

# Visitor Management

SEASON REVIEW 2023



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# Executive Summary and Key Insights

The 2023 season saw a more typical season than in recent years. It was predicted that day visitors would continue to come in high numbers and that foreign visitors would return stronger than in 2021/2022 and those predictions appear to have been borne out.

Continued targeted funding from the Scottish Government allowed the recruitment and deployment of Rangers and Visitor Management Staff at similar levels to previous years. Funding was received by the National Park Authority, Forestry and Land Scotland, and NatureScot and funding to communities continued through the [Better Places Fund](#). There is wide consensus across the Partners and Stakeholders that these recruitment levels played a large part in reducing visitor impacts on the environment and people who live and work within the National Park.

While numbers relating to camping, launches from the Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway and enforcement are closer to 2019 figures than during the pandemic years, they remain higher than in 2019 and point to a continuation of the steadily increasing visitor numbers we have observed over the past 10 years.

Numbers of day visitors remained high, especially over warm summer weekends, but there were less issues with irresponsible parking than in recent years. Reports from staff and volunteers showed an 18% drop in the number of car parks being marked full or almost full at weekends. Notably, Police Scotland did not have to close roads in the Park this season for visitor management reasons.

There was continued high demand for camping in the National Park and bookings for both permit areas and for National Park Authority campsites remain considerably higher than in 2019, pre pandemic. At Loch Achray Campsite for example, bookings are up 41% on 2019. Camping booking data and reports from staff also indicate that motorhome and campervan use continues to rise.

For 2023, the level of alleged contraventions of the Camping Management Byelaws remained similar to 2022. The most common offence reported was 'setting up and occupying a tent without authorisation' followed by 'failure to provide details'.

An encouraging picture appears to be emerging however regarding the value of Ranger Service engagement and the byelaws in influencing behaviour.

A detailed look into the Camping Management Byelaw data over the last three years shows that less than 1% of people whose details were taken for alleged breaches had had their details taken previously.

This would appear to indicate a positive behavioural influence of this legislation and reinforces the value of the Ranger Service engagement in influencing behaviour.

On Loch Lomond, although there was an 8% drop in launches from the Slipway this year (likely related to weather), numbers are still up 20% on 2019.

Notably, alleged contraventions of the Loch Lomond Byelaws in 2023 were down by 28% on 2022. This can be partly attributed to the weather - weekend patrols on Loch Lomond did not see the large influx of Loch users experienced in previous seasons.

However, there was also an increased focus on having Rangers present in hot spot areas this season, including Luss, Duck Bay, the River Leven, and Balloch Park. This was

supported by three boat patrols on Loch Lomond across weekends, as well as new signage and communications promoting responsible use of the Loch. It is believed that this package of measures, a visible Ranger presence and engagement with Loch users in hot spot areas reduced the need for details being taken for byelaw contraventions.

Other changes this season which had a positive impact include allocation of two mid-week days for Rangers to focus on climate and nature activity. Staff embraced this opportunity and they supported key projects such as educational outreach and invasive non-native species removal. Results indicate that there was no negative impact on our visitor management programme.

For the first time, the Park Authority was able to recruit Permanent Seasonal Rangers, which helps reduce recruitment pressures, retains experience and provides additional job security to the staff who provide this vital support during the visitor season.

The experience of managing extreme visitor pressures during the pandemic years has strengthened partnerships and developed understanding of the approach and resources required to sustain a strong visitor management model that supports visitors and communities alike.

The role of staff on the ground, providing vital in-person engagement with visitors and addressing issues before they escalate, remains crucial.

## Introduction and context

The 2022 season was considered by many in the visitor management and tourism sectors to be the start of a return-to-normal following the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions.

For the 2023 season, it was expected that the cost-of-living crisis would have an impact on domestic visitors but that staycations and day visits would remain popular, alongside the recovering international market. Anecdotal reports from businesses in the Park suggest these expectations were borne out.



These expectations helped to inform the preparation for the season by the National Park Safe Recovery Action Group (NPSRAG) as set out in the [2023 Joint Response Visitor Management Plan](#) (JRVMP).

This visitor management partnership group is led by the National Park Authority and includes Police Scotland, Forestry and Land Scotland, Transport Scotland, and the four local authorities in the National Park; Argyll and Bute Council, Stirling Council and West Dunbartonshire Council.

Initially established during the pandemic, the group continues to work together to manage the impacts of visitor pressures locally on the environment, people who live and work in the National Park and the visitors themselves.

At a national level, the national Visitor Strategy Group led by Visit Scotland continued to meet to agree a consistent approach to tackling visitor management issues and ensure that consistent information was provided to visitors.

Three working groups focussed on developing a national approach to:

- motorhome and campervan management
- improving sustainable visitor transport options
- using digital technology for visitor management.

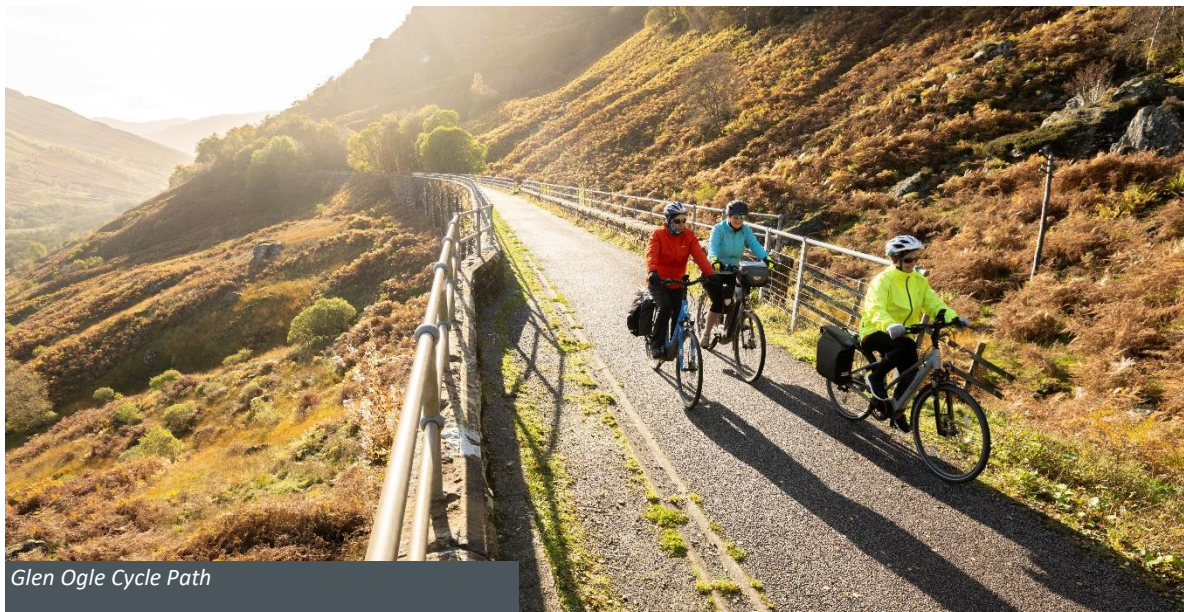
Lessons learnt from previous seasons have shown the importance of having staff available to directly engage with visitors. Continued additional funding from the Scottish Government allowed staff numbers to be sustained this season and for some temporary facilities such as toilets to be provided in areas that would in future benefit from permanent infrastructure.

The National Park Ranger service employed a total of 44 seasonal Rangers this year, in addition to 20 Permanent Ranger staff. Turnover and staff retention in some more remote areas of the National Park can be challenging but the ability to recruit Permanent Seasonal Rangers (for the first time) has reduced recruitment pressures, helped to retain experience and provided additional job security.

The National Park Authority was able to further invest in the Place Projects team to increase capacity to deliver a multi-year investment plan ([The Place Programme](#)) to improve visitor infrastructure. Visit Scotland provided additional funding through the Strategic Tourism Development Fund to assist with the development of visitor infrastructure plans in areas including Strathard & The Trossachs and Callander and its surrounding area.

Meanwhile at Tarbet Pier - a site that was identified as a priority project in delivery of the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Strategy for West Loch Lomond - planning permission was granted for ambitious proposals to transform the site and facilities over the coming years.

Following consultation with the local community and businesses, work will start later this year on a £1.5m first phase delivery project, which is supported by a grant from VisitScotland's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF).



Glen Ogle Cycle Path

# Information and Engagement

Communications with visitors and the communities and businesses whose lives and livelihoods are impacted by them is an essential component of the National Park Authority's approach to visitor management.

Our overarching objective is to educate, encourage and inspire visitors to enjoy the National Park in a responsible and sustainable way.

Visitor communications for the 2023 season focused on:

- A rolling programme of core themes – water safety, car parking, litter, fires and camping.
- An increase in content relating to climate & nature-friendly visiting – raising awareness of these twin crises and inspiring visitors to play their part.
- Visitor infrastructure investments – highlighting longer-term investments in visitor infrastructure and low-emission travel.



Starting in March as we approached the visitor season, we shared weekly content with visitors, communities and stakeholder groups on our key visitor management themes - water safety, car parking, litter, fires, and camping.

As always, this involved a mix of practical information, for example when and where camping byelaws apply, and more inspirational content such as lesser-visited destinations and how to have a sustainable visit.

While social media content showing irresponsible visitor behaviour always elicits a strong response, this season the engagement with content showing responsible visiting was particularly encouraging, showing there is a desire from visitors to know how to do the right thing. One post on Facebook showing how to have a responsible fire reached almost 300,000 people.

In addition to this core visitor messaging, this season also saw focused communications on a number of specific events/topics.

August saw the National Park host two road races for the 2023 UCI Cycling World Championships. The high-profile event drew large numbers of visitors, media and participants to the area and the Park Authority worked with partners to share practical information about the events and their impact, as well as using the opportunity to promote the excellent cycling opportunities available in the National Park all year round.

The public consultation on our draft National Park Partnership Plan took place across the peak summer period and this involved engagement with visitors to encourage them to share their views on the future of the National Park.

Our seasonal messaging on tick safety was also increased this year following reports from Public Health Scotland that a probable human case of tick-borne encephalitis was likely to have been acquired in the Loch Earn area of the National Park.

## Providing practical information

Ensuring visitors have the practical information they need to be able to plan ahead is a key objective of our visitor management communication.

The National Park Authority's website continues to provide an online hub where visitors can find practical information such as [how to book a camping permit](#) and [getting to the Park](#). These pages are among our most visited areas on the website during the visitor season, confirming sustained demand for this practical information.

From 1st March - 30th September 2023, the Park Authority website had 1,552,053 page views and nine of the top 10 visited pages during the season were visitor pages, including [how to get a camping permit](#), [general camping advice](#) and [information on the Loch Chon campsite](#).



Season parking issues

Visitors were once again able to check car park availability via our car park monitoring service, though demand for this service was down on last year (11,546 page views in 2023 compared to more than 16k views in 2022).

This is in line with reports from staff on the ground that although car parks in hot spot areas filled up early at peak weekends, there were less issues with car parking in general and less need for visitors to worry about capacity.

The [visitor facilities web page](#) was updated regularly based on reports from staff, volunteers and partners. Our social media channels - primarily Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram - were used to direct people to these important resources and were used at

weekends to communicate live updates such as car park availability and toilet closures.

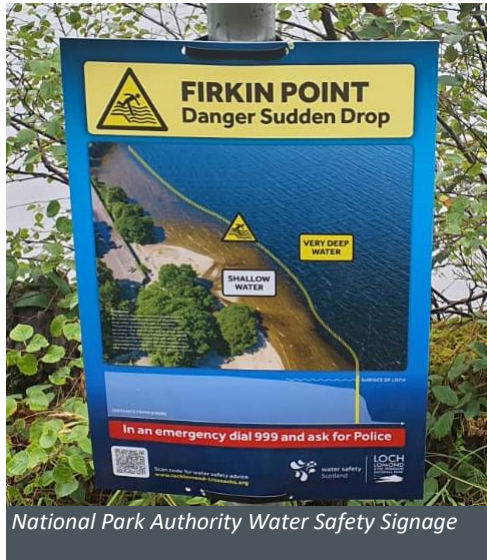
On the ground, signage and leaflets were replaced and updated as required this season. This included new Interpretation panels for the Bracklinn Bridge site, a new water safety panel at Moss o Balloch Slipway and a 'No motorised launching' panel at Milarrochy Bay.

These materials supported the face-to-face engagement with visitors carried out by Rangers every day. Rangers and volunteers also provided advice and information on key topics such as water safety at pop-up events.



## Inspiring Responsible Behaviour

We want visitors to feel good about behaving responsibly in the National Park so in addition to more practical information, we promote examples of responsible behaviour and visitors 'doing the right thing'.



National Park Authority Water Safety Signage

Data on engagement with this type of content suggests visitors welcome these examples. One post celebrating reports from Rangers that more people are using raised fire pits was seen by 81,000 people.

Water safety remained a priority topic for us this season and was well received by audiences on social media. One water safety post showing steep drops reached almost 39,000 people.

In line with our wider climate and nature priorities, this year we aimed to inspire people to make more climate and nature-friendly visiting choices when visiting the Park.

There was significantly more climate and nature content shared than in previous visitor seasons, including [itineraries for car-free trips to the Park](#), [wildlife content](#) and [opportunities for visitors to engage with nature in the Park](#).

School holidays and Bank Holiday Weekends were used to highlight opportunities for 'A Different Adventure', building on work in recent years to promote less visited and easily accessible destinations in the Park away from hotspot areas. This included [promotion of Cashel Forest](#) to disperse visitors on East Loch Lomond.

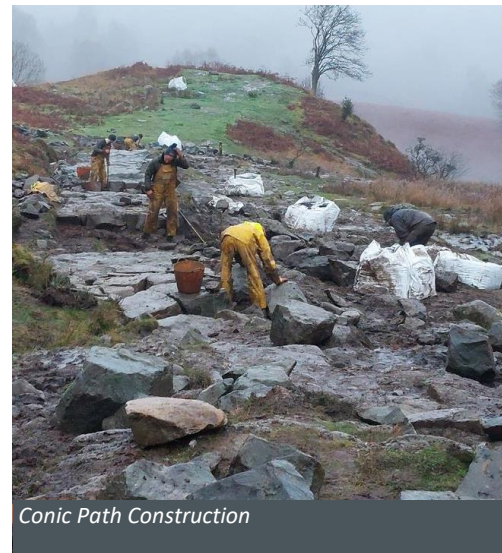


Tree Planting Project

## Showing our Working

While encouraging visitors to play their part by respecting and protecting the Park, it is important to demonstrate the scale of the work that we and our partners deliver to manage visitors and their impact on local communities.

In 2023, this was illustrated clearly by the investment in key visitor sites at Tarbet, Conic Hill and Bracklinn Bridge. Communications with visitors and stakeholders highlighted not only the practical impacts of work on the ground but also the longer-term investment and benefits being delivered. While disruption and closures of facilities will always prompt some criticism, highlighting the long-term benefits was an effective way to balance that and was well received:



Conic Path Construction

Images and video footage showing our staff and volunteers on the ground (and on the water) continued to be popular and an effective way to engage people with our work. Some 'on patrol with the boat team' videos showing people how Rangers manage activity on Loch Lomond was engaged with more than anything else we shared on Instagram/Facebook stories for example.

Demonstrating enforcement of the Camping Management and Loch Lomond Byelaws acts as an important deterrent and communications was able to support that on social media this season with examples of byelaw breaches and the Fixed Penalties issued as a result. [One social media post](#) outlining enforcement action for flytipping was seen by 142,000 people across our social media platforms.



Loch Lomond Boat Rangers

## Stakeholder Engagement

Every month, a stakeholder bulletin was issued to more than 1495 stakeholder contacts including community anchor bodies, destination group businesses, land managers, recreation and access partners and local Councils and MSPs. A visitor management update was included in each edition and these newsletters received an average open rate of 47% across the season.



In addition, specific updates were sent to National Park stakeholder mailing lists for communities of place and interest. For example, progress on the new Loch Lomond Byelaws and updates regarding the work at Conic Hill and Bracklinn Bridge were communicated to relevant local stakeholders via regular email updates.

The National Park Authority, together with partners from the National Park Safe Recovery Action Group, hosted a pre-season [Stakeholder briefing](#) in March 2023. This meeting provided an opportunity to outline the Joint Response Visitor Management Plan and to answer questions from local communities, businesses, and landowners.

Our four place-based Visitor Management Groups have remained a key point of contact to assist with the development and implementation of the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Studies and the subsequent projects. These groups also provide feedback on how the season is going and influence planning and resource deployment.

Targeted stakeholder meetings were held as required for specific communities/issues, for example the Luss Summit which brought together local stakeholders in Luss four times in 2023 to work through the Luss Visitor Management Plan. This work is now absorbed within the wider visitor management group meetings on West Loch Lomond.

The 12-week public consultation on the Draft National Park Partnership Plan took place during the peak summer season. Visitors were a key audience and 'creating a sustainable low-carbon destination' is one of the main areas of focus for the draft plan. The opportunity to take part in the conversation about the future of the National Park was promoted regularly and visitors were one of the most engaged audiences, suggesting they feel a strong connection with the Park and its future.

# Infrastructure and services

## Staffing and volunteers

The National Park Authority recruited 44 Seasonal Rangers in 2023 to support our permanent Ranger staff (20) during their busiest period. This allowed the Park Authority to maintain the level of ‘boots on the ground’ that has made such a difference in recent years.

Of those 44 Seasonal Rangers recruited, 23 were employed as permanent seasonal staff so will return to work with us during the visitor season in the years to come.

This measure was introduced to help with staff retention, which has been challenging in the environment, tourism and hospitality sector. It also reduces the pressures around annual recruitment and training of new staff, as well as providing continuity of knowledge and experience.

Visitor Management was the primary function of the Ranger Service throughout the season. Alongside this, Rangers also engaged in more climate and nature activity this year. Based on historic enforcement data 2023 we re-allocated two mid-week days to support climate and nature activity. Rangers were able to carry out tasks including invasive non-native species removal, path inspection and maintenance, educational outreach, and wildlife survey work.

Results indicate that there was no negative impact on our visitor management programme. Although specific patrols were not allocated to these days (meaning less patrols overall this season), Ranger Team Leaders continued to monitor the four key patrol areas and were on standby to deploy a patrol to deal with any intelligence-led issues from landowners, emergency service partners and the public. Ultimately this was not required over the season and no complaints were received relating to the given days.



Number of patrols		
Patrols	2022	2023
ELL	233	149
WLL	229	180
Trossachs	218	172
Breadalbane	210	169
Strathard*		55
3LFD	183	183
Boat	240	284
<b>Total</b>	<b>1379</b>	<b>1192</b>

(\*Strathard was included in a different patrol area in 2022)

This 2023 Season saw an increase to 77 Volunteer Rangers (VRs) available to support staff, up from 69 in 2022, though still lower than the pre-pandemic total of 102 VRs in 2019. The National Park Authority is actively recruiting more Volunteer Rangers and numbers are expected to grow year on year.

Volunteer Rangers contributed 3431 hours across the season and a considerable proportion of this time was spent on visitor engagement activities at hot spot areas, including water safety pop-up events. Volunteers also assisted in conservation work such as Himalayan balsam removal, path maintenance and supporting school groups and under-represented groups that visit the National Park.

The National Park Authority recruited three Environment Officers (EOs) this season, an increase on the two EOs who worked last year. The additional EO on the ground this year provided increased support for staff, landowners, partners, and communities to tackle litter and flytipping. A seven-day service was maintained and pressures that had built in more remote areas over busy weekends could be resolved more quickly.

Forestry and Land Scotland also recruited additional staff again this year to support the visitor management season, employing four Seasonal Rangers to cover East Loch Lomond, the Trossachs area, and Cowal.

Communities and organisations were able to secure support from NatureScot's [Better Places Fund](#) again this season, providing funding for seasonal staff to help reduce visitor pressures. Strathfillan Community Development Trust secured funding for two full-time Seasonal Rangers, while Friends of Loch Lomond and Arrochar and Tarbet Community Development Trust also secured funding and were able to employ one part time warden to help with visitor engagement and maintaining the temporary toilet facilities in Arrochar. Luss Estates Company provided two wardens for visitor engagement and maintenance in the village.

## Litter and toileting



Litter remains an issue that unfortunately needs to be addressed each year and the 2023 season saw 1138 bags of litter removed from the Park by the Ranger Team and 199 bags removed by volunteers. This is slightly less than in 2022, a 12% reduction overall and this can be attributed to less litter picked by volunteers this season.

Partners also report ongoing issues with litter. Strathfillan Community Development Trust for example collected 240 bags of litter (including human waste) this season along the shores of Loch Lubhair, Loch Dochart and the surrounding areas.

Meanwhile at the RSPB reserve in Gartocharn, wardens report consistent problems with dog waste, as well as some camping related litter. Their Wardens have focused on providing Scottish Outdoor Access Code messaging to visitors.

Litter continues to be a focus for our visitor management services and is addressed primarily through employment of Environment Officers and targeted clean ups outside our estate.

## Parking and traffic management

Most visitors continue to travel to and around the National Park using a personal vehicle and this continues to cause problems in the most popular locations.

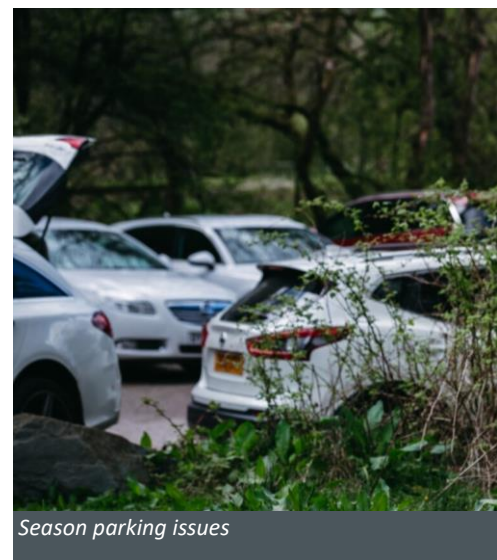
There were however less parking issues this season than in previous years, including no road closures related to visitor management and public safety.

Anecdotally and as indicated by our camping bookings data, motorhome and campervan use continued to rise and in some cases, these users reduced parking capacity through poor parking practices but were receptive to advice from Rangers.

Overall, although car parks in hotspot areas continued to fill early on the busiest days of the season, our weekend car park update system showed a quieter summer, with an 18% drop in the number of car parks being marked full or almost full (based on reports from staff and volunteers at weekends).

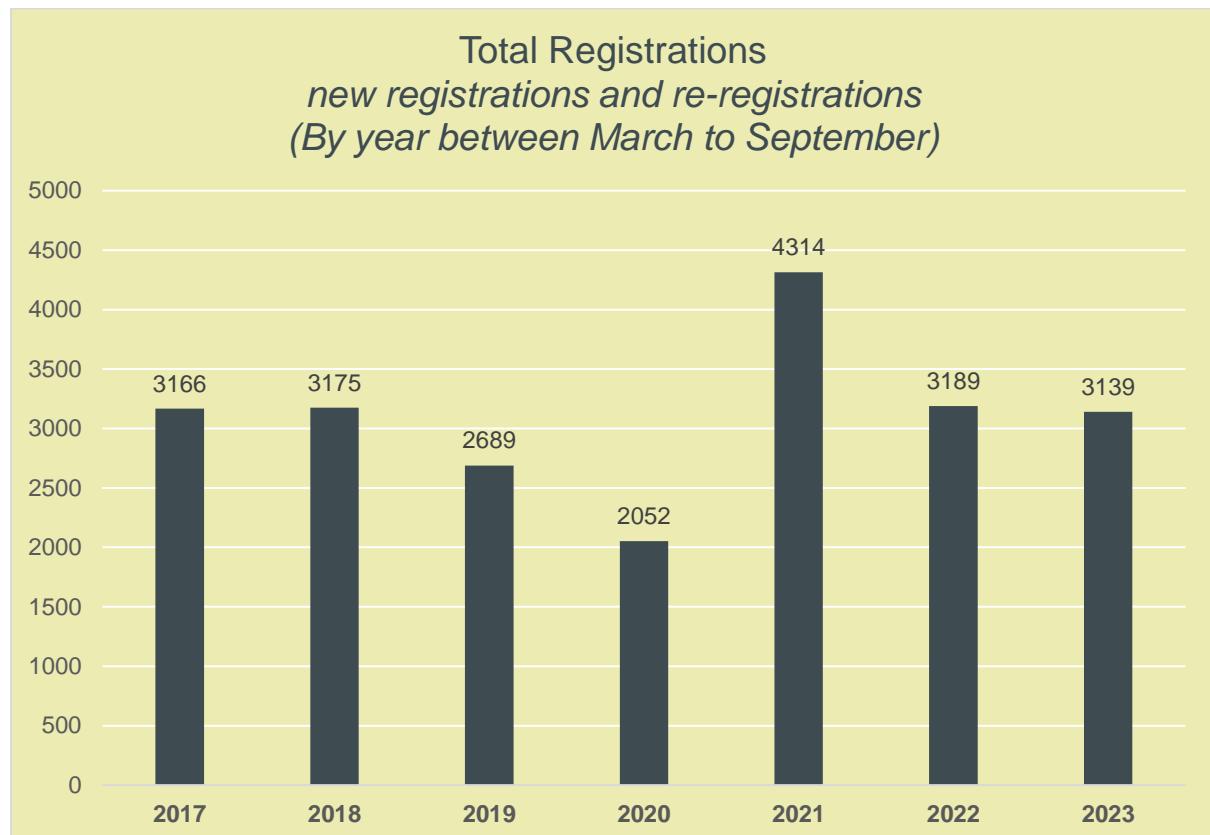
Local Authorities within the National Park also reported that hot spot areas remain busy with vehicles and incidents of irresponsible parking.

Argyll and Bute Council for example report regularly issuing Parking Charge Notices in Luss village. Going forward, traffic management improvements are being made including a Traffic Regulation Order and updating signage.



## Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway (DMMS)

In the 2023 summer season, registrations and launches at the Slipway were down slightly across the board and similar to those seen pre-pandemic.



Compared to the same period in 2022, the 2023 visitor season saw:

- A 2% increase in all boat user registrations
- A 4% drop in new registrations of craft
- A 2% drop in people re-registering craft
- An 8% drop in launches from the Slipway

These numbers suggest a return to normal levels of activity for powered vessels on Loch Lomond. Although, there has been an 8% drop in Launches from 2022, we still see a 20% increase from 2019 pre-COVID numbers up from 2856 launches to 3453.

For more details on violations and other Slipway information please see the Ranger Service part of the enforcement section.

## Camping



There was continued high demand for camping in the National Park and bookings for both permit areas and for National Park Authority campsites remain considerably higher than in 2019 pre pandemic.

Compared with 2022 season, bookings for Loch Chon Campsite increased by 8% and bookings for Loch Achray Campsite remained similar (down by 1%). The small National Park Authority campsite on Inchcailloch saw a reduction in bookings this year (down 5%) and this can be attributed to several factors that affected access to the island including weather and transport issues.

Camping Byelaws are in effect from 1<sup>st</sup> March – 30<sup>th</sup> September. This season there was a 5% increase in camping permits purchased for Camping Management Zones.

Camping data for 2023 shows:

- Total of 16,027 camping permit bookings (up 5% 2022 season)
- 30,056 adults and 5,802 children booked into permit areas.
- 15 of the 17 permit sites at 3LFD were delayed in opening due to FLS civil engineering work. They were open by the end of March with 1,576 potential bookable days lost
- A 53% increase in camping permit bookings compared to 2019 prior to COVID restrictions
- Loch Chon Campsite – 8% more bookings than 2022 season and 18% more than in 2019
- Loch Achray Campsite – 1% reduction in bookings compared to 2022 season and 41% up on 2019
- Inchcailloch Campsite – 5% reduction in bookings compared to 2022, 26% decrease from 2019

Levels of satisfaction remain high among those who camp in permit areas or National Park Authority campsites, with 99% of Loch Achray and Loch Chon campers who responded to our camping feedback survey saying they would recommend the sites. For permit areas in the National Park, 92% of respondents said they were likely or quite likely to recommend one of our camping permit areas (up from 83% in 2022).



## Water Safety

Water safety continues to be a priority for the National Park Authority. Our water safety lead – Ranger Manager Leigh Hamilton – joined the steering group for the national water safety partnership [Water Safety Scotland](#) this year, sharing our learnings and expertise with partners and ensuring there is a joined-up approach to addressing water safety risks and preventing incidents.

At a local level, the Park Authority also has representatives on the [Partnership Approach to Water Safety](#) (PAWS) groups that operate within the National Park.



National Park Rangers continued to carry out daily patrols both on the ground and on the water, providing advice and enforcing byelaws on Loch Lomond, with support from Police Scotland. Rangers engaged with over 1100 people regarding water safety this season whilst undertaking patrols.

In 2023, our National Park Rangers and volunteers held 11 water safety events at popular waterside locations including Luss and Balloch. These events engaged over 800 people who were given advice on how to stay safe on and around the water, including harder-to-reach groups such as young people and minority ethnic groups. Rangers and volunteers also came together with partners to mark World Drowning Prevention Day in Falkirk, which saw 3000 people attend, and the Blue Light Day at Levensgrove Park which saw 6000 people in attendance to further help promote water safety.

Water safety also continued to be a priority theme for our visitor management communications, with weekly water safety content shared on our social media channels during the season and more than 4000 visitors to the main water safety advice page on our website.

## The Place Programme

While National Park Rangers, volunteers and land operations staff manage seasonal visitor management activities, extensive work is going on in the background as part of the National Park Place Programme to strengthen tourism infrastructure and improve key visitor locations.

Further progress was made this year to develop Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Studies (STIDs). These local studies aim to identify areas of opportunity and actions to strengthen tourism infrastructure, addressing the needs of both residents and visitors. They also create a framework to help secure additional funding for projects in key visitor management areas.

The National Park Authority continues to work with local Visitor Management Groups and other stakeholders to develop these strategic studies and subsequent infrastructure projects.



### West Loch Lomond

In West Loch Lomond, the STID study has resulted in projects being taken forward at two visitor hotspots - the Tarbet Pier site and in Luss.

Following consultation with the local community to develop a 'masterplan', the first phase of work to transform the Tarbet Pier site into a sustainable low-carbon destination and travel hub is due to get underway this winter.

The £1.5m first phase delivery project, which is supported by a grant from VisitScotland's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) includes:

- measures to resolve issues around parking and vehicle circulation at the site
- park and landscape improvements to improve accessibility and biodiversity
- encouraging modal shift through the development of the site as a sustainable travel hub

Meanwhile at Luss Pier, work is underway to enhance safety. Work is due to be completed by the end of 2023.

## East Loch Lomond

As a result of the East of Loch Lomond STID study, a Balmaha Master Plan has been developed, looking at improvements that can be made in and around the village to improve the visitor experience and ease congestion. We look forward to developing this as part of our 2023 /24 East Loch Lomond programme.

In addition, we have commenced the development of a masterplan for the Rowardennan site, with a view to celebrating and enhancing the natural landscape, supporting sustainable methods of travel, and creating the highest quality visitor experience. Stakeholder engagement on this project will begin this winter.

## Other Visitor Infrastructure Improvements

- A replacement Bracklinn Bridge was in place for the start of the 2023 visitor season. The robust, sustainable bridge was built to last more than 100 years and will ensure the people of Callander, and visitors to the area, can enjoy the location for many years to come.
- Work is continuing at pace on the project to widen and strengthen the heavily used path on Conic Hill, which has deteriorated in recent years due to the high volume of visitors. Following an initial phase of works completed in March 2023, work on section 1 of the path – the timber steps within the forest boundary – and on section 4 – Bealach Ard to West Highland Way high point – is scheduled for this winter.
- Redevelopment of Ben Venue carpark was delivered this year in partnership with Forestry & Land Scotland. The work upgraded an ageing car park by marking formal car parking spaces and designing it for potential shuttle bus services.
- Vital works will be taking place this winter on bridges that cross the West Highland Way in behind Conic Hill. The Burn of Mar bridge and the Kilandan Burn bridge, will both be replaced. This will re-open this section for easy access for walkers on the West Highland Way.
- The core path linking Succoth to Arrochar has become degraded and requires resurfacing and drainage improvements. The National Park Authority is directly funding the work to improve this vital community link - the work is scheduled for winter 2023.



Bracklinn Bridge

## Sustainable Travel

Reducing car dependency remains a priority for tackling emissions, congestion and making access to the Park more inclusive. It is a key element of creating a sustainable low-carbon destination, as set out in the Draft National Park Partnership Plan.

Difficult market conditions meant we were unable to secure a contractor to run a trial shuttle bus service in the Park this season. Options for future years are being discussed with operators, local authorities, and other key groups to find a way forward.

In the meantime, the Park Authority remains part of a Journey Planner pilot – the [National Park Journey Planner](#)- and is working with an emerging Integrated Mobility Partnership to use the pilot results to inform improvements regionally and nationally.

Learnings from the [Sustainable Travel and Modal Shift Study](#) (completed March 2023) are being used to inform the National Park Partnership Plan 2024-29 and related partnership programmes covering the Park area.

Several sessions with local authorities, regional transport partnerships and other key stakeholders have already been undertaken with positive outcomes and we look forward to taking these further.



## Regulation and enforcement

The enforcement picture has remained stable, with figures similar to that of the 2022 season (a significant improvement on the 2021 season). Over the last three years, less than 1% of people allegedly contravening the Camping Management Byelaws have had their names taken previously, indicating a positive behavioural influence of this legislation.

The National Park Ranger Service worked closely with Police Scotland on enforcement of the Loch Lomond Byelaws and Camping Management Byelaws while local authorities led on parking enforcement and their duties under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

In August Lorna Slater, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity, confirmed the revised Loch Lomond Byelaws that will come into effect on 1st November 2024. To support these byelaws a new database is being developed that will enable online registration, allow the introduction of Boat User Registration scheme and improve administrative efficiencies.

### National Park Ranger Service

The level of alleged contraventions of the Camping Management Byelaws remained similar to 2022, while alleged contraventions of the Loch Lomond Byelaws were down by 28%. The majority of interactions that the Ranger service have in byelaw enforcement remains positive with an ‘education first’ approach.

*Table E1*

Details taken		
	2022	2023
 Loch Lomond Byelaws	235	168
 Camping Management Byelaws	821	826
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,056</b>	<b>994</b>

To date a total of 13 incidents involving 23 individuals were escalated to enforcement action. Of these, five were solely related to abandoned campsites and dealt with by way of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for flytipping. Three of these FPNs were accepted and paid, the other two were not and resulted in reports to the Procurator Fiscal.

The remainder of the cases (two alleged breaches of Loch Lomond Byelaws and six for offences under Camping Management Byelaws or the Environmental Protection Act) were direct reports to the Procurator Fiscal.

Of the 10 cases reported to the Procurator Fiscal, including the two rejected FPN offers, seven have now been dealt with and closed; these were disposed of either by Procurator Fiscal warning or Procurator Fiscal fines. The remaining three cases are either still to be marked or identified for court proceedings.

On Loch Lomond, the majority of alleged offences were related to speeding, failure to display registration numbers and or annual marks and failure to register.

Under the Camping Management Byelaws, the most common offence reported was, 'setting up and occupying a tent without authorisation' followed by 'failure to provide details'.

A detailed look into the Camping Management Byelaw data over the last 3 years between 2021 – 2023 shows that of the 2984 people who had their details taken, only 25 of them (less than 1%) had their details taken previously. Whilst there may be multiple factors affecting this, it does seem to indicate the value and importance that the engagement by the Ranger Service can have on positively influencing behaviour.



*Ranger interaction while on patrol*

The Ranger service increased loch patrols at core times in busy hotspot areas including Luss, Duck Bay, the River Leven and Balloch Park in 2023. The additional presence of Rangers in these areas had a profound effect and contributed to the reduction of contraventions compared to 2022.

The weather was a factor in the reduction of issues this season, weekend patrol did not see the large influx of loch users as seen in previous season.

The National Park also had an increased social media presence, promoting lower speed zones on the loch. also including erection of signage at Moss O'Balloch slipway, focusing on speed on the loch, Personal Floatation devices usage, and registration.

The National Park Ranger Service employed 44 Seasonal Rangers this year. These Seasonal Rangers:

- worked across five patrol areas, campsites, boat patrols and visitor centres
- conducted 1,192 patrols between 1st March-30th September
- carried out 908 patrols in Camping Management Zones (CMZ)
- conducted 284 Loch Lomond boat patrols

## Police Scotland



Police Loch Lomond Patrol

Police Scotland have continued to develop their partnership work within the National Park including through cooperation with the NPSRAG Partners, Operation Ballaton and the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Partnership Against Rural Crime (PARC).

This year saw the National Park Authority again sponsor a dedicated Police Officer to focus on the National Park. This role acts as a liaison between the National Park Authority and Police Scotland, identifies and brings in additional day-to-day and specialist resource to the National Park, assists with daily support for the Ranger Service and

provides additional reassurance and support to communities within the National Park. This is PC Kennedy's first full season in this role having taken it up in September of 2022.

Some examples of the National Park Police Officer's contributions in 2023 include:

- supporting the National Park Ranger service through the provision of training, liaison to give advice, assistance with enforcement issues, and support for staff in conflict situations.
- byelaw enforcement - reporting fourteen Camping Management Byelaw cases and three Loch Lomond Byelaw Cases.
- as part of the work of the Partnership Against Rural Crime, undertaking joint patrols with water bailiffs to encourage good behaviour, practice, and to discourage poaching. Patrolling with divisional Wildlife Crime Officers targeting hare coursing, livestock worrying and attending remote farms to offer crime prevention advice.
- engaging with visitors at events to promote water safety and the Drymen Show to highlight the work of the Partnership Against Rural Crime as well.
- deploying the speed gun at sites around the National Park to ensure safe driving speeds and provide visible police deterrent.
- Working with Special Constables to bring additional policing resources into the National Park.
- Using Police Scotland social media to highlight:
  - opening day of camping season reminding users to expect to speak to Rangers and Police and asked to provide permits.
  - signpost to byelaws for fires and firewood
  - social media witness appeals for crimes at National Park sites.

## Looking ahead

The 2023 visitor season was in many ways similar to 2022. This may help us to answer the question posed this time last year ‘what is the new normal?’ It seems that the new normal is a return to the steadily increasing visitor numbers that we saw prior to the COVID pandemic.

This year the biggest influence on visitor related pressures was once again the weather. There was a bright and sunny start to the season with a slightly wetter summer meaning that most of the pressures were felt earlier in the year.



There is anecdotal evidence from tourism businesses that international visitors have returned strongly and that although domestic visitors are coming, their spending habits may have been negatively affected by the cost-of-living crisis.

The experience of National Park Authority staff (and partners) in managing visitor pressures under extreme circumstances has sharpened skills, strengthened partnerships and helped everyone understand what resources are needed to sustain this optimal visitor management model. This model includes clear messaging, adequate resourcing of ‘boots on the ground’ and a proportionate approach to enforcement alongside continued development and maintenance of high-quality infrastructure.

To manage things as well as they have been managed this season, we would need the following for 2024:

- a similar number of Rangers, Wardens, and Environment Officers operating in the National Park providing that vital in-person engagement with visitors and addressing issues before they escalate
- the partnership working built under the National Park Safe Recovery Action Group to continue, with proposed name change to the National Park Sustainable Visitor Management Group
- to continue effective communication and engagement with communities, businesses, landowners, and Local Authorities to ensure that there is opportunity to raise issues and work together to find solutions to reduce visitor pressures and improve everyone’s ability to enjoy the National Park.



There are also areas that will need to change with regards our approach to visitor management, in line with the launch of the new National Park Partnership Plan and the priorities within it. Some of these changes will be quicker than others but we anticipate that in 2024 this will include:

- continued focus on the Place Programme as a means to ensure effective infrastructure is in place to help reduce and contain visitor pressures and provide an excellent quality of experience for all who use it.
- taking forward the learnings from sustainable transport projects in recent seasons and improving sustainable transport choices for visitors, with an exploration of the important part that car parks will play within a sustainable and attractive mobility network in future years
- implementation of the revised Loch Lomond Byelaws (November 2024) with engagement through the season and beyond to ensure they are understood by loch users, as well as evaluation to measure their impacts.
- starting the process to review the Camping Management Byelaws, ensuring that we can have meaningful discussions about their future with all interested and affected stakeholders.
- continuing with improvements and innovations, whilst looking after what we have. In 2024 we will work with other landowners to consider how facilities can be maintained to a high standard against increasing financial pressures.



Detail of these actions will be included in the 2024 Joint Response Visitor Management Plan to be presented to the National Park Authority Board in March 2023 following engagement with all key stakeholders and partners.