

# MANAGEMENT IN CONFIDENCE

## FIRST ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP

### I INTRODUCTION

1. The Dartmoor Steering Group is a consultative body established by HMG as part of the action taken on the Report of Lady Sharp on the continued use of Dartmoor for military training. Such a body had been recommended to Lady Sharp by the Countryside Commission and the Dartmoor National Park Committee jointly.
2. The Group comprises the GOC South West District, the MGRM Commando Forces, the Head of Defence Lands and the Property Services Agency/Senior Estate Surveyor Plymouth on the military side, of a representative of the Duchy of Cornwall as the principal land owner concerned, and representing environmental, ecological and recreational interests of two members of the Dartmoor National Park Committee, and representatives of the Countryside Commission, the Nature Conservancy Council, the South West Regional Office of the Department of the Environment, and of the Department of Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings. Matters of detail are referred to a supporting Working Party. We are grateful to them for their preliminary investigations which have been most helpful.
3. Our tasks are to keep under review progress made in considering those recommendations contained in Lady Sharp's report which were accepted by HMG in Cmnd 6837, and, through comprehensive consultation, to obtain the best possible reconciliation of the requirements of military training, conservation and public access. Certain difficulties have arisen due to the fact that the National Park representatives can express only personal views which are not binding on their fellow committee-members. Although this is understandable it limits the ability of the Steering Group to become an effective link in the chain, and there is a danger that so far from positively assisting in achieving agreed and reasonable solutions, we shall become a source of delay. We recognise this risk and will be at pains to avoid it.
4. It must be recognised that there is a fundamental conflict between the requirements and objectives of military training and those of the National Park. Two consequences follow:

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a. Those who expect major reductions in Military training as a result of our work are likely to be disappointed. Progress should instead be sought in the cumulative effect of a wide variety of minor improvements taken to adjust the achievement of these conflicting requirements and objectives so that they can accommodate each other with the least possible harm. However, Cmnd 6837 states clearly that there are no grounds for offering any hope of significant reduction in the demands of military training on Dartmoor in the foreseeable future and it is therefore plainly necessary for the Steering Group to be able to discuss meaningfully major issues that arise and to attempt to suggest the means of resolving these, and not just to seek to make progress in areas which may be relatively uncontentious.

b. Second, issues which raise a conflict of principle may arise from time to time. We shall try to offer solutions to these but to do so must entail a compromise by one side or the other. Where compromise is not possible, issues will still have to be referred to Ministers for decision.

5. We have held four meetings: the first at County Hall Exeter on 27 September 1978; the second at the Royal Marines Commando Training Centre Lympstone on 19 December 1978; the third at County Hall Exeter on 26 March 1979; and the fourth at Okehampton Camp on 26 June 1979. After the meeting at Okehampton we toured Dartmoor by helicopter, landing at four places. Visibility was excellent and we were able to have a thorough look at the whole of the area with which we are concerned. Our discussions have been characterised by an informality which has enabled us to examine the problems frankly and objectively. A statement has been issued to the Press after each meeting.

## II INCREASE OF PUBLIC ACCESS

6. Between the publication of Lady Sharp's Report and our first meeting, South West District arranged for a total of 270 acres on the Eastern side of the Merrivale Ranges to be freed from live firing. An adjustment of the danger area boundary has enabled the public to be permitted access at all times to most of the West Dart River valley.

7. The possibility of transferring the small arms ranges to a site outside the National Park was carefully considered but the strong opposition from alternative areas had to be recognised as an obstacle which could only be overcome by incurring disproportionate expense and conflict with environmental and other interests. With the recent Government decision that the Willsworthy Ranges are to be retained, we attach great importance to their re-alignment to allow as much public access as possible in the Tavy Cleave area.

8. Lady Sharp recommended a further examination of the possibility of transferring most of the artillery and mortar firing from Dartmoor to Salisbury Plain. We are informed that it is not possible to transfer all such firing, but there is considerable under-usage of the Dartmoor Ranges at present and South West District have undertaken to keep the level of firing to the minimum necessary to meet the essential operational training requirements, and to discuss any future increase. Members have made it clear that they wish to keep this matter under review.

9. Emphasis on the increase of access for the public is matched by concern to ensure their safety. Additional precautionary measures recently determined include an increase in visual surveillance. We have seen the places where it is proposed to instal a few additional look-out posts for the Range Wardens and shelters for their horses. The military have submitted a proposal for these under the Circular 7/77 Procedure to the National Park and a speedy decision is required to obviate the risk of severe discomfort and suffering for the Range Wardens and their horses in the winter months.

### III CONSERVATION

10. At the outset of our discussions it was evident that there was insufficient knowledge of the environmental consequences of military training, and of the damage which might be done to ancient monuments. We accepted the need to establish the present position against which future ecological and other changes can be measured, but realised that to do this effectively might require considerable resources of manpower and money. It is hoped that sufficient can be achieved by a Conservation Group of scientists and managers who

will consider nature conservation in the context of the whole of the high moor.

11. As regards the preservation of ancient monuments and archaeological remains, it appears that much work has already been done by the Archaeological Division of the Ordnance Survey and by the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments. A survey has already been carried out of the Merrivale area and is now being processed. An aerial survey has also recently been carried out of parts of Okehampton and Willsworthy Ranges. We understand that by this time next year the sites will all be identified and the base-line set up for all the ranges. Consideration will then be given to the marking of archaeological sites.

#### IV TRANSFER OF MILITARY TRAINING

12. Lady Sharp recommended that dry training over the National Trust land at Ringmoor should be reduced by transferring it elsewhere. The Services have been without proper dry training facilities in this area since their use of the National Trust land on Ringmoor for the full range of dry training ceased in December 1976, when the Leases ended and the National Trust refused to renew them on the old basis. An area around Cramberton Tor, owned by the South West Water Authority, is under consideration and formal proposals under Circular 7/77 have been submitted to the National Park.

R. S. C. Gray

W. E. Bennett  
Secretaries

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