on behalf of the Friends who, along with others, owe Stuart a great debt of gratitude for his enormous contribution to saving the lives of others and ensuring many thousands of people enjoy the National Park more safely.

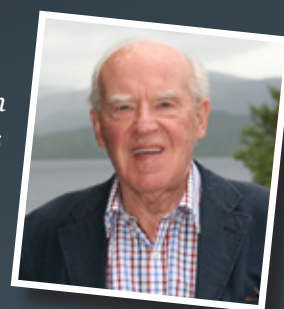
SAD NEWS OF ANOTHER FRIENDS STALWART

Those of you who knew former Friend's Trustee Iain Stuart will like me have been deeply saddened to hear of his passing a few months ago. A keen outdoor man, a mountain walker and a skier, Iain was a thoughtful person, who, living as he did at Tulloch Farm in the heart of Kilmarnock, was intimately aware of and cared deeply about the issues which affect the National Park. Iain's answer was to join with the Friends in their efforts to deliver real improvements on issues like litter, education, countryside access and visitor management. He was passionate about these topics and got involved in a number of initiatives to make Loch Lomond a better place for local residents and visitors to enjoy. He was particularly proud of the comprehensive guidebook which was

*Friends Vice-Chair John Urquhart pays tribute to **Iain Stuart** - a Trustee of the Friends for more than 10 years- who passed away quietly in his sleep at his home at Tulloch Farm.*

produced during his time with the Friends and he spent many hours persuading outlets around the loch to stock copies and to spread the word about the useful information contained in the guide. He knew his home ground well and I worked closely with him over the spring of 2014 trying to assist Scottish Natural Heritage (now "NatureScot") in their efforts to identify a route through Kilmarnock for their new John Muir long distance coast to coast walking route. In the end our canvassing labours around the community came to nought, stymied by a few influential figures who clearly did not share Iain's imagination and outward looking generosity of spirit. The idea was summarily dismissed at a community council meeting in Gartocharn's Millennium Hall

and what was Kilmarnock's loss was Carbeth's and Strathblane's gain. There is still no safe off road walking route between Balloch and Gartocharn or between Gartocharn and Drymen! Iain's background was in local government administration and he served at a senior level for many years with Glasgow and latterly Stathclyde Regional Council's Education Department. Those were heady days when ground breaking initiatives in outdoor education were being developed and Iain was at the cutting edge of all of that. Sadly, since then, years of austerity have eroded many of the gains Iain and his contemporaries worked so hard to achieve.



Friends Website Refresh



The Friends have invested £4,000 refreshing the current website to make it more easily accessible via a number of platforms. The opportunity was also taken to make joining the Friends membership scheme online easier and improving access to the online version of the Friends magazine Voice and feature weekly updates contributed by our longstanding nature specialist writer Keith Graham.

Please take the opportunity to visit the Friends website at www.lochlomond-trossachs.org which has comprehensive information on cultural and natural aspects of the National Park as well as detailed guide on places to visit. The website is also a useful source of information on our comments on various National Park policy document consultations and responses to planning applications.

The Friends online shop at www.lochlomond-trossachs.org.uk/the-friends-shop is a useful source for unusual Christmas gifts, such as Loch Lomond and The Trossachs related books, guides, DVDs or Friends branded clothing. Or for something a little different, choose a gift that funds some of the practical conservation work we do to help keep the National Park a special place for years to come, including sponsoring a red squirrel feeding station or native tree planting.

Welcome Aboard

We are pleased to welcome the following new members who have joined since our last edition:

- D. MCGUIRE & A. ROWLAND** *Joint M/ship*
- L. ROBERTSON** *Family M/ship*
- M. ECKERSELL** *Individual*
- S. RULE** *Individual*
- J BOWERS** *Individual*

If you are interested in becoming a member please contact Carol Lloyd on 01389 727761, by email info@lochlomond-trossachs.org.uk or join via our website www.lochlomond-trossachs.org.uk

Annual General Meeting

Due to the COVID-19 lockdown earlier this year and the current travel restrictions, the Friends AGM has been postponed to March 2021. If it is still not possible to have a gathering of members at our usual Ross Priory venue, an online meeting will be held to ensure we comply with OSCR regulations and guidelines.ongoing. Further details to be advised early next year.

In the meantime if there are any burning issues please contact Carol Lloyd on 01389 727761, by email info@lochlomond-trossachs.org.uk and she will pass this on to the relevant Trustee for a response.



Help us make a difference

Working for people and nature in Scotland's first National Park
 Scottish Charities Registered SC015389
Find out more at: www.lochlomond-trossachs.org.uk



Protecting and nurturing the special qualities of the National Park.

Promoting and celebrating the natural and cultural heritage of the National Park.



Join us NOW



Providing support for projects to make the National Park a better place for people and nature.



THE OAK TREE INN BALMAHA LOCH LOMOND

Muddy Boots Welcome



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

Tel: 01360 870357 | Email: info@theoaktreeinn.co.uk | www.theoaktreeinn.co.uk



@oaktreeinn



theoaktreeinn

St Mocha

COFFEE SHOP & ICE CREAM PARLOUR

LOCH LOMOND
ICE CREAM



Loch Lomond roasted coffee • Teas • Gluten Free & Vegan Cakes & Traybake
Lunch menu • Homemade Loch Lomond Ice Cream

Open daily in Balmaha + The Station - Just opened in Aberfoyle



www.theoaktreeinn.co.uk - Next to the Oak Tree Inn & Village Shop, Balmaha



@LochLomondCoffee @stmochacoffee @thestationaberfoyle

The Electric Bike Experience

Carol Lloyd, the Friends Support Officer, takes a close look at the growth in the use of electric bikes and recently took up the offer from one of our Business Supporters, The Lodge on the Loch Hotel at Luss to sample an e-bike activity break.

A noticeable trend this year and a by-product of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increasing awareness of the climate change agenda has been the explosion in the use of electric bikes (e-bikes) with record sales and local hire fleets in the National Park rapidly expanding to cope with demand from a wide range of age groups.

I am reliably informed a number of Friends Trustees and Business Supporters have splashed out and can now be seen regularly enjoying cycle rides in different parts of the National Park! Several business owners, including Sandy Fraser of the Oak Tree Inn in Balmaha and David Warnes of the Winnock Hotel in Drymen, are progressing plans to develop cycle hubs at key locations in the National Park to capitalise in the surge in public interest in this activity.

Forth Valley LEADER and the Countryside Trust have also worked jointly to produce a useful selection of e-bike routes and online leaflet covering a large part of the National Park. It is possible to cover around 10 km in just half an hour and there are routes appropriate for everyone. Find out more at <http://trustinthepark.org/tred/>

I recently took up the kind offer of a cycling short break from Niall Colquhoun, the owner of the Lodge on the Loch Lomond Hotel and avid outdoor recreation 'action man', who himself owns a top of the range e-bike and heads out on lengthy adventures from his lochside home. I spent a pleasant time enjoying the hotel and exploring the attractive village of Luss and the lochside on an e-bike.

Stunning Location

The hotel is situated on an enviable site at the beachfront in Luss and the views from the beautifully refurbished restaurant and bedrooms are simply stunning as they overlook the loch and Ben Lomond with constantly changing colours and moods. I enjoyed being able to walk and cycle for miles along the shore line.

There are a variety of ways to explore the area, including by speed boat, canoe or water bus. I chose to try an ebike. Not having been on a bike for many years, I admit to being a little apprehensive, however I was keen to try one out ...and I'm very glad I did!

Delivered to the door of the hotel, the e-bike was an enjoyable way to experience the beautiful scenery. The battery powered pedalling together with the smooth West Loch Lomond Cycle Path makes it easy and fun. Before I knew it, I reached Firkin Point, yet another picturesque spot overlooking the loch, where I stopped to catch my breath and make the most of this photo opportunity. The ride was around 11 miles in total and was effortless, even for a novice.

The bike was provided by Cycle Luss, which is the brainchild of Erin Charters, an Environmental Science student who is passionate about sustainability and recognises the environmental benefits of electric power.

In a conversation with Erin, she said: "Customers are often keen to try out e-bikes for the first time with a view to changing lifestyle habits by reducing car usage and therefore CO2 emissions. I study Environmental Science at the Open University so it was inevitable I would create a business related to sustainability in some way. The e-bikes are fun to ride with the pedal assistance giving the confidence to 'non-riders' or those who are less fit to jump on and experience the outstanding scenery on the West Loch Lomond Cycle Path."

After my exhilarating e-bike ride I was back at The Lodge on Loch Lomond again to relax and enjoy the in-room sauna before sampling the fantastic Scottish produce on offer in the pleasant surroundings of the Colquhoun Restaurant with what must be the best view of stunning Loch Lomond to savour while dining."

The Lodge on Loch Lomond have a clear hygiene commitment and a simple social distancing etiquette that was reassuring yet resulted in minimal disruption during my stay. The team are clearly excited for the hotel to be reopened and to welcome guests back to stay at this picturesque destination.

Members of the Friends can enjoy 10% discount on all food at The Lodge on Loch Lomond and 10% discount on e-bike hire for parties up to 4 (T's & C's apply). More information can be found on our website www.lochlomondtrossachs.org.uk





CAMERON HOUSE HOTEL EXPANSION UNDERWAY

Work is well underway on the £17million Cameron House Hotel extension on Loch Lomondside. The extension includes 70 additional bedrooms and a function suite for 300 people. In the background, work on the sensitive restoration of the main hotel that was badly damaged by a tragic fire almost three years ago is progressing well. The historic façade has been saved but the interior of the main house is being completely rebuilt and the main hotel complex should re-open by early summer next year.

SCRAPYARD TRANSFORMATION TO CAMPERVAN HUB

Imaginative plans to transform the use of a vehicle breakers yard beside the A811 between Balloch and Gartocharn at the southern end of Loch Lomond to a campsite and motorcaravan hire centre with a toilet block and associated landscaping have received the backing of the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs.

The welcome plans have come at a time when there has been a massive growth in the popularity of motorcaravan, or campervan, holidays in Scotland with a shortage of overnight stay and support facilities in the National Park. Independent research confirms that ownership of campervans in the UK is growing by at least 15% a year and there has also been a significant increase in campervans available for hire to meet demand.

The infrastructure for campervans is currently inadequate within the National Park and this development would provide additional much need campervan support facilities on a busy tourist route. Conversion from a breakers yard to a tourist-orientated facility is considered to be a good use for the already well screened site.

WEST HIGHLAND WAY ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION

The West Highland Way, Scotland's first long-distance walking route, which winds its way from Milngavie via Loch Lomondside and Glencoe to Fort William in the West Highlands, celebrated its 40th anniversary on 6 October with the launch of a specially created online exhibition.

Walkers, runners, cyclists, charity fundraisers and the route's fans from across the world contributed poems, videos, photographs, art and their personal stories and memories to the exhibition.

Jimmie Macgregor, now in his 90th year and who inspired many people to walk the West Highland Way through his radio and TV programmes and spin-off books during the 1980s and 1990s, gave an exclusive interview and provided the welcome to the exhibition.

Features also include stories of marriage proposals, charity events in memory of loved ones and people who have enjoyed the route multiple times. The West Highland Way has attracted painters, poets and musicians too and the exhibition attempts to capture a flavour from all those who have found it inspirational.

The celebration is part of a wider West Highland Way project, funded by the Scottish Government's LEADER programme, to support the future upkeep of the popular route by drawing in further investment and exploring income generation opportunities. The project aims to ensure the long-term economic sustainability of the West Highland Way, in its anniversary year, and the rural businesses and communities that depend on it.

The exhibition can be viewed at www.westhighlandway40.org with plans in place to launch a travelling exhibition shortly.



NEW GLEN LUSS DISTILLERY PLANS

Ambitious plans for a new Glen Luss Distillery were unveiled over the summer months by a consortium led by Patrick Colquhoun. The plans involve the sensitive conversion of the former smokehouse near the centre of the conservation village, incorporating a courtyard and a pedestrian link through a new village park to a much needed new 260-space village car park south of the Loch Lomond Arms Hotel, which is currently under construction.

A large barrel warehouse and visitor experience is also planned at the northern end of the car park.

Detailed plans have been lodged for planning consent with the National Park but elements, such as the new car park and village green, already have approval as part of a wider West Loch Lomond Framework Plan. More details on the distillery plans can be viewed on www.glenlussdistillery.com. The vision for the distillery is to capitalise on the strong heritage credentials of the

Luss area and the Clan Colquhoun and to create a visitor attraction that will provide a high quality indoor visitor experience that increases the length of stay and average spend of visitors in the village, which is currently swamped by short-stay visitors. A percentage of the profits from the new distillery venture will be gifted to the local community to support priority community initiatives.

Meanwhile, good progress is being made with improved traffic management plans for the village, which were hard won in the face of opposition originally from Argyll & Bute Council. Thankfully, the community-led plans are now being adopted, which means that Pier Road with the attractive historic cottages that are a major visitor draw will become traffic-free and the welcome addition of a large car park and attractive village green nearby, funded by Luss Estates as part of a package of investment in the wider Luss area.



Work has started on the large new car park at the south end of Luss which will enable improved traffic management measures to be introduced elsewhere in the congested village

NEW PARK LITTER STRATEGY

The National Park Authority recently approved a new litter prevention strategy, which is very timely given the major growth in litter problems that occurred regularly at busy visitor hotspots this summer, with a surge in visitors numbers and many new first-time visitors to during and after the COVID-19 lockdown. Local public sector bodies struggled to keep on top of the unprecedented volumes of litter at busy sites and on lochshores. Additional unwelcome trends also included more incidents of fly-tipping and accumulations of human waste, which were challenging for already depleted and stretched staff to deal with.

The National Park litter strategy reflects the Scottish Government's National Litter Strategy and is based on the three pillars to litter prevention: effective engagement, appropriate infrastructure and proportionate enforcement. The Park Authority plans to develop actions to target the immediate damaging issues seen in the Park: litter and fly-tipping associated with irresponsible camping, day trippers and picnickers, and accumulations at 'honeypot' sites.

It is recognised that these are not issues that the Park Authority can tackle alone and success will only be achieved through effective partnership working and joint actions. To deliver the new strategy, the Park Authority plans to bring together and lead a joint action group of relevant local stakeholders and national experts to work towards a rolling action plan.

NEED FOR PRACTICAL ACTIONS

At this stage, it is not clear what practical actions will emerge from the Action Group deliberations that will make a real difference but it is hoped many of the suggestions, which were put forward by community representatives and bodies, such as the Friends, at a Litter Summit earlier this year, will be embraced and followed up on. Communities across the Park have consistently highlighted litter as a priority issue in Community Action Plans and they regularly organise very successful volunteer litter clean ups but many would welcome the provision of more well designed and regularly emptied litter bins at key locations as part of their fight to improve the quality of their local environment.

The Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs are working on pilot litter initiatives with community groups for 2021. Plans are being progressed for the Lake of Mentieth area with the local Community



One of the many well designed bins now in use in Stirling Council area including at this busy Aberfoyle car park

Council, which hopefully will result in some well designed litter bins being strategically located in lakeside car parks with regular litter monitoring along the shores of the lake by local residents and supported with frequent bin emptying in partnership with Stirling Council.

Both the Friends and the local Community Council recognise well-intentioned education efforts on their own are insufficient to deal with the growing litter problem and it will be interesting to see what impact pilot initiatives such as the one planned here will have.



CALLANDER VIC ON THE MOVE

Following the success of the seasonal opening of the community-led Callander Visitor Information Centre for the first time last year, with over 20,000 visitors, it was disappointing that the Centre, temporarily housed in the National Park's offices in Main Street, could not reopen this year due to the COVID-19 situation. However, this gave the three local organisations involved time to plan to find a permanent home for the Centre and when the former RBS building opposite the current premises came on the market it was considered to be an ideal location.

Callander Community Development Trust (CCDT), led by Frank Park, agreed to fund buying the building and the offer to purchase was accepted at the beginning of October. The building will host the Visitor Information Centre (VIC) on the ground floor and the Development Trust, with ideas from the local community, will decide what to do with the two upper floors.

Frank Park, who also chairs the Board that runs the current VIC, said "The purchase of the building is a major statement by CCDT for the future of Callander. This investment secures a home for our VIC, staffed by our amazing team of volunteers, who assist our visitors with a wealth of local knowledge and welcoming smiles."

It is envisaged the new VIC will open in the new building by Easter 2021 if the refurbishment programme goes according to plan. The centre fills a major void in visitor information provision in a strategically important location on one of the main tourist routes to the West Highlands. It also has a key role to play promoting the town and the wider Trossachs area.

CALLANDER'S LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS

Good progress is being made with several projects including improvements at Bochastle Car Park at Kilmahog and the implementation of an area wide interpretation plan.

Work started in Bochastle Car Park in early-October, to increase parking from 14 to 29 bays and fully resurface the car park and its approach road. This is intended to provide extra parking for people accessing Ben Ledi, The Great Trossachs Path and National Cycle Route 7, and help to ease congestion in the surrounding area. The work also includes improving a path link to the nearby cycleway and is on track to be completed in early December.

In September last year, Callander's Landscape partners came together to share ideas on how best to tell the stories associated with Callander's landscape. The workshop led to a comprehensive interpretation plan and, from here, partners chose the most important and relevant stories to tell through a series of panels. The panels, that will be installed across the area next year, cover a whole range of topics and themes including Roman occupation, local wildlife and Callander's dark skies.

These projects are being financed by grants from Forth Valley & Lomond LEADER, National Lottery Heritage Fund and Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park who are managing the projects. Some funding for the interpretation project is also being provided by the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs



More on Callander's Landscape at www.callanderslandscape.org



It's Wonderful at Wintertime

Winter is a magical time of year in the National Park with views and scenery that can take your breath away.

Here local photographer Paul Saunders captures the special magic of Winter in the National Park with a selection of his images.

More of Paul's stunning images of the National Park can be seen on his website www.seelochmond.co.uk

Tom Weir Statue at Balmaha



Millarochy Bay



Maid of the Loch, Balloch



Conic Hill



Luss



From Dumpling



Loch Achry



Rowardennan

Visitor Invasions Cause Chaos

2020 has turned out to be a horrendous year as a result of the devastating impact of COVID-19 on the world's population. One of the biggest impacts, apart from the awful death toll and on people's mental health and wellbeing, has been the introduction of travel restrictions and fluctuations over time on how far people could travel and for what purpose. In the UK, we started with a complete lockdown in the spring and then a gradual easing of restrictions in mid-summer and a further clampdown in recent months. This had major consequences for Scotland's outdoors and no more so than here in the National Park with wave after wave of large invasions of visitors during and after lockdowns, due to the area's close proximity to major population centres.

The influxes of visitors, including many first-time visitors, were far greater than ever before and the area simply did not have the capacity or infrastructure to cope with the numbers. The situation was exacerbated by public and private sector visitor facilities being closed during lockdown and many thousands of visitors ignoring confusing and contradictory travel restriction guidelines, which led to major problems in communities and popular lochside and countryside locations throughout the National Park.

In the early months of lockdown communities and rural businesses in visitor honeypot locations were left largely to fend for themselves. Thankfully, Police Scotland stepped up their presence but this did not prevent the area being swamped when Scottish Government guidance changed with people being allowed to travel 5 miles for recreation purposes and any distance to visit friends and relatives. Chaos ensued, particularly in the southern half of the National Park with traffic congestion, excessive roadside parking, extensive toileting in the outdoors, including in local residents gardens, and deluges of litter at the more popular lochshore sites and in communities such as Luss, Balmaha and Callander.

Raft of Problems

Many of the local agencies had their hands tied behind their backs initially due to the guidance from the Scottish Government not to open car parks and public toilets and this greatly

compounded the raft of problems. The Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs regularly highlighted the plight of communities and the problems arising from basic public facilities being closed and mounted a successful media campaign with regular interviews on national radio and TV and extensive press coverage. A particular issue highlighted during this campaign was the lack of toilets being open with consequent health and hygiene issues arising from large accumulations of human waste at popular locations.

When local agencies such as the National Park Authority, Councils and Forestry & Land Scotland were eventually allowed to swing into action in late June and early July this helped relieve some of the problems but even they couldn't cope with the constant deluge of visitors. Steps were taken in several areas such as East Loch Lomond and the heart of the Trossachs to close roads and introduce emergency Traffic Regulation Orders giving Police Scotland and Councils the powers to impose parking fines and, in extreme instances, to tow cars away.

While these actions were probably necessary on road safety grounds, it didn't solve the problem as it merely displaced cars to other areas such as Strathard and the spur road to Loch Katrine, causing further problems. Record levels of parking fines were issued and several areas in the National Park were plastered with no parking signs and cones. National Park media briefings and social media campaigns tried to discourage visitors from going to some of the more popular and congested sites but some of this good work was undermined by a national TV and social media advertising campaign undertaken by VisitScotland featuring Conic Hill above Balmaha and the islands of Loch Lomond. This was at a time Balmaha and East Loch Lomond was already one of the most congested areas in the National Park with regular road closures.

In the National Park Authority spread on pages 14 and 15, more detail on the steps taken by local agencies and Police Scotland to tackle the visitor management challenges over what has been an unprecedented and difficult period is provided and a review is currently underway at national and local levels to determine what steps to take to ensure agencies are better prepared to manage the predicted large flows

of visitors to Scotland's countryside and the National Park next year and beyond.

There is clearly a need for further investment in basic infrastructure such as public toilets, better car parking and improved litter management. A key feature of recent campaigning by the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs has been lobbying Scottish Government Ministers for more funds to be released to bodies such as the National Park Authority, Councils and local communities for additional visitor infrastructure investment and positive visitor management activities. The Friends have also suggested the existing Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund that was introduced a few years ago should be expanded and be better resourced to help address problems which are not going to disappear and urgently need to be addressed.

Balmaha Overflow Car Park Success

The provision of more temporary parking at key locations such as Balmaha helped ease some of the traffic verge parking problems this summer. Sandy Fraser of the Oak Tree Inn in Balmaha had the foresight last year to create an overflow car park for 70 cars at a site in the centre of the village and within easy walking distance of the lochshore. In Strahard, in advance of the 2021 season, local farmer Fergus Wood hopes to follow this example by providing temporary seasonal car parking and mobile toilets to relieve visitor pressures at Loch Ard.

Hopefully other local farmers and landowners will follow these examples to help manage visitor pressures in a more positive way than the current blunt tools of simply introducing temporary traffic orders and car parking fine regimes for verge side parking in the absence of adequate off road parking.

Toilet Relief

As highlighted earlier, toileting outdoors and accumulations of human waste became a major problem at popular locations in the National Park and a successful campaign was undertaken by the National Park Destination Group and the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs to encourage public agencies and others to address this by opening public toilets and providing additional mobile toilets as soon as they were allowed to. The National Park Authority responded positively to this campaign and provided more than 30 temporary toilets at busy sites around Loch Lomond while the Steamship Sir Walter Scott Trust provided six temporary toilets at the popular Trossachs Pier site to supplement the existing public toilets there.

The general public appreciated the provision of safe and clean toilets and there was very positive feedback from visitors to these locations. The temporary toilets were provided by Gartocharn based Honeywagon whose normal markets for mobile toilets had disappeared with events such as Highland Games, Agricultural Shows and weddings all cancelled.

Bold Visitor Management Plans for the Trossachs

An ambitious £600,000 Trossachs Visitor Management Project has been developed by two leading charities in the National Park: the Steamship Sir Walter Scott Trust and the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs in partnership with Forestry and Land Scotland and with the support of local community groups, the National Park, Stirling Council and Scottish Water.

A comprehensive package of visitor infrastructure improvements is planned and a number of planning applications have recently been submitted to the National Park to enable works to get underway in 2021 if funding is secured.

The partners are also hopeful that a bid for funding from the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, which is designed to help areas suffering from visitor pressure, will be successful. The outcome of the bid to the scheme administered by VisitScotland should be known by mid-December. Additional funding is being provided by the Steamship Trust, Forestry and Land Scotland, the Friends and local community hydro schemes.

James Fraser, CEO of the Steamship Trust and Chair of the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs, who is coordinating the project said: "There is clearly an urgent need to relieve the chronic problems created by visitor pressures in the heart of the Trossachs and, in particular, traffic congestion caused by excessive road verge parking which is impacting adversely on the quality of life for local residents who regularly have problems going about their daily business safely.

"Our proposals aim to do just this in positive and sensitive ways that will also enhance the quality of the visitor experience in the popular Brig O'Turk/Ben A'an/Loch Katrine visitor corridor and encourage the dispersal of visitors to other parts of the Trossachs area where it is less busy."

Surge of Visitors

It is planned to invest in visitor infrastructure improvements at Ben A'an Car Park, below the popular Ben A'an mountain path, and at the Trossachs Pier and Stronachlachar visitor hubs at either end of Loch Katrine, which is credited with being the birthplace of Scottish Tourism due to the writings of Sir Walter Scott and others in the early 1800s that led to the first surge of visitors to the Trossachs.

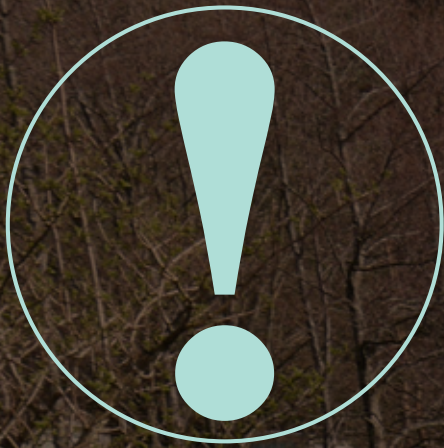
These three sites collectively now consistently have in excess of 200,000 visitors a year and there has been a marked growth in recent years and particularly following the mid-summer easing of COVID-19 travel restrictions that led to road closures and the introduction of temporary traffic regulation orders to control excessive and dangerous roadside verge parking.

The plans include well-designed expanded car parks with 110 additional spaces, improved disabled parking and bus drop-off and pick-up points across the three sites at Ben A'an, Trossachs Pier and Stronachlachar Pier; additional overnight campervan bays with hook up facilities, electric vehicle and bike charging points, public litter recycling points and water refill stations at the Trossachs Pier and Stronachlachar Pier visitor hubs; a new mobility hub with electric scooters and extended public toilets at Trossachs Pier to provide treble the current capacity including 16 COVID-19 adapted cubicles and two disabled toilets and wet rooms; and the reinstatement of the 200 metre historic Roderick Dhu Watch Tower path and scenic lookout beside Trossachs Pier Car Park.

The planned investment at these locations will be augmented by improved signing and information/orientation points at 'spoke and hub' locations around the long established 40 mile Trossachs Trail.

Commenting on the plans, local MSP Bruce Crawford said: "I am very supportive indeed of these well thought through practical proposals which have attracted support from a number of community and business groups as well as Police Scotland and other agencies. The areas in the vicinity of Ben A'an and Loch Katrine have found themselves under huge pressure from the sheer volume of visitor numbers over a long period, but the pressure has only increased over recent months as more and more people choose to staycation.

"I truly hope the Steamship Trust and their partners are successful in securing funding as this kind of infrastructure improvement is badly required."



GHOST VILLAGES OF ARROCHAR & TARBET A CALL FOR HELP

"Perfect Storm" in Arrochar and Tarbet area.

- A83 road closure and delays
- Continuing road safety issues
- Tourism infrastructure damaged by recent wild weather
- Severe marine pollution
- Multiple brownfield site blight
- Longstanding unaddressed visitor management issues
- All compounded by national Covid situation reducing trading levels and business closures.

In this superb location these villages could and should be a jewel in the National Park crown. Resolving these various issues must be a Post Covid priority

John Urquhart

Friends of Loch Lomond & Trossachs

In a heartfelt plea, the Chair of Arrochar and Tarbet Community Development Trust and Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs Trustee, Duncan Maclachlan, has recently issued a call to local politicians for assistance in turning round the fortunes of the beleaguered lochside communities of Arrochar and Tarbet. He described them as "ghost villages" following the devastating impact of regular closures of the A83 due to landslides and floods at the Rest and be Thankful coupled with the COVID-19 lockdown earlier in the year and the current travel restrictions.

Both villages are heavily dependent on tourism with a mix of small and medium sized family tourism businesses and some large coaching hotels. Early in lockdown the large Tarbet and Claymore Hotels were permanently closed with staff being made redundant following tour operator, Shearings, going into administration. Other local companies such as Cruise Loch Lomond, which is heavily dependent on the coach market, have reluctantly laid off a number of staff and many businesses have struggled on as best they can but have recently closed or gone into hibernation due to the lack of sufficient visitors to remain viable. There are fears some will not re-open. Facilities for the community too, such as the great Three Villages Hall with its local clubs and events, are also facing unprecedented difficulties.

These challenges come on top of some longstanding issues, such as a lack of progress in regenerating the prominent derelict former torpedo range site on the shores of Loch Long and ongoing problems with inadequate parking and lack of public toilets to cope with the increasing popularity of the Arrochar Alps mountain range. There was a major setback recently when ambitious plans for a £1 million scheme at Stronafyne, to provide much needed car and coach parking and public toilets, were abandoned due to potential flood risks being too great.



Dilapidated Arrochar Pier



Former Weavers Cottage & Café –Tarbet(A82)

REJUVENATED FORUM

Commenting on his detailed overview of the current problems being faced by villagers, Duncan Maclachlansaid: "There is an urgent need to reconvene and rejuvenate the previous Arrochar Forum and broaden out its remit to cover Tarbet as well. I would be hopeful with the assistance of Scottish Enterprise, the Park Authority, the Council and local politicians, the opportunity is taken to engage professional support to develop a robust action plan and secure the necessary financial resources to tackle some of the many challenges and undoubted development opportunities there are, which, with a concerted effort, could turn around the fortunes of both villages, straddling as they do important tourist corridors to the West Highlands."



SOME SPECIFIC ACTIONS IDENTIFIED BY DUNCAN INCLUDE:

- investing in visitor infrastructure, including the basics such as parking, toilets and more effective litter management to cope with the growth in walking and outdoor activities;
- exploring the potential of realigned or bypass routes including a potential Loch Long causeway to improve road safety, the quality of life for villagers and business development opportunities as suggested by the Friends as part of their response to the recent Transport Scotland consultation on the A83;
- reviewing opportunities for community infrastructure improvements, including better marine litter management, arising from a potential Loch Long causeway linked to a realigned A83 and the future construction of the well developed plans for the A82 Loch Lomondside, Tarbet to Inverarnan roadway;
- investigating the feasibility of investing in a relief road through upper Glen Kinglas to the A82 south of Inverarnan along with a new Glen Croe route to overcome the regular disruption caused the closure of the A83 due to landslips; and
- reviewing options to purchase and develop the eyesore former Torpedo Range site and consider other ways of realising the tourist and recreational development potential of the two villages and linking corridor at an appropriate and sustainable eco friendly scale.

ACTION PLAN

The Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs have strongly supported Duncan's call for action. Friends Chair, James Fraser, said: "Both Arrochar and Tarbet, given their strategic lochside locations on busy tourist routes in the National Park and the scale of problems and challenges they are facing, require the urgent development of a carefully targeted and well resourced action plan and area initiative. A potential Viking Villages and Ithsmus Regeneration Initiative which embraces Tarbet Glen as well as the villages and fringe derelict sites is a potential strong runner, with the right backing of public agencies and the local community. This could make a real difference and transform the area which is currently looking very tired and rundown."

He added: "There are good examples of this working elsewhere and a useful role model is the Tomintoul and Glenlivet Regeneration Project in the Cairngorms National Park where much has been achieved in what is a more fragile and remote area with the local community development trust working closely with key local agencies."



CRUISE LOCH LOMOND
ESTABLISHED 1973

Experience the serenity of the bonnie banks
on one of our award winning cruises
Rambler; Explorer; Discovery or Capercaillie.

Departures from Tarbet, Luss, Inversnaid and Rowardennan

- CYCLE HIRE • WEEKLY RSPB CRUISE
- TWO LOCHS EXPERIENCE: LOCH LOMOND & LOCH KATRINE



Telephone **01301 702356**
www.cruiselochlomond.co.uk

CRUISES : WATERBUS : BIKE & HIKE : WILDLIFE



- Located in **Loch Lomond National Park**, just minutes from the water's edge
- Mouthwatering **Restaurant & Bar Meal Dining**
- Regular **Scottish Nights, Ceilidhs & Murder Mystery Events**



...Great Rooms



...Great Food



...Great Breaks



...Great Times

CALL TO ENQUIRE ON: **01360 660 245**

www.winnockhotel.com **AA**

SWEENEY'S CRUISE CO LOCH LOMOND

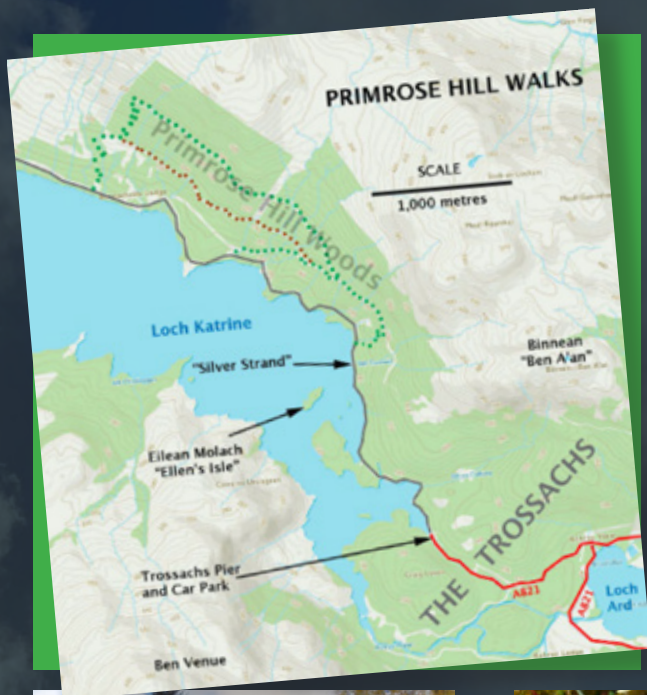
DAILY CRUISES • PRIVATE CHARTER • WATERBUS



SWEENEYSCRUISECO.COM

E: INFO@SWEENEYSCRUISECO.COM

T: 01389 752376



A WALK IN THE PARK

PRIMROSE HILL

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, visits Primrose Hill on the shores of Loch Katrine in the heart of the Trossachs.



With the unpredictable October weather settling down, the Autumn tints of Loch Katrine's Primrose Hill woods were beckoning.

You are north of the Highland Line here, so Primrose Hill's English name stands out in the surrounding sea of Gaelic. The name doesn't appear on the Ordnance Survey maps, but nearby the OS map does record two other anomalously English language names, Silver Strand and Ellen's Isle, both connected to Sir Walter Scott's famous *The Lady of The Lake*, the poem which made Scott and Loch Katrine famous in 1810. Could the out of place floral name have a 19th century literary connection too? From Trossachs Pier car park the full outing is about 11km with a little over 200m of ascent, but we decided to take the slightly shorter route shown by the brown dots. This lies through Primrose Hill's lower and less disturbed woodland, but be warned, the once excellent forestry track has been abandoned by Forestry and Land Scotland and is becoming overgrown in places. Their green waymarked path (shown in the green dots) starts a couple of kilometres along the tarred service road between Trossachs Pier and Stronachlachar. A little

north of Eilean Molach and Silver Strand the trail zig-zags uphill beside a little burn and soon you are looking down on the scene Scott described so vividly over 200 years ago.

*Where, gleaming with the setting sun,
One burnished sheet of living gold,
Loch Katrine lay beneath him rolled,
In all her length far winding lay,
With promontory, creek, and bay,
And islands that, empurpled bright,
Floated amid the livelier light,
And mountains that like giants stand
To sentinel enchanted land.
High on the south, huge Benvenue
Down to the lake in masses threw
Craggs, knolls, and mounds,
 confusedly hurled,
The fragments of an earlier world;
A wildering forest feathered o'er
His ruined sides and summit hoar,
While on the north, through middle air,
Ben-an heaved high his forehead bare.*

Scott researched his locations carefully and re-visited Loch Katrine before writing the poem, but he was never shy about altering things to suit the needs of poetic scansion, rhyme or dramatic purpose. "Eilean Molach", which means shaggy island, became Ellen's Isle, a nameless beach

became the "Silver Strand" and Binnean's pinnacle, "the forehead bare of Ben An". The new names have stuck. But what about "Primrose Hill"? Had Scott featured these shy little flowers in his poem and if so might he have seen them in the woods we were about to explore? Prior to setting out, a quick Google search had revealed that the answer to the first question was yes. Early in the narrative there is a long and lyrical passage describing Loch Katrine's woodland and wildflowers which includes this couplet: "The primrose pale and violet flower Found in each cliff a narrow bower;" Primroses are a sign of ancient woodland and although the woods have clearly been altered considerably by modern forestry operations, they are now thankfully protected as part of The Great Trossachs Forest. Amidst the densely packed regeneration of birch, alder and hazel, there were indeed many venerable oaks, all magnificent in their leafy golden glory and, sure enough, the oval leaves of the wild primrose could be discerned half hidden amongst the grass and leaf litter at their roots. We will be returning in Spring to see Scott's primroses and violet flowers blooming in all of their glory.

Before the winter



Keith Graham writes about the rich variety of wildlife in the National Park and how different species adjust to the changing seasons.

The year is drifting to its end, in the glens to the north there is a climactic atmosphere...

ACROSS THE POND, THEY CALL IT FALL. Here we live in a world that has suddenly become a technicolour magnificence. Autumn transforms the landscape. Golds and reds burnish the countryside and as the year declines many trees will undertake a striptease performance, shedding leaves until the chlorophyll is exhausted. Then we are left with the basic skeletal remains, the stark shapes in all their contortions, some statuesque, others utterly strange bring us an actuality that is hidden by summer's clothing. The basic structure that shapes all trees will be exposed for all to see as nature takes a deep breath, not just to cope with shorter days and falling temperatures but to prepare itself for the forthcoming spring. As I write this in October, it may seem a long way off, yet already the ground-work is being laid.

Nature is always transient, preparing for the next stage of an age-old process in which, as surely as night follows day, inexorably season follows season and slowly replace each other in the sequence we all know so well. From the leaves that are being shed now will spring new life in just a few short months. We may view the onset of autumn, then winter as a shutting down process as the most of our summer birds have fled to warmer climes. Where the twittering swallow once serenaded his mate as she reared her second or even third brood of the year, now only remains the twittering sparrow which deigns any notion of escaping our forthcoming winter but is prepared to tough it out. Those summer migrants have gone in order to escape our winter, for they must find warmer places where the insects upon which they depend, flourish. Yet others seek solace here from the far north and there are different sounds now as the gabbling of wintering geese confirms. Pink-footed geese from Greenland and Iceland have descended upon our fields having flown here from those areas. On the waters of Loch Lomond, Greenland white-fronted geese will arrive and soon, like great sailing galleons, the graceful whooper swans will decorate the Park's skies and lochs. From the far north and the east, come many other winter migrants to escape the severity of the northern climate when winter locks up the ground. Short-eared owls fly across the North

Sea and with them come flocks of tiny goldcrests, fieldfares and redwings – the northern thrushes - and by tradition at Halloween, woodcock, which old sages used to reckon had summered on the moon!

Bird Song

Only redbreast, our Christmas bird, provides us with copious and true bird-song. He is a compulsive singer, ready to voice his distinct style of music whether it be spring, summer, autumn or winter. Those sweet notes, almost thrown away as a random selection of song, stand out because nothing else gives voice. Yet do not forget that although the music is sweet, the intent behind it is distinctly anti-social. The one thing a cock robin cannot stand or tolerate is another cock robin and so each one proclaims vocally the areas of its winter feeding territory, the boundaries of which may not seem clear to us but which are clear enough to robins. And that territorial integrity is as fiercely defended as any spring breeding one. Let no cock robin cross that invisible boundary or there will be trouble!

The only other voice likely to be heard as we approach Christmas, is that of Jenny Wren, his rapid delivery such that he sings as many as fifty-six individual notes in a mere 5.2 seconds. The only way to count the notes is to record the song and then slow it down. Considering his minuscule size, he certainly takes the decibel biscuit.

...or we see the mighty fall...

Meanwhile, whilst elsewhere the year is drifting to its end, in the glens to the north there is a climactic atmosphere as the monarchs of the glen challenge each other as the potential progenitors of the next generation of red deer. By and large, for most of the year red deer are relatively silent but now the glens echo to the mighty roaring of rival stags as they challenge one another for supremacy. The rivalry however is centred upon the master stags, the oldest and fittest animals that are at the top of the social pile. Young stags may be eager to join in but there is a strict hierarchy among the senior members of each group of red deer.

Rival, well matched stags may march side by side, sizing each other up until at last open conflict develops. Mighty heads go down and clash and the sounds of crashing antlers echo through the glens. They huff and they puff as each strives to gain the upper hand. Often it takes only the slightest sense of uncertainty to give the stronger rival the incentive to push home his advantage and emerge in triumph. However, the victor may have to do it all over again as the opponents literally lie in wait to make further challenges. These stags will have adorned themselves with mud and mire – all to give the impression of awesome power. They roar and clash but eventually by November, a semblance of order returns as pecking orders are determined.

Monarch's Harem

Thus, as the year comes to an end, the red deer year reaches its dramatic climax however, defeated, older stags now face a forlorn future. From this moment on, their best past them, they will be excluded from future ruts, outcasts and quickly forgotten as former monarchs of the glen. One or two younger, more

ambitious stags, although not part of the main action, content themselves with nipping in to steal a couple of hinds from a monarch's harem whilst he is busy concentrating on the main business in hand and warding off challengers. Hardly another harem but a start and maybe next year the youngsters will join the annual conflict.

It is surprising how quickly time moves on. Early in the New Year, the first catkins appear and the first outbreak of new music may be heard. Almost always it is the strident two-note song of male great tits that break the silence. These are the first stirrings of a new season even if there is plenty of winter yet to come. Significantly, at this time many of the red deer move down to lower altitudes to find food, for mammals have a relatively tough time of it during those winter months. Sheer survival being the challenge they always face.

Some, of course, prepare well for the winter months. Many of the smaller mammals, such as the mice and voles, set food aside during the natural autumn harvest and of course squirrels are especially renowned for burying surplus food as winter supplies. There has been an increasing evidence of the growth in populations of red squirrels as opposed to the alien greys, a welcome change which has resulted from the arrival of pine marten in the Park. The greys, introduced to the area back in the nineteenth century, are heavier than reds and are therefore easy meat for the pine marten which has accordingly reduced their numbers. Severe frosts also make life difficult for the grazers such as roe deer and of course, some creatures avoid the winter altogether by hibernating, most notably hedgehogs, bats and reptiles such as our one and only poisonous snake, the adder.

Versatility

Others, in particular the badger, will feast in autumn and put on extra pounds so that when the weather turns more severe, they stay underground in their setts and sleep through the worst weather relying upon the surplus fat they have accumulated to keep them going. Badgers do not hibernate but may sleep for days on end in adverse conditions. The Park's population of foxes also shows versatility by somehow eking out a living

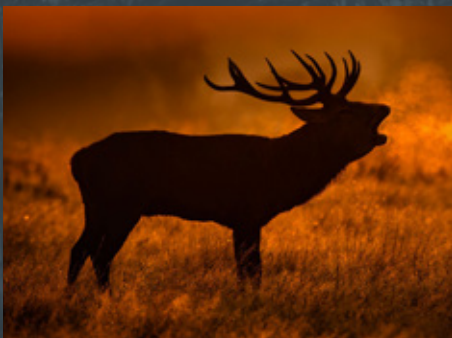
from any number of sources, including catching earthworms which they consume in considerable numbers to keep them going.

The winter solace - December 21st - sees a significant change. Now at last the days, instead of shortening, imperceptibly lengthen. We now know that nature responds very significantly to these lengthening days of daylight and soon those intrepid songsters, blackbirds and thrushes, known in Scotland respectively as the merle and the mavis, are beginning to tune up. Both can be exceptionally early in breaking into song and blackbirds can be so precocious as to build nests and even lay eggs as early as January although they seldom come to anything.

But slowly and surely, the natural world is beginning to breathe more vigorously. More vegetation reveals itself and more birds gradually follow the merle and the mavis and join the growing chorus of birds exercising their lungs. Snowdrops are the first flowers to show themselves and soon there are carpets of them. They will be followed by the first daffodils and the first primroses. Again, each in turn giving sure signals that Nature is re-awakening.

Now we can look forward to the arrival of the first returning migrant birds, like the white-rumped wheatear and often the first to arrive, the humble chiff-chaff, plain looking – the classic 'little brown bird' - and equally ordinary of music, its monotonous 'chiff-chaff, chiff chaff' nevertheless a sound we await with eagerness. Spring is definitely on the way.

As the weeks unfold, more and more summer visitors return, the air beginning to fill with their music and that of the resident birds, which now respond to those increasing hours of daylight to join the avian choir. The deer are beginning to edge up the hills and deep into the forests, new life begins to stir. The foxes and badgers are already preparing for the birth of this year's litters of cubs. For them, especially the foxes, spring arrives early. Fresh life will soon abound as a new season bursts forth. The Park re-awakens to welcome the first folk stretching their limbs on the many footpaths and to the more intrepid climbing skywards on our many mountains. It feels good to be alive.





Foundation Supporters £500 MINIMUM

• CAMERON HOUSE

Loch Lomond, Dunbartonshire, G83 8QZ
Tel: 01389 755 565 Fax: 01389 713 281
www.cameronhouse.co.uk

A magnificent baronial mansion surrounded by 100 acres of woodland, Cameron House on Loch Lomond, blends traditional Scottish influences with sumptuous contemporary décor to offer guests a memorable stay in the finest surroundings. This is your lochside Baronial mansion and much more with our Carrick resort, our 18-hole championship golf course and luxury spa.

• TIGH MOR TROSSACHS

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 SHORE LOCH LOMOND

Ben Lomond Way, Balloch – 01389 488883
theshorelochlomond.com

The former Gateway Centre at Loch Lomond Shores has been transformed and is now home to an elegant and stylish events venue situated by the water's edge at Loch Lomond Shores. This is a beautiful location for weddings and celebrations. The Shore also offers an Elemis Spa. The Shore Loch Lomond is proud to be a Business Supporter of Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs.

• ARDOCH

Gartocharn G83 8ND 01389 710401
email: luke@ardoch-scotland.com
www.ardoch-scotland.com

Ardoch is an exceptional venue for business seminars and family reunions. There are 18 bedrooms and numerous meeting rooms in a mix of traditional and contemporary

spaces most of which overlook Loch Lomond. Hire Ardoch on an exclusive basis and be assured of total privacy.

• 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

The Campbell family have developed quality holiday parks and hotels in seven stunning scenic locations in Argyll with a number in, or close to, the National Park. They are all easily accessible and just within an hour from Glasgow. As part of their growing emphasis on green and active holidays, Argyll Holidays are delighted to be supporting the work of the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs.



Business Plus Supporters £250 MINIMUM

• THE OAK TREE INN BALMAHA

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

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

• THE WINNOCK HOTEL

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

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

• SWEENEY'S CRUISES

Balloch, Loch Lomond, G83 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
Tel: 01301 702 356
email: enquiries@cruiselochlomond.co.uk
www.cruiselochlomond.co.uk

Experience the serenity of the bonnie banks throughout winter and summer on award winning cruises - Rambler, Explorer, Rob Roy Discovery and Ben Lomond Hike. From Tarbet, Luss, Inversnaid, Balmaha, Rowardennan.

• BALMILLIG B & B

64B Colquhoun St, Helensburgh, G84 9JP
Tel: 01436 674 922
email: anne@balmillig.co.uk
www.balmillig.co.uk

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

• LOMOND LUXURY LODGES

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

www.lochlomond-holidays.co.uk

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

• CALLANDER ENTERPRISE

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

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

• LOCH LOMOND SEAPLANES

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

Fly in a luxury seaplane back to the halycon days of travel with a first class seat over the most magnificent landscape in the world. Take off from the romantic shores of Loch Lomond. Discovery tours from £129 to £169. Flight vouchers make the perfect gift.

If you would like to become a Friends supporter, please contact us today... FRIENDS OF LOCH LOMOND AND THE TROSSACHS, Carrochan, Carrochan Road, Balloch G83 8EG Telephone: 01389 727761



Business Supporters £100 MINIMUM

• POPPIES HOTEL & RESTAURANT

Leny Road, Callander FK17 8AL
Tel: 01877 330 329
www.poppieshotel.com

• VENACHAR LOCHSIDE

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

• WHEELS CYCLING CENTRE - BIKES / HIRE

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

• MAID OF THE LOCH

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

• FOREST HOLIDAYS

Argyll Forest and Strathyre Tel 08451308223
www.forestholidays.co.uk

• WWW.HOLIDAYCOTTAGES.CO.UK

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

• APPLEJACKS

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

• PAUL SAUNDERS PHOTOGRAPHY

7 Gartness Court Drymen, Glasgow G63 0AX
Tel: 01360 661029
www.paulsaundersphotography.com

• FORTH INN

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

• DELI ECOSSE

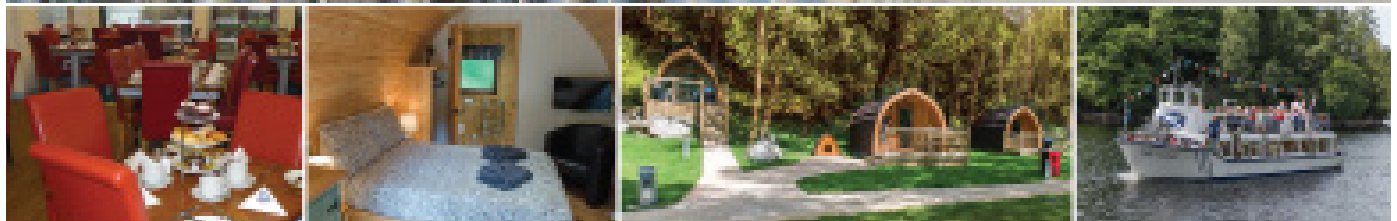
Ancaster Square, Callander FK17 8ED.
Tel: 01877 331220 www.deliecosse.co.uk

• COTTAGES AND CASTLES

Tel: 01738 503601 holidaycottages.co.uk



ENJOY A STAY & SAIL BREAK AT LOCH KATRINE



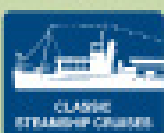
- Steamship cruises on the iconic *Sir Walter Scott*
- Legends of the Loch cruises on the *Lady of the Lake*
- Lochside Eco Lodges & Campsite • The Steamship Café
- Katrine Gifts • Katrinewheelz - Cycle Hire

MAKE A DATE WITH NATURE

The Loch Katrine Eco Camp provides an opportunity to re-connect with nature. There are plenty of wildlife watching, cruising, cycling & walking options available. Take a break in one of our 8 cosy Lochs and Bens Eco Lodges (4 en-suite with underfloor heating) suitable for 2 - 4 people.

Includes: kitchenette with combo microwave, fridge and sink, freeview HDTV, wifi and heating. Alternatively park your motorhome at one of our specially designated spaces near Trossachs Pier. Each bay is equipped with water, metered electricity and WiFi internet access.

Book your stay today and enjoy special discounts on sailings and on cycle hire.



Trossachs Pier, Loch Katrine,
by Callander, Stirling FK17 8HZ



T: 01877 376315/6 • enquiries@lochkatrine.com • www.lochkatrine.com

TWO HOTELS, ONE STUNNING LOCATION



THE LODGE ON LOCH LOMOND HOTEL

Introducing our new menus with a taste of Scotland,
from Afternoon Tea to Traditional Sunday Lunch

Join us for lunch, dinner or even just a drink
and enjoy free mooring on our new Jetty

For more information or to book
Visit www.loch-lomond.co.uk
or Call 01436 860 201



LODGE ^{ON}
LOCH LOMOND
★ ★ ★ ★



THE INN ON LOCH LOMOND HOTEL

The perfect stop for coffee, lunch or dinner
with live folk music every weekend.

For more information or to book
Visit www.innonlochlomond.co.uk
or Call 01436 860 678



THE INN ^{ON}
LOCH LOMOND

