

NATIONAL ACCESS FORUM – 20 SEPTEMBER 2019

INFORMAL CAMPING – discussion paper

Purpose

1. The purpose of the paper is to inform National Access Forum members of the recent rise in irresponsible behaviour associated with informal camping and the corresponding increase in press and social media activity incorrectly referring to this as wild camping.

Action

2. Members are invited to discuss the issues set out in the paper and agree potential next steps.

Background

3. This issue has been raised by Local Access Forum representatives. Local authorities are experiencing a significant rise in informal camping at key sites and a rise in antisocial behaviour such as littering, fires, etc. It also follows concerns by LAFs and Mountaineering Scotland over recent press articles referring to irresponsible camping activities as 'wild camping'. This is coupled with frequent notifications through social media (Facebook etc.) with people explicitly referring to car and motor-home based road/loch side camping as 'wild camping' with little reference made to how it is described in SOAC.
4. The guidance on camping in the **Scottish Outdoor Access Code** relates to 'wild camping', also sometimes referred to as 'informal camping'. This type of camping should be interpreted as 'camping in the wild' and does not include camping on organised camp sites or with groups such as the Scouts or Guides.

The Access Code says:

Access rights extend to wild camping. This type of camping is lightweight, done in small numbers and only for two or three nights in any one place. You can camp in this way wherever access rights apply, but help to avoid causing problems for local people and land managers by not camping in enclosed fields of crops or farm animals and by keeping well away from buildings, roads or historic structures. Take extra care to avoid disturbing deer stalking or grouse shooting. If you wish to camp close to a house or building, seek the owner's permission. Leave no trace by:

- taking away all your litter
- removing all traces of your tent pitch and of any open fire (follow the guidance for lighting fires)
- not causing any pollution.

As the Code is written in fairly general terms, a number of National Governing Bodies have published more specific guidance. For example, Mountaineering Scotland has a *Wild Camping a guide to good practice*; (<https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/sites/default/files/2018-09/Wild%20camping%20-%20a%20guide%20to%20good%20practice.pdf>), and the Scottish Canoe Association has adapted this for canoeists; (<https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/b9315d6a/files/uploaded/SCAWildCampCode.pdf>).

However, the problem is that this guidance is not read by irresponsible campers.

The challenge is to get the media and wider public better informed about what is – and what is not – responsible camping.

5. There is concern about the increasing mis-perception in public eyes as to what they think wild camping is, especially where this is associated with anti-social (and often illegal) activities that local authorities are having difficulty keeping on top of. While work has been undertaken in previous years it is perhaps time again to clarify exactly what wild camping is and couple it with a promotional campaign to ensure that there is better public understanding of responsibilities and of what is illegal.

Current Action

6. The Mountaineering Scotland have been contacted by the BBC about the rise in informal camping and associated problems and put out a press release in response: <https://www.mountaineering.scot/news/calling-time-on-dirty-camping>. This has resulted in a lot of traffic on the website and social media. Mountaineering Scotland is concerned that the reputation of all wild campers will be damaged by the behaviour of irresponsible campers. Thus, there is a need to clearly understand the issues that are causing problems and identify potential solutions, recognising that this is an issue of national significance which should be tackled in a co-ordinated and consistent way.
7. In addition, there is the petition lodged with the Scottish Parliament that is calling for a roll out of no-camping zones: <https://www.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/wildcamping>
8. A number of local authorities provide advice and guidance on what responsible camping looks like through posters and publicity campaigns. An example of a recent East Lothian poster is attached to this paper.

Discussion Points for NAF:

- How is irresponsible informal camping being tackled at the moment, and is it effective?
- What isn't working and why? What resources are needed?
- How can NAF/LAFs help tackle such problems as anti-social roadside camping/"dirty camping"? What national actions/solutions can NAF recommend?
- Is there a need to raise awareness and have a public education campaign? (Next year is 15 years since SOAC was published and new generations might not understand what their rights and responsibilities truly are.)
- On a wider front should we link this with other SOAC promotion activities at a national media level such as irresponsible dog ownership?.