

DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP

Eleventh Annual Report of the Dartmoor Steering Group to the Secretaries of State for Environment and Defence

September 1992

ELEVENTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP

INTRODUCTION

1. The Tenth Annual Report of the Dartmoor Steering Group was submitted to the Secretaries of State for Defence and the Environment in April 1991, and covered the twentyfourth, the twentyfifth and the twenty-sixth meetings of the Group. Since then 3 further meetings have been held: the twenty-seventh at County Hall, Exeter on 9 May 1991, the twenty-eighth at Okehampton Camp on 22 October 1991 and the twenty-ninth at Headquarters Commando Forces Royal Marines, Plymouth on 7 April 1992. A statement was issued to the Press after each meeting.
2. The Working Party has held 4 meetings since the last Report and we are grateful for the continued support afforded to the Steering Group. Some excellent work has been carried out by the Working Party in furtherance of the Group's principal task. In accordance with agreed procedure, in April 1992, the National Park Officer took over the Chairmanship of the Working Party from the nominee of COC Southern District until 1994 when the latter will resume the Chairmanship.
3. In general, significant progress has been made during the period of this report. There can be no doubt that this has been achieved because of the sensible, cooperative, friendly and positive attitude displayed by members of both the Working Party and the Steering Group, and the agencies they represent. This is most heartening and augurs well for future steps towards achieving our principal task, namely, of achieving the best possible reconciliation of the requirements of military training, conservation and public access.

WILLSWORTHY CAMP

4. The Steering Group was informed that the replacement of Willsworthy Training Camp on a site at Higher Beardon had been delayed due to the implications of Options for Change. The military authorities now plan to begin the necessary preliminary roadworks in September 1993, with construction of the camp building following in FY 1994/95. Removal of the existing camp would take place within 6 months of completion of the new camp building.

DUCHY OF CORNWALL LICENCE

5. The Duchy of Cornwall and the military authorities have kept the Steering Group informed throughout the bilateral negotiations for renewal of the licence for military training on Okehampton and Merrivale Ranges. The new licence was signed in July 1991 and is for a period of 21 years from 29 September 1991. The Steering Group was briefed on the terms of the licence insofar as these affect the Group's function.
6. It was reported that the Dartmoor National Park Committee expressed disappointment at the length of the renewal period at its meeting on 25 July 1991. However, the Steering Group was informed that the National Park Committee recognised the significant concessions made by the military authorities in the interests of

conservation and access and, in particular, welcomed the reduction in the number of days when live firing is permitted, the cessation of high explosive artillery firing after 1998, and the reduction in the size of the range area by some 400 acres. The National Park Committee also recognised that the concessions were made not without inconvenience to military interests.

DUCHY OF CORNWALL LICENCE - PUBLIC INFORMATION

7. Following the announcement, accompanied by a Press Release, by the Duchy of Cornwall about the new licence for military training on Dartmoor, it was suggested in the Steering Group that more detail of the terms of the licence should be made available to the public and other interested bodies.

8. While this was principally a matter for the Duchy, it was agreed that a rather more comprehensive document in extension of the Press Release would be produced and made available on request to third parties. Accordingly a draft document was tabled in the Steering Group, was endorsed, is available to third parties, and will be displayed in the High Moorland Visitors' Centre to be opened in Princetown in 1993.

REASSESSMENT OF CONSERVATION/RECREATIONAL BENEFITS

9. In view of the term of the new licence which gives the military authorities an assured presence on Dartmoor for 21 years, the National Park proposed that certain new initiatives in connection with improved conservation efforts and greater public access should be considered. The Steering Group invited the Working Party to undertake the task and accordingly a list of firm objectives was presented to the Steering Group. These objectives are set out at Annex.

10. The Steering Group commended the objectives as a wide ranging and significant new initiative which demonstrated the real commitment and willingness of all parties to work together towards achieving the main purposes of the Group. The Working Party is currently working towards translating the objectives into material benefits on the ground.

CRAMBER TOR DRY TRAINING AREA

11. The licence from South West Water Plc and the planning consent for dry training on Cramber Tor on the South Moor lapsed on 29 September 1991. The military authorities however, while wishing to retain training rights on the land, had been unable to take the necessary action to resume these rights before the agreement lapsed. This was because it had been agreed with the National Park that to proceed with arrangements for the continued use of Cramber Tor would be meaningless while the Duchy licence remained unresolved. The Duchy licence was not signed until the end of July 1991. However, a further hurdle stood in the way of resuming training rights. In 1986 when the use of Cramber Tor was last renegotiated, the military authorities undertook to review the need for dry training on Cramber Tor after September 1991 through the Steering Group machinery.

12. The military authorities therefore submitted a Circular 18/84 consultation document to West Devon Borough Council and to the National Park Authority in September 1991, and gave a formal presentation to the Steering Group on the need for the continuation of dry training on Cramber Tor in October 1991.

13. After detailed consideration and negotiation of conditions the National Park Authority responded favourably to the Circular 18/84 submission and dry training can continue on Cramber Tor for a period of 9 years. In connection with the National Park's agreement to a 9 year term, the military authorities have undertaken to surrender training rights on the 820 acres comprising Roborough Down, a popular area for residents of Plymouth and for visitors.

ENVIRONMENTAL BASELINE

14. The Environmental Baseline was established in 1984 with Steering Group approval. It was a joint exercise between the military authorities, the National Park and the Nature Conservancy Council (now English Nature). The baseline was extended in 1986 by the Breeding Bird Survey carried out by the RSPB. It was an attempt to establish a baseline as an inventory of the natural environment of the Moor and covered about 12% of the land used for military training. Against this baseline and by monitoring and resurveying at intervals, it was intended to detect changes in the natural environment.

15. Originally the baseline involved a ground survey of 4 sample areas selected for their topography and vegetation types. Of these, 2 were located in areas of deep peat which had suffered from cratering caused by artillery firing in order to monitor the effect of cratering on peat.

16. The first resurvey was carried out in 1987 when very little change was detected. The second resurvey was carried out in Spring 1992 (Summer 1992 for Breeding Birds) but the results are not yet available. However, the Steering Group has had its attention drawn to the impact of recent developments which indicate a need to review the purpose of the baseline in order to decide on its future. For example, the need to review crater zone plots would end in 1998 when high explosive artillery firing ceased. It had also been suggested that dry training areas should be covered by the baseline and, of course, account must be taken of the National Park's Draft Monitoring Strategy and the fact that Dartmoor has been notified as an Environmentally Sensitive Area.

17. English Nature recommended that the baseline should continue as a flexible monitoring programme with elements being added or subtracted as circumstances dictated. The Steering Group agreed to endorse this general approach and confirmed the Group's commitment to continue the Environmental Baseline.

THE NATIONAL PARK'S REVIEW PANEL REPORT - FIT FOR THE FUTURE

18. The National Park's Review Panel was set up by the Countryside Commission to look into the working of the National Parks. Chapter 10 of the Report dealt with military use of the National Parks. The

Report was drawn to the attention of the Steering Group and the military authorities expressed concern that the Report had been compiled and published without consultation. The Countryside Commission had been made aware of the situation and a meeting of officials was to take place.

19. The Steering Group was however informed that the MOD stood by its Declaration of Commitment to the National Parks and did not think the Report raised any new issues. It was pointed out that military training occurred on only 3% of the National Parks and live firing on only 2% of that land. The Group was told that the MOD record was good on conservation, release of land, liaison at local and national level and public access. The military authorities did not accept the recommendations at Chapter 10 and saw a continuing need for the training that takes place on Dartmoor.

20. The Government response to the Report, made in January 1992, insofar as it applies to Chapter 10, was noted by the Steering Group and, in particular, that the Government did not consider that an independant commission would serve any useful purpose and that there would be a continuing need for military use of land in National Parks. The Steering Group also noted that the military authorities had already given up 400 acres of land in connection with the renewal of the Duchy licence and would also give up 820 acres of Roborough Down in 1994 in view of the 9 year licence granted for Cramber Tor by the National Park. New initiatives on conservation and for improved public access were already underway in the Steering Group and the cessation of artillery firing high explosives by September 1998 had previously been agreed.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL LEAFLET

21. A revised Archaeological leaflet has been published to replace an earlier version 'A Field Guide to Archaeology' published in 1986. This is primarily for the use of Servicemen training on the Moor. Stocks are to be held at the National Park Authority's information points for use by the general public.

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Secretaries

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Chairman

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ANNEX

1. Removal of Redundant Military Artefacts.
(Existing list plus any other items)
2. Prevention of Civilian Vehicle Use of Unauthorised Tracks.
3. Restoration of Unnecessary Tracks to Moorland.
4. Improvement in Appearance and Standard of Maintenance of Military Infrastructure.
5. Initiatives for Improving Public Knowledge and Awareness of Military Use of National Park.
6. Efforts to Avoid Use of Popular Visitor Sites for Dry Training.
7. Increase Public Access including Possible Reduction of Danger Areas.