

Bill and Catherine Guest

We are delighted to add our voices to the call for a ban on alcohol on Scottish trains. The following is a letter we sent to the HQ of East Coast Trains in August this year. We received a letter from the CEO more or less wringing her hands and saying there was little to be done.

"On 5th August my wife and I travelled on an East Coast train 1400hrs from Edinburgh to London Kings Cross. We sat in coach C, seats 21 and 22. It was a most unpleasant journey.

When we got on board our coach was absolutely stifling, and it remained so for the rest of the trip. Nothing could apparently be done about this. Much later on we were on two occasions offered bottles of water which, although most welcome, could not of course alleviate the problem. It may well be, we suspect, that our coach was added to the train at Edinburgh after sitting out in what was a very hot sun; but this was no excuse. We trust that you may hear from other passengers about this.

To add to our discomfort, a group of Glaswegians, clearly in party mood, arrived shortly after we boarded and sat in front of us. There were seven of them, three men and four women, aged between about thirty and fifty. We noticed that, along with various – clinking – plastic bags they also had with them a large cool-box which they placed on their table. They then proceeded, over their journey to Peterborough, to drink the contents, and after an hour or so were very noisily drunk, singing, swearing and generally making merry. This continued, uninterrupted and at high decibels, for the rest of their journey. They were not I should add in any way threatening, but this alas was not much of a bonus. By the time we reached Newark they had turned their attention to the family opposite them (grandmother, mother and two little girls), who were clearly uneasy, and by the time they got off the train had succeeded, against the wishes of the girls' grandmother – who finally had had to give up protesting – on pressing five-pound notes on each of the girls.

Finally, as the party disembarked at Peterborough, as a last throw, they lost – or thought they had lost – a bag, and the train was held up for a few minutes while one of the women weaved her way up the train looking in vain for the bag, which had already it seems reached the platform unnoticed.

The relief! If it had not been for the fact that we were still sweltering we would have enjoyed the silence even more.

We have been regular passengers to Scotland over the years (we are in our seventies and my wife is Scots) and clearly the alcohol problem is a long-established one on all trains. But having had this most recent experience we really feel that it is beyond time for serious measures to be taken to sort this out once and for all. It may be that some law or laws would have to be changed or introduced, but the ideal solution, or so it seems to us, would be for passengers to be forbidden to bring their own alcohol on to trains. Airlines seem to be able to accomplish this, and no-one protests. Surely it should not be impossible to do the same on trains?

It may be that there are not very many passengers who behave in this way; but it is nevertheless a problem which needs – at long last - to be addressed. It only takes one or two drunks to make other passengers' journeys – especially long ones - intolerable.

We could of course have travelled in the quiet coach, and this is something we shall have to consider for the future, but really this is not something we should be forced into doing."

Where Scotland leads let us hope England follows!