



Duncan Mills Scholarship Awards – Kenny Auld
Award Category – Management Best Practice
Sweden Report – August 2011



Introduction

The trip was designed to investigate differing techniques to overcome common barriers to access and related visitor management issues.

As an Access Advisor for Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority (LLPNPA) my workload is extremely diverse with day to day projects ranging from upholding our legislative responsibilities, to strategically designing path networks which will provide quality and appropriate access for a wide range of access takers, and even to the practical side of recommending path and interpretation standards that meet the requirements of a National Park.

In LLTNP the management and development of access and recreation opportunities is a key factor in achieving a balance between the economic sustainability for an area, the protection of its valued landscapes and habitats and ensuring that the Park remains an attractive place for recreational enjoyment.

Scotland's access legislation is relatively new (6 years old) and consequently the role of access professionals is quickly developing. Within Scotland access professionals meet reasonably frequently to discuss best practice, common issues, successes and failures however I have always been aware that we do not have all of the answers and that success stories from Scandinavia, Sweden in particular, seem fresh and innovative. This is probably unsurprising as they have been working hard on the access agenda for longer than ourselves.

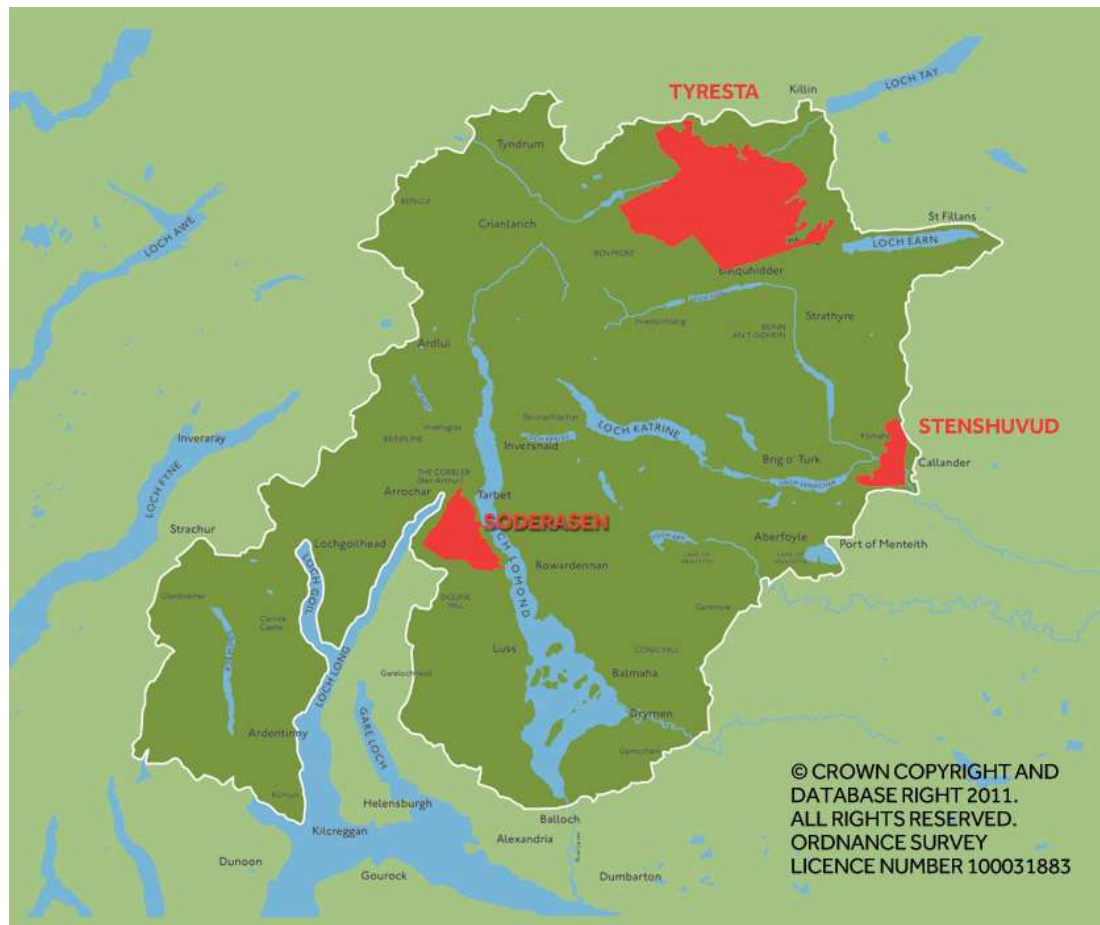
The ambitious study tour was designed to cover the breadth of work covered in my role here in Scotland and each Swedish National Park (Tyresta, Söderåsen and Stenshuvud) chosen had different work priorities and therefore a diverse range of priority issues and work practices could be shared.

Illustration: Hans Sjögren, Copyright: Swedish Environmental Protection Agency



When comparing the work and resources of the Swedish National Parks with Loch Lomond & The Trossachs it was important to remember the differences in size and also the fact that Swedish National Parks are all state owned whilst LLTNP is not. The Swedish National Parks are IUCN Category 3 because of the focus on specific features and single values, whilst LLTNP is Category 5 as a protected landscape/seascape.

The map below shows the Swedish Parks visited superimposed to scale onto a LLTNP map to emphasis the significant size differences.



Active travel is also a priority area of work in Scotland at the moment so the opportunity was taken to investigate cycle-path infrastructure in the urban environments of Stockholm and Copenhagen as well as the rural areas.

Hopefully others working within the outdoor recreation field will find this report interesting and find some specific techniques which help with their workload. To this aim I have structured the report in a very targeted and hopefully user-friendly manner. I have initially provided essentially background and general information of all the key sites that I visited and then collated the most interesting points under specific themes ranging from threshold signage to active travel provision.

My hope is you find the report as interesting as I found the experience.

Structure

Many of the same issues and opportunities were examined at each of the sites and consequently I have structured this report with initial background information on each site and then, under general themes, discussed the different site approaches.

A/ Sites:

1. Stockholm
2. Stockholm Royal National City Park
3. Tyresta National Park
4. Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
5. Söderåsen National Park
6. Kristianstads Vattenrike Biosphere Reserve
7. Stenshovud National Park
8. Copenhagen

B/ Themes:

1. Active Travel
2. Shared use paths
3. Long distance routes
4. Path design
5. Directional signage
6. Behavioural signage
7. Camping provision
8. Fire sites
9. Threshold signage
10. Visitor Centres
11. General Facilities

C/ Summary of potential outcomes and learning for Scotland

1. naturum™
2. Threshold Signage
3. Camp sites
4. Firewood
5. Anti-social behaviour
6. Active travel infrastructure investment
7. Stockholm bike hire
8. Copenhagen bus stop islands
9. Information sharing

D/ Summary of potential outcomes and learning for Sweden

1. Staff isolation
2. Advertising
3. Consistency
4. Directional signage
5. Specialist access advice
6. Boardwalks
7. Long Distance Routes
8. Business opportunities
9. Volunteers
10. Söderåsen hub investment
11. Shared-use paths
12. Iconic projects
13. People counters
14. Online behavioural signage

A/ Sites:

1. Stockholm

Stockholm is the capital of Sweden built across 14 islands with a well preserved medieval centre. The city centre has a population of 800k while the larger metropolitan area is home to 2 million people. The Civilising The Streets report published in June 2010 reported that the city centre had a cycling rate of 6% and that the city has greatly benefited from 11 years of cycling-specific investment.

2. Royal National City Park

This park is not actually one of the 29 NPs overseen by the Swedish Environment Protection Agency (EPA) but is an independent Royal Park. It covers 26 km squared and provides for walking, cycling and horse riding. The signage is clear although no distances are used i.e. how far is the café/toilet? The signage shows what modes of recreation are allowed on each path and for much of the main path signage shows that it is shared route with horse and bike allowed alongside walkers. However at other sections separate paths are provided parallel to the main path for cyclists and more specifically horse riders. The park has several liveryies within its area and it would appear horse traffic is heavy.

The Park also had a well signed health route split into seven 1km sections. The growth of Nordic Walking for health was evident by the sheer number using the circuit on my brief visit. This is one of several health routes co-ordinated by The Swedish Heart & Lung Association and the municipality. Such routes must meet certain criteria and signage must be supplied from an agreed source to ensure consistency.

Interestingly the park has imported Highland Cattle to graze some of the fields. This was also seen in Tyresta NP and Stenshuvud NP.

The Park provides excellent green space within the City and serves Stockholm well. In Copenhagen it was stark how little green space was available in comparison.

3. Tyresta National Park

Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park (LLTNP) sits within 30 minutes drive of Glasgow and 1hr of Edinburgh and Stirling, a total of 2 million people. Therefore we suffer from extreme visitor pressures and such a scenario is shared by Tyresta National Park which sits 25mins outside Stockholm.

Tyresta was established in 1993 and covers 2000 hectares. The park was set up to preserve a representative fissure valley landscape with extensive primeval forest. In a very different system than other National Parks across Sweden Tyresta is not managed by the County but by an independent Tyresta Forest Foundation.

The path network across the park is extensive with 55 km of marked, colour coded trails using large amounts of boardwalk. Close to the Visitor Centre (naturum), a visitor can enjoy shorter loop walks but there are several larger loops which would be day walks and these often use the natural bedrock formations for path surface. Along the trails beside the lakes there are four wind shelter sites where visitors are permitted to camp. There are seven fire sites where wood is provided for visitors.

The main visitor leaflet the Tyresta clarifies the following rules:

- Wildlife is protected and may not be intentionally disturbed.
- It is forbidden to damage the vegetation, including dead trees. It is not allowed to break off twigs and branches, cut down trees or dig up plants.
- Fires and camping are permitted only at designated places (further guidance on the NP website clarifies that only one night camping at a time is allowed).
- Off-road cycling is not permitted.
- Dogs must be leashed at all times.

It was particularly interesting to me that the National Park is surrounded by 2700 hectares of Tyresta Nature Reserve. This acts as a buffer for the National Park whilst in Scotland the opposite is true where the LLTNP provides a wide “buffer area” for the specific designated nature reserves within its boundary.

4. EPA

The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are predominantly based within offices in Stockholm and work to ensure consistency and quality across all of the 29 NPs. They also work with regional authorities to designate new NPs.

5. Söderåsen NP

Söderåsen is within the southern region of Sweden known as Skåne. This National Park was inaugurated in 2001 and since then visitor numbers have grown year on year. The National Park covers 1625 hectares and its main purpose is to preserve a large contiguous section of southern Sweden’s horst landscape in a natural condition. Söderåsen was the 27th National Park to be established in Sweden. The management of the Park is the responsibility of the Skåne County Administrative Board.

Söderåsen boasted two informal camp sites which I was keen to investigate to help inform our project to initiate such a system within LLTNP. The cumulative impacts of irresponsible camping on the habitats around our Lochs (Loch Lomond in particular) have resulted in the Authority looking at the implementation of byelaws, the first in Scotland specific to camping. In turn we are considering the provision of informal campsites. Best practice of such sites cannot be found in Scotland where the only two options are extremely formal provision or completely independent camping.

Söderåsen and ourselves are also both looking at expansion of our respective path networks so information sharing on our strategies, methodology and vision for the future was extremely valuable. Söderåsen offered insights into online promotion of the path network, cycle provision, path standards and how they protect their visitors from dangers such as falling branches. All of these elements are directly mirrored within my workload and future aspirations within LLTNP.

Similar to each Swedish National Park, Söderåsen has its own set of rules for visitors and the key instructions on the back of the main information leaflet are:

- It is not permitted to damage vegetation: this applies even to dead trees. It is forbidden to break off twigs or branches, or to fig up plants.
- It is forbidden to pick up mosses, lichens and wood fungi.
- Fishing is only permitted on Lake Odensjön.
- A fishing licence is required.
- It is not permitted to ride horses or bicycles, or to operate motor vehicles, on other than the designated paths and roads.
- Dogs must be kept on a lead at all times.
- Tenting and lighting fires is allowed only at the designated sites.

In terms of the Söderåsen path network the access opportunities are concentrated around the naturum, with a flat boardwalk path of 500m around a lake offering excellent all abilities opportunities. From here the Kopparhatt trail is a 3km loop with a considerable ascent to the iconic view point with look-out platform.

The staff also showed me the less visited and promoted western side of the Park where we discussed the merits and issues with greater promotion and investment. This area had a very rustic unmanaged feel and although there was obvious potential it was seemed clear that finances should be targeted at the busy area of the Park.

6. Biosphere

The Biosphere project has a large budget of approximately 9million Euros, although that figure does include a new visitor centre within the town of Kristianstad.

We visited two sites: the first a new fishing spot and 200m all-ability boardwalk loop. We were guided around by the project co-ordinator who clearly explained the “new” approach of fully consulting the less able community within the project planning process, along with the maintenance department to ensure that maintenance commitment was minimised for the future. The result is an extremely expensive (£400 per m) oak boardwalk with metal stanchions into the marsh so that the oak was protected. Interestingly no antislip had been used but there was a gap beneath the kick board and the boards were horizontal. The signage is of superior quality but again it is interesting that bikes are forbidden to use the boardwalk even though the area links well into the surrounding cycle network. Whilst we were there a visitor arrived by bike and left the bike by the entrance whilst they walked the loop. Despite the amount of investment no people counters have been installed to evidence value for money.

The second site was a bird viewing tower in a more rural area. The less-able group receive organised trips to this site. The site had parking roadside for the able and disabled parking at the base of the tower. The tower has been constructed with graduated inclines so that the less able can manage to get to a height to observe the waders and birds of prey. Half way up the tower a visitor can use the elevated compost toilet which the project co-ordinator was very proud of as it overcame ground issues.

7. Stenshuvud NP

Stenshuvud National Park was founded in 1986 in order to preserve a natural area of special geological and biological significance, which also provides a “valuable setting for outdoor recreation”. Stenshuvud is very small and only covers 386 hectares. It sits at the very southern tip of Sweden in an area known as Österlen. The Park includes a network of trails with boardwalk again often used as it is in Tyresta and Söderåsen. The naturum and large car park sit within the centre of the Park. The main information leaflet outlines the key rules for visitors:

- Camping is not permitted in the National Park; trailers and camper vehicles may not remain in the park overnight.
- Plants and animals may not be damaged or disturbed in any way.
- Fishing is only permitted in the waters of the Baltic.
- Parking is permitted only at the places indicated.
- Cycling is not allowed within the park boundary.
- Dogs must be leashed at all times.

Of particular interest in Stenshuvud was how the park managed access and grazing cattle (reintroduced in order to maintain the landscapes open character) within a very small area, and also why camping and cycling were not allowed at all within the area.

Scottish access legislation allows for visitors to share enclosed areas with cattle but this has resulted in complaints from both access takers and landowners over the last couple of years. Indeed such issues arise on the West Highland Way which is Scotland's major long distance route and passes through LLTTNP. It was extremely interesting to see that very few issues had arisen in Stenshuvud over the years.

Camping and cycling were completely banned due to the small nature of the area and it had been deemed that zoning of such an area would have been unmanageable and difficult to communicate.

In terms of the path network the boardwalk was of a superior quality to other National Parks visited but this could be explained by the compact nature of the park. The signage was also of a superior standard but, like in other Parks, the staff were waiting for National standards from the SEPA. From the naturum there is a small all abilities loop of 600m which stretches down towards the Baltic coast. The main used path for visitors is the 1km ascent to the iconic viewpoint (97m high) which offers fantastic views up and down the coast. The same regional long distance “hiking trail” called Skåneleden which passes through Söderåsen National Park also runs through the Stenshuvud.

8. Copenhagen

Copenhagen is the capital city of Denmark and has a population of 500k within the city itself and 1.6 million within the larger metropolitan area. The city is renowned as the Mecca for active travel and this reputation is based upon a fantastic 30% cycling rate with 38% cycling commute rate. There is also an impressive 23% walking rate. This behaviour did not occur over night and Copenhagen has benefited from cycling specific investment for 25 years and walking specific investment for 40 years.

B/ Themes:

1. Active Travel

Interestingly in Stockholm the cycling rate felt higher than the official 6% and it is incredible to think that Stockholm has only benefited from cycling-specific infrastructure over the last 11 years. The cycling network feels embedded. Cycle lanes are designed within the roads where possible but there are no fixed standards and on several occasions cycle provision in one direction may be on the road whilst the other shares the footway. Cycle traffic generally follows car traffic direction but where space is limited a bi-directional cycle track will be incorporated at one side. The orientation of painted bikes on the tarmac made it clear what direction should be taken. Examples are shown below:



This main stretch has wide segregated cycle lanes on both sides flowing with the traffic. Interestingly the near side lane was within the road boundary but the far was on the pavement. This shows a sensible flexible design approach to maximise space.



Cycling at dusk. Where appropriate high quality bi-directional shared use lanes sit isolated from main road carriageways. These appear to be well maintained and clear.



Even at busy cross-roads within the centre of the city marked out cycle lanes are always clear and integrated effortlessly.



Every set of city centre traffic lights had a clear area for cyclists with vehicles kept well back from the actual junction line.

Stockholm operates an excellent bike rental scheme where you can purchase a card (much like the oyster card) which can cover a day, 3 days or more. The city has over 80 bike stations where you can swipe your card and take a bike for up to 3 hours and drop off at any other station. I tried this system and it appeared to work very well with many other residents and tourists also using it even in late October. Some of the bikes were in poor condition as it was the end of the season however the project covers itself against any accident through an initial disclaimer. The bikes are functional with 3 gears but are unattractive for theft as they are heavy and bright blue with an distinctive bespoke design.



One of the reasons for the success of this project is its affordability. For a full season of April to October the cost is only 250 SEK which is roughly £24.

In summary the hire system seemed very easy and inspiring and the cycle network felt clear and embedded.

For an active travel enthusiast Copenhagen is nothing short of inspiring. The statistics of 30% cycling rate with 38% commuting are staggering and the road network which has received investment for 100 years allows cycling priority and consequently active travel is the easiest way to go around the city. Pavement widths have been sacrificed by cyclists are of all ages and both sexes, conflict seems minimal. In the vast majority of cases the cycle lane is clearly marked separate from the footway and road, allowing fast commuting with overtaking. Even where a bus stop is in operation the passenger disembarks onto an "island" and looks to see if the cycle lane is clear before crossing the 2m's to the footway.



Bus stop island which prioritises bike flow. It is also worth noting that the pavement width is considerably narrower than you would find in the UK and that this has obviously been deemed as an acceptable sacrifice.

Another point of interest is that cyclists have right of way at all road junctions and the driver must pay attention for cyclists coming up on the right of the car and let them go ahead. On one occasion I witnessed a car wishing to turn right at a T-junction where the cyclists enjoyed an option of a short cut straight ahead. Instead of the cycles filing behind the car they would simply pass on the right and straight on and the driver had to wait for 4 or 5 minutes. Taxi drivers in the UK may take some time to warm to this concept. All road junctions fully integrated cycling and the separated traffic lights and filter lanes for cyclists worked exceptionally well.



Classic Copenhagen traffic junction with clear cyclist arrows and waiting areas. Also a typical casually dressed female resident on a classic ladies bike.

The only place that cyclists were not permitted were the few pedestrian roads within the centre. Interestingly as cyclists in the UK fall in the grey area regarding pelican crossings, Copenhagen has formally allowed cycling across but in part of their own lane. In the UK there is still debate about the legalities of cycles on pelican crossings.



Segregated cyclist waiting areas with different waiting lanes for right turn and straight. Designated cyclist lights offer greater flow than is afforded to cars.

Most bikes within the city were privately owned and were “old style ladies bikes” in the majority of cases. The cycling culture is such that “cycling” is not just about pedalling fast. Most appear to be going at a leisurely pace and in work clothes to meet friends for a social meeting. The ladies bike allows for cycling in a skirt and different posture. The sheer numbers of bikes means that theft occurs but bikes are so readily available for cheap prices that the motivation from thieves is less.

At the central train station the bike rack at the weekend was filled with several hundred bikes. This is because most commuters have a “city bike” which they leave at the station over the weekend and simply use as the quickest mode from the station to work and back again. Most residents I asked stated that cycling cut 25-50% of city travel time compared to both walking and motorised options.

Copenhagen is justifiably proud of its cycling culture and boasts a cycle counter on the cycle path by the main square. On the day I visiting the counter showed 3000 which was lower than normal as it was midday on a Sunday. Simple infrastructure investment like this shows that Copenhagen appreciates the need for innovation and motivational tools.



The famous cyclist counter by the main square. There is tangible pride within the city of its cycling culture and this is exemplified by this infrastructure.

The Copenhagen bike hire system differed from Stockholm in that the bike “stations” were less formal and obvious and the method was very much pay and go much like shopping trolleys in the UK, put in a coin and get it back at the end. Essentially a free system which I presume is affordable as most own bikes.



At one of the bike stations there were also 3 IKEA electric cars for hire where the public could hire a smart car on the spot after paying an amount with a credit card. This was a particularly inspiring project and I would be keen to investigate the success rate.

2. Shared use paths



Within the Royal National City Park of Stockholm routes which are suitable for all users are signed clearly. These are always 3m wide surfaced routes. This photo shows Lena (Europarc host) with a typical Stockholm hire bike.



Where the Royal National City Park managers have decided that path width is too narrow for horse use riders are signed to use a parallel alignment which is clear and visible.



Within Tyresta National Park bikes were only allowed on 2.5m wide tracks and not on any of the narrower trails.



All barrier gates into Söderåsen NP show signage emphasising the shared use nature of the path. In Scotland the presumption would be that access is permitted unless signage indicates differently. In Sweden the opposite would appear to be true.



The established Swedish position that bikes are only permitted on certain path standards was emphasised at one of the Kristianstads Vattenrike Biosphere Reserve projects which linked directly into a wider cycle network. Even here a short wide boardwalk section had no bike signage and enjoyed compliance.



Stenshuvud NP does not allow any bike access throughout, even on wider path sections where shared use could potentially succeed without conflict. This decision was made on the basis that the park is so small that zoning would be impractical and be hard to communicate.

3. Long distance routes



One of Sweden's long distance routes, Sörmlandsleden (www.sormlandsleden.se) passes through Tyresta NP. Symbology for the long distance routes across Sweden are two figures walking with backpacks.



The signage along Sörmlandsleden within Tyresta tends to be orange rings painted on various objects along the route. These rings are maintained by volunteers associated with the route.



The long distance route leading through Söderåsen NP is Skåneleden and this sign once again shows the national symbology for long distance routes and the typical orange ring painted in a rustic manner on the pole. Scotland is now launching “Scotland’s Great Trails” which have associated criteria. Such rustic signage would not meet the Scottish criteria.



Often the orange rings were within line of sight and very close together even at locations where the path was clearly defined with no junctions.



At times the orange rings were formalised and integrated into the NP signage which in my mind improved the credibility of the LDR. This is a Stenshuvud example.

4. Path design



Boardwalk was used by all locations visited in Sweden and here in Tyresta we can see a typical three plank width construction with steps.



Tyresta have begun to move away from the boardwalk design in sections with gravel material providing the surface. However the concept of machine built paths within NPs is not one which has been fully explored.



At times in Tyresta the boardwalk would narrow to a width of only two planks.



The most commonly used route within Söderåsen NP was a short loop around a small lake by the main car-park. The route was entirely boardwalk with a 20m bridge.



The boardwalk around the lake was in good condition with periodic resting places extended off. The boardwalk allowed an excellent visitor experience but placed a large maintenance burden upon the small team of NP staff.



In Söderåsen as visitors walk further from the main visitor hub the path standard becomes less inclusive as one would expect.



At the iconic Söderåsen lookout the NP staff have themselves built an all-abilities platform with a 30m ramp approach. This follows standard boardwalk specifications.



The Biosphere project has invested heavily into an all-abilities oak boardwalk and through that process consulted both the wheelchair audience and also the maintenance team.



The boardwalk in Stenshuvud was arguably the most attractive of all the NPs and with good width and a more natural appearance.



Stenshuvud had an interesting "dog-gate" attached to one bridge but I was not clear how the lead is passed through easily by the dog owner.

5. Directional signage



A standard NP fingerpost in Tyresta. The information was all present but felt almost cluttered.



Typical colour coded painted route markers on a tree in Tyresta. It could be argued that this rustic style fits with the surroundings however my personal preference is for trees to be left natural and way markers used.



Main path signage by the visitor hub at Söderåsen. This was effective but as the main site by the naturum it could be upgraded into some different and interesting interpretation for visitors with an associated map.



Simple signage in Söderåsen showing an all-abilities path which is also part of an LDR as symbolised by the orange square.



A prototype fingerpost in Stenshuvud NP. This shows the hexagonal pillar design EPA are considering as a standard.

6. Behavioural signage



In Söderåsen behaviour signage was not integrated into the main interpretation but was added separately.



Standard behavioural signage wording. As a responsible visitor to from the UK I would probably have missed this message but would have responded to symbology signage on the path.



Other behavioural signage in Söderåsen was very dry and presented in a wordy way which may hit a receptive audience but probably not elicit compliance from other audiences. These signs were used in the quiet area of the NP.



Typical small individual behaviour symbols reminding: no bikes, no horses, no camping and no fires.

7. Camping provision



Typical Tyresta informal camp site with fire-pit, shelter and benches. Visitors are expected to camp anywhere within the small lakeside clearing. The shelter was very basic with a mud floor.



Alternative informal campsite at Tyresta with no sleeping shelter. These were simple and popular no definitive camping area was clear. As a new visitor I was unsure where I could and could not camp. No toilets were provided so human waste issues were evident.



Shelter in Söderåsen with fire pit beside a small popular lake. The shelter only had a bench and was constructed from stone walls with an iron roof. Again no toilet was provided.



Camping was also allowed in Söderåsen on the grass areas around NP owned houses. Fire sites and benches were in situ. These large bunk houses were free to stay in and were commonly vandalised by groups.

8. Fire sites



Other than informal campsites Tyresta offered picnic areas with fire-pits, benches and wood supplies.



Typical wood supply store offering free wood to anyone using the facilities.



Picnic area on the edge on Söderåsen NP with rustic rock benches and interesting design of fire-site.



Söderåsen would also supply fire wood for visitors along with chopping blocks and mallets for use by visitors.

9. Threshold signage



The EPA published the “Guidelines for entrances to Sweden’s national parks” in November 2007 with the aims to “ensure high-quality experience from the start of a visit” and to “strengthen the profile of National Parks”. Alongside this second aspiration of raising the NP “brand” the guidelines also highlight that each NP is unique and that the entrances should convey such special qualities. So the aim is for consistency with individualism. The EPA has overall responsibility for the upgrade of NP entrances but some or all of aspects of the project may be delegated to the Park Manager.

Key aims within the guidelines are that the entrance infrastructure should be designed at the highest quality to the point that it should be notable for high architectural quality and that it should be a sustainable long-term solution. EPA tends to test approaches through pilot projects on individual Parks and when they were looking at a freestanding marker announcing the NP they used Fulufället as shown in this photo.

A similar free standing marker is in place at Söderåsen which can be seen in the photo below.



This blue freestanding structure was quite impressive from a distance but up close the detail and condition was not of the standard expected by the EPA guidelines. Indeed the staff of Söderåsen were quite dismissive of the structure and looked forward to its replacement. The blue paint looked particularly poor after rain. However, it and its replica at the other entrance to the NP certainly left the visitor with no uncertainty that they had just entered a NP.



Comparatively Tyresta had no threshold signage of note and was only served by standard Swedish road signs.



Road signs within Sweden include this standard black and white symbol for sites of interest.



This is the first gateway that most visitors pass through to enter into Tyresta forest having parked in the main car park.



Threshold signage within Stenshuvud was understated, a simple large sheltered interpretation panel with leaflet dispenser.

10. Visitor Centres

Particularly interesting was that the EPA have copy-righted the term “naturum” and have set out strict criteria to ensure that the public across Sweden know they will receive a certain level of experience when they visit a naturum. I had presumed that the word naturum was Swedish however this is not the case and it is simply a word “invented” to convey themes of nature and learning.



Tyresta naturum which is designed in the shape of Sweden.



The interpretation within the very light and spacious space of Tyresta naturum.



Tyresta naturum also included a cinema space for use by school groups and community events.



A mobile experiential exhibit where children spend time in a dark space listening to sounds of nature. This was in Tyresta but tours around naturums.



Söderåsen naturum was under considerable renovations during my visit with very ambitious plans. The external design of this Naturum was consistent with local design of the area.



Stenshuvud naturum was a modern building with a very light airy feel. Following naturum criteria the building hosted huge numbers of events but I wonder whether public attendances and quality would suffer due to such targets. Ranger led walks certainly seemed popular whilst I was on site.

11. General facilities



Courtyard area at Tyresta NP with café and also sheltered buildings for visitors to eat food they have brought themselves.



Söderåsen recycling facilities at the viewpoint car-park. Very little litter was evident on site.



Söderåsen toilet facilities at the viewpoint car-park. These followed the traditional design of the area and fitted well with the woodland environment.



High quality accommodation within NP owned housing in Söderåsen. I felt privileged to be able to stay in such a site and as a visitor would have paid handsomely for such an opportunity.



Health walks project within Royal National City Park. The clear map with distances and stages was very effective.



Additional health circuit signage within Royal National City Park. This was cheap but effective.

C/ Summary of potential outcomes and learning for Scotland

1. “naturum”

The concept of a copyrighted quality stamp for visitor centres such as “naturum” is a very interesting concept which Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park may explore. The concept is already incorporated within a Draft Park Plan. The final park Plan sets-out our strategic direction over the next 5 years.

2. Threshold Signage

The threshold signage shown within the “Guidelines for entrances to Sweden’s national parks” is very interesting and could inform LLTNP plans.

3. Camp sites

LLTNP are only now looking into informal camp sites and the experience of seeing the Swedish models was very useful. In Scotland traditionally there have been very few options between camping in a very controlled caravan site or alternatively without any facilities at all. We are now looking to work with different landowners to install a network of quality informal campsites which offer a wilderness experience but with managed compost toilets and fire-sites.

4. Firewood

We have long discussed the option of providing firewood to resolve the destruction of vegetation associated with irresponsible camping. The time consuming nature of supplying firewood within Swedish NPs was very interesting and we will have to consider that thoroughly at LLTNP as we move forward.

5. Anti-social behaviour

There is a perception within Scotland that Scandinavian countries do not have the anti-social behaviour issues of the same level. However this trip made it very clear that issues such as vandalism, human waste and littering are prevalent. Although sites like East Loch Lomond may be of a different scale generally Sweden suffered similar issues with large visitor numbers and enforcement.

6. Active travel infrastructure investment

Active travel within Stockholm and more specifically Copenhagen was inspiring. It was clear that the level of investment and clear sensible road and junction design is the basis for the success in these cities. I will hope to share some of the designs and concepts with as many road designers in the NP as possible.

7. Stockholm bike hire

The bike hire in Stockholm seemed a very successful, cheap (£24 for a 7 month season) and easy mechanism. The bikes were attractive and functional without being a temptation for theft. Both locals and tourists used the system in large numbers and the bike stations were clear, uncluttered and user friendly.

8. Copenhagen bus stop islands

This was logical solution to a common problem within urban areas in the UK. This easy change allowed continuous cycle flow and removed the dangerous scenario where cyclists are forced to brake, stop or overtake within a bus drivers blind spot.

9. Information sharing

There is also a perception that Scandinavia has all of the answers to access queries but this visit emphasised that there was a hunger in Swedish NP staff to share knowledge and learn new technologies and techniques from other countries. Within Scotland we have information sharing networks such as Scottish Countryside Access Network (SCAN), West of Scotland Access Officers Group, and Scottish Access Technical Information Network (SATIN) but there are opportunities to spread the net further and liaise more frequently with networks such as EUROPARC.

D/ Summary of potential outcomes and learning for Sweden

1. Staff isolation

There was little consistency through the NPs visited. Swedish NP staff tend to be split into Interpretation Rangers who lead on interpretation work and Rangers who deal with paths, fire-sites and maintenance. These are very small groups of enthusiastic individuals who would greatly benefit from greater central support and information sharing facilitated by EPA or another body.

2. Advertising

The lack of cohesion between National Parks and the wider tourism sector was noticeable. For example Tyresta NP had very little presence within nearby Stockholm and is not easily stumbled upon. This is apparently due to the fact that Stockholm Tourist centres charge for displays and therefore only advertise destinations which have budgets to pay the advertising costs. From the outside this appears a strange scenario and one that EPA need to address to encourage a different audience into Swedens NPs.

3. Consistency

The fact that each National Park has its own particular set of rules is confusing for overseas visitors such as myself.

4. Directional signage

EPA considerations for standard signs following a hexagonal design makes sense in theory but will result in far higher costs which on a national scale would be a significant barrier for field staff.

5. Specialist access advice

There seems to be little national specialist access assistance from EPA for NP staff across the country. There could be huge benefits in terms of path and signage standards if there was some sort of specialist support mechanism which can help the field staff. The field staff are skilled but usually generalists, and a specialist could support and educate field staff in finding the best solutions which reduces maintenance commitments. This would avoid the “reinventing the wheel” problem. Scotland could offer much specialist access advice and construction standards.

6. Boardwalks

The continued use of traditional timber boardwalks is placing greater maintenance and liability pressures on Swedish NPs than would be the case if they invested in new boardwalk technologies such as recycled plastic or accepted constructed path design as an option.

7. Long Distance Routes

The profile of long distance routes would appear to be strong in Sweden but I felt that some greater professional support could greatly enhance the experience of the route users and more professional signage would only add credibility to the route and not diminish any charm. The WHW in Scotland which passes through LLTNP is certainly a very successful packages product and it would be interesting to compare visitor number between that and Sweden LDRs.

8. Business opportunities

Swedish NPs, particularly Söderåsen, own many general facilities which could potentially be used to bring in additional income. For example Söderåsen does not charge accommodation costs for staying at the NP owned bunk houses. These are currently in a dilapidated state but could easily turn into quality facilities for visitors which operate on a sustainable financial basis. Potentially they could be leased to a local business to help the local economy.

9. Volunteers

The concept of volunteering would appear to not fit with Swedish policy however in these economic times I feel that a well structured and supported volunteer sector could greatly benefit the NPs. In Scotland the voluntary sector is strong and is structured in a manner which does not affect employment numbers. Within LLTNPA we have 140 active volunteers who do various tasks which can include maintenance work or visitor interaction with our Rangers to help with workload. This also allows individuals to develop skills and enhance future job prospects with ourselves and other organisations. This introduction also helps our recruitment processes and many of our staff started as volunteers to learn skills and decide whether such work is for them. I personally volunteered for LLTNPA for a year before securing a job. We have recently set-up a new Volunteer Ranger strand which has 21 individuals representing the Park more formally.

10. Söderåsen hub investment

Söderåsen would benefit from securing considerable investment to upgrade the lake side boardwalk which would greatly enhance visitor experience and reduce unmanageable maintenance pressures on both staff and finances. Investment in this “hub” area is greater value for money than any improvements to the less visited areas of the Park.

11. Shared-use paths

EPA could consider whether guidance on cycle suitable paths is fit-for-purpose or whether responsible shared use approaches adopted in other countries would be appropriate and improve visitor numbers and experience.

12. Iconic projects

Individual NPs and the EPA could consider whether innovative path projects would have greater impact on visitors and provide greater value for money. The cover picture is of a site called Bracklinn Falls within LLTNP where ourselves and the community worked hard to secure considerable funding to install an iconic bridge structure which conveyed messages of sustainability whilst generating visitor and press interest, thereby increasing the NP profile and generating economic growth within the area. This has proven extremely successful in both national press coverage and visitor numbers.

13. People counters

As part of the Bracklinn Project we installed new people counter technology to ensure that we could evidence value of money through visitor numbers. EPA could potentially pilot such technology which downloads remotely to a website daily and provides the highest quality data we have witnessed. For more information on this system you can visit <http://www.eco-compteur.com>

14. Online behavioural signage

Each Swedish National Park was very interested in standardising both directional and behavioural signage. Each seemed impressed by an internet signage tool used by both Scottish National Parks which generates instant behavioural signage which follows national standards but is site specific. This greatly reduces staff time and cost and provides visitors with consistent signs they recognise and comply with. More information on this concept can be seen at www.easysignage.co.uk/demo. (username: demo/ password: demo).

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