

# Operation ironworks: addressing antisocial behaviour in Scotland's first national park

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The close proximity of the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park to Scotland's largest city, Glasgow, and 50% of Scotland's population living within an hour's drive is both a blessing and a challenge for park managers, business operators and park residents. Partly due to the success of national park designation, inadequate infrastructure to accommodate a broad spectrum of visitors and their desires and needs, and increasing incidences of antisocial behaviour of short-term visitors to the park over the past decade required a fresh and heightened management approach. Operation Ironworks was borne from the need to arrest the antisocial behaviour in a number of Park hotspots of a small segment of park users having a disproportionate, negative impact on traditional National Park visitors. This behaviour also adversely impacted residents, land managers and businesses as well as damaged the natural environment, particularly in areas of Special Scientific Interest that attracted the attention of Scottish Natural Heritage. This paper traces the precursors to Operation Ironworks, its evolution, implementation, and outcomes.

## *Methodology*

The methodological approach combines the participant observations of two actors deeply involved in Operation Ironworks, one as a national park manager focusing on visitor and park ranger services, and the second, as a senior police officer tasked with coordinating and strategizing police enforcement services. The third author offers an outsider's perspective having examined the National Park's management strategies and issues for over a decade. In addition to key stakeholder meetings and field observations, a broad range of documents were analysed to assess strategies, effectiveness and efficiency.

## *Context*

The Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park is situated twenty kilometres north of Glasgow. The Park itself is adjacent to Scotland's 'Central Belt' that encompasses 3.5 million people and several cities and towns including the capital, Edinburgh. It is estimated that six million people visit the Park every year from all of the world. It is a prime destination for British holidaymakers and is an attractive day or weekend visit location. Until recently a very small percentage of visitors frequented the Park for very different reasons than to experience the Park's natural and cultural assets. As a result, antisocial behaviour became an essential focus of park management and police authorities operating within the Park.

## *Antisocial Behaviour*

Binge drinking excursions to the Park, typically on holiday and fine weather weekends, aided by close proximity, cheap disposable camping equipment, informal camping provisions, and weak public intoxication regulations as well as problematic police response times, over time led to an escalation of antisocial behaviour. Such behaviour seriously deterred bona fide Park visitors, detracted park management from delivering articulated objectives, and routinely tied up policing and ranger resources in the peak season. Vandalism such as chain sawing trees, and the destruction

of park furniture, park buildings and private property for fuel was all too common. Unruly behaviour resulting from intoxication was a regular feature in informal campgrounds, and even more perplexing were the intimidation and assault on unsuspecting campers, some of whom were young families. There were knifings in gang skirmishes and even an attempted murder. Damage to personal property such as the torching and total destruction of a camper's car also served to raise concern that something deep-seated needed to be done to avoid having the situation spiral further out of control, causing long lasting damage to the Park and to the social and economic fabric of its residents.

### *Park Management Strategies*

Operation Ironworks is a multifaceted approach to addressing antisocial behaviour within the Park and developing complementary and coordinated management strategies. Spurred on by local communities, the Eastern Shore of Loch Lomond became a key focus of management attention of park managers and law enforcement. Over time Operation Ironworks tasked a police sergeant to address this issue. A Park Police Officer was made responsible for coordinating with park management and particularly park rangers, and in time liaising with all three police authorities having jurisdiction within the Park. There was a move towards more focused patrolling activity, higher profile and more visible presence, and encouraging local residents and visitors to report issues or incidents (see Table 1). Two key bylaws were enacted, one to curb public drinking and intoxication and the second to manage camping to mitigate raucous behaviour, limit environmental damage and improve the visitor experience. The drinking bylaw controlled the unrestricted consumption of alcohol within public areas and outside tents or caravans while the camping bylaw restricted camping to formal areas or camp sites, removing the opportunity to "wild camp". To reduce inadvertent as well as blatant vandalism, camp grounds were cleaned of vandal impacts, campsites were improved such as providing vandal resistant metal fireplaces, and wood fuel was made more available. Sturdy and aesthetically pleasing barriers were also constructed to restrict vehicle access to beaches, further discouraging unregulated camping. In time campsite environs were improved and refreshed through capital improvements and road congestion was addressed along the shore road by the Stirling Council.

Table 1: Selected Ranger Service Patrols April to September 2012 compared to April to September 2011.

<b>Ranger Team Area</b>	<b>Patrol Route</b>	<b>Number of Patrols 2011</b>	<b>Number of Patrols 2012</b>
East Loch Lomond & Trossachs	East Loch Lomond	208	670
East Loch Lomond & Trossachs	Trossachs 2: Loch Chon	31	64
East Loch Lomond & Trossachs	Trossachs 3: Loch Venachar	45	83
Cowal & Breadalbane	Breadalbane 2: Glen Dochart	19	41
Cowal & Breadalbane	Breadalbane 3: BalQuhidder	23	72

Cowal & Breadalbane	Breadalbane 4: Loch Earn	41	148
Cowal & Breadalbane	Breadalbane 5: Loch Lubnaig	39	104
West Loch Lomond & Water	West Loch Lomond 1	69	93
West Loch Lomond & Water	West Loch Lomond 2	72	91
West Loch Lomond & Water	Luss	72	82

Source: Grant Moir (2012). Ranger Service – End of Season Review 2012. P.6-7.  
Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority

### **Results**

Operation Ironworks as measured by several important metrics and observations is a resounding success. In the camping bylaw zone for example, pitching tents outside designated areas were down 96.6%, there was a 97.5% decrease in new fire sites, and litter was down 98.4% in 2012 from 2010 benchmarks. As a result of the drinking bylaw, Park Rangers attest to major improvements, statistics show that families are now returning in increasing numbers to the Eastern Shore. Police and Ranger records show dramatically fewer complaints from residents and park visitors, and significantly fewer bookable offences despite increased police presence and greater police and Park coordination.

An interesting question is, where have all the trouble makers gone? An initial concern of Park residents in other areas, as regulations on the Eastern Shore were ratcheted up, was whether antisocial behaviour would simply be displaced to other locations. There is little or no evidence of that. One possible reason, an important element of Operation Ironworks, was to raise public awareness. Incidences, arrests, court proceedings and convictions became part of an important and tightly coordinated media campaign.

### **Conclusions**

Despite its successes, Project Ironworks is a work in progress requiring constant monitoring and vigilance. The lessons learned are now being considered and/or implemented in other Park hotspots and elsewhere. No situation is alike, however, so it is of great interest to see how lessons learned might work in other places.