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naidheachdan ■ news

Ledgowan Estate "distortion" of events

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Ledgowan Estate have given their version of events regarding an encounter with walkers in October which sparked widespread criticism of their land access policy.

Dr Kenneth Brown recounted how he and his wife, Maureen, were walking on hills on the estate when they were approached by a man later identified as Richard Simpson, son of Ledgowan owner Andrew, who demanded to know what they were doing "walking on his hill".

Mr Simpson then launched into an interrogation of their activities, Dr Brown said, adding that he was "extraordinarily arrogant and ill-mannered". Dr Brown commented at the time: "I informed him that we were simply exercising our statutory right of access to the

countryside and that that was all he needed to know."

A letter given to an Achnasheen resident recently by the estate encloses an "incident report".

In the report Mr Simpson writes that he saw two people walking near the lodge before they returned to their car. He then saw them walking on the hill and took photographs of their vehicle's number plates — as "I didn't know who these people were" — before returning an hour later to see the couple returning to their car.

Mr Simpson states that he approached the couple: "The elderly gentleman didn't seem that happy to see me waiting their (sic) came storming through the gate and up to my face in quite an aggressive manner, demanding to know why I was watching him and taking pictures of his car."

After telling the couple that stalking was underway and that it was unsafe to be

"wandering the hills", Mr Simpson writes that he asked why the couple were there. He found it "suspicious" that they did not walk past the lodge earlier in the day "and had driven to another part of the estate to go for their walk, without being seen". He adds that he took photos of Dr and Mrs Brown "as a safeguard".

Mr Simpson concludes: "The woman then asked why there were no signs there saying stalking was in progress and that dogs must be kept on a lead. I replied that there was a sign there stating, Ledgowan estate, working with the environment please do not disturb."

Responding to Mr Simpson's claims, Dr Brown said: "Far from being even an alternative, subjective account, it is a blatantly dishonest distortion of our encounter. Consequently, I stand firmly by the short description that my wife, Maureen, and I prepared on 5th October in order to record

matters accurately and without exaggeration while they were fresh in our minds.

"We read, almost with amusement, that Simpson accuses me of 'storming' down the hillside towards him. That would have been quite an achievement as I was — and still am — recovering from a hip replacement operation a few weeks before the incident and was obliged to use two walking sticks!

"It was also why we chose to access the estate by that unlocked gate rather than risk a contretemps between our own elderly dog and two apparently aggressive sheep dogs in the vicinity of the estate house."

Dr Brown added: "Maureen and I have been walking on hills throughout the Highlands for the past 40 years and I have climbed the highest Scottish hills hundreds of times. Perhaps we have been lucky, but we had never encountered this kind of ignorant, aggressive behaviour until we met Simpson."

MSP calls for quicker action — see page 10