

DARTMOOR

STEERING GROUP

4th Annual Report
(1982)

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

July 1983

FOURTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP

I INTRODUCTION

1. The Third Annual Report was submitted to the Secretaries of State for Defence and for the Environment in May 1982 and covered the eighth, ninth and tenth meetings of the Group. Since then we have held two meetings: the eleventh at County Hall, Exeter on 29th April 1982 and the twelfth at Headquarters South West District, Bulford Camp, Near Salisbury on 27th October 1982. A statement has been issued to the Press after each meeting.

2. Our supporting Working Party have held two meetings and we are grateful to them for their continued assistance. In accordance with the agreed procedure, in October 1982 the National Park Officer handed over the Chairmanship of the Working Party to the nominee of the GOC South West District until October 1984 when the former will assume the Chairmanship once again.

II PUBLIC ACCESS: OKEHAMPTON RING ROAD

3. In our last Report we mentioned that the Duchy of Cornwall, as landowners, were proposing to convene a meeting to discuss the problem of the Ring Road. We have since been informed that a meeting has been held by the Duchy to discuss the present situation and that it had been attended by representatives of the Dartmoor National Park Authority, the Ministry of Defence, the Dartmoor Preservation Association and Lady Sayer. We were also informed that, as a

result of the meeting, the Duchy had undertaken to consult its Attorney General about the legal status of the road; and that further consultations would take place with those interested before any decision is taken. We now await the decision of the Duchy with interest.

III WILLSWORTHY: PROPOSED MODERNISATION OF THE RANGES

4. We have had further discussions about the proposed Electric Target Range and Mechanised Moving Target Trainer which the Services propose to construct at Willsworthy. We were informed that the Countryside Commission had undertaken a feasibility study, in the light of Baroness Sharp's recommendations, to see whether alternative areas could be found for these Ranges outside the National Park. The feasibility study was not successful in finding a suitable alternative.

5. We were informed by the Chairman of the National Park Committee that the Committee might well feel that they could not object in very strong terms to the modernisation of the Ranges. He was concerned, however, that the decision to rebuild Willsworthy Camp had been taken unilaterally by the Ministry of Defence since the publication of the Baroness Sharp Report and that there had been no public debate on the possibility of using alternative sites. He also said that he could not entirely separate the proposed reconstruction of the Camp from the modernisation of the Ranges and, with this in mind, he had previously advocated the concentration of all facilities at an existing establishment such as Okehampton Camp. He went on to say that it would be more acceptable to the National Park Authority if a 'package' of proposals could be

presented which would remove the Camp from Willsworthy. The Ministry of Defence representative assured the National Park Committee representatives that the Ministry of Defence viewed the proposals for the Range and those for the Camp as entirely separate and that, should the National Park Committee accept the proposal for the Ranges, it would be without prejudice to any subsequent decision on the proposals for a Camp which may emerge.

6. At the invitation of the General Officer Commanding South West District, the Group was able to visit the existing range complex at Bulford on 27th October 1982 and saw various types of ranges and had them explained. The Group was also told that training activity is being increased as Government restrictions are lifted and that an urgent need was recognised for new ranges to meet the demand for weapon training, particular as the Falklands War had underlined the importance of maintaining shooting standards.

7. At our meeting on 27th October 1982, we were informed by the National Park Officer that the Circular 7/77 Consultation on the proposed improvements to the small arms ranges at Willsworthy had been advertised and sent out for consultation, with a decision likely to be made by the National Park Committee in December. In the event a decision to object to the proposals was made in November. This was clearly a disappointment for some members of our group and once again illustrated that however well-established and sophisticated liaison and consultation arrangements might be, they cannot remove fundamental differences. Our understanding is that in objecting the Park Committee considers that the Willsworthy Range proposals raise defence training and landscape conservation issues of national importance the final decision on

which can only properly rest with central government. We now await that decision.

IV WILLSWORTHY: PROPOSED REBUILD OF THE CAMP

8. In our last report we mentioned that there might be possible alternative sites for the Camp, and that we had referred to the Working Party the issue of identifying the least damaging possibilities, so that the Property Services Agency could then submit them in outline under the Circular 7/77 Consultation Procedure to the National Park Authority. At our meeting on 29th April 1982, we were informed that the Working Party had considered the draft 7/77 notification for the reconstruction of the camp involving two alternative sites together with a third potential site also within the boundaries of the full extent of Willsworthy camp. We were also told that the National Park Officer had emphasised to the Working Party that the marginal environmental advantages between the three sites were insignificant when compared with the arguments of principle about the 'replacement' of the existing structures, which appear to change the form and function of the establishment. At that meeting the Chairman of the National Park Committee stressed the joint policy of his Committee and the Countryside Commission, that there should be no more investment by the Ministry of Defence to keep or prolong the presence of the Services on the Moor. He said he did not accept the fact that the Camp is essential at Willsworthy, as there is already a large establishment at Okehampton which is not over-used.

9. The Ministry of Defence representative explained that the proposal to rebuild the camp on the present site at Willsworthy did not, in their opinion, constitute a material change. He told us that the Ministry of Defence would be prepared to consider alternative sites within their freehold which the National Park Authority might wish to propose, if it met the requirements of the Ministry of Defence and if the National Park Authority could give their assurances that outline Planning Clearance would be given for the rebuild on that site. He went on to say that Okehampton Camp was not an acceptable alternative and that the reasons for this would be made clear to the National Park Authority in the formal 7/77 notification, which would be submitted following the receipt of comments from the National Park Officer on the draft forwarded to him earlier.

10. At our last meeting we were informed that, following a joint initiative between the National Park Officer and the Ministry of Defence, possible alternative sites for the camp off the moorland were currently being explored. The Ministry of Defence representative confirmed, however, that should the Willsworthy site ultimately be selected, the Ministry of Defence would not argue that the case for it was enhanced by the National Park Committee's prior approval of the modernisation of the Ranges.

V ARTILLERY AND MORTAR FIRING

11. In our last report we mentioned that this subject would be kept under regular review. During the period covered by this report, however, the Willsworthy proposals have overshadowed all other matters to such an extent that this subject was never discussed.

VI CONSERVATION

12. We reported in Paragraph 21 of our last Annual Report that there were certain practical difficulties in establishing an Environmental Base Line, which was first proposed and accepted in principle at our first meeting, as a means of monitoring and assessing the military impact. We have discussed this matter further and we have been advised that the only unchallengeable base line would be photographic, but that this would need a sample ground survey for adequate interpretation. We understand, however, that the Nature Conservancy Council have expressed concern that, if proper care is not taken in the selection of sample areas, the results would not be representative and could adversely exaggerate the results. Also, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) now have a new method of map making from aerial photography which may help in the determination of the Base Line. The National Park Officer has stressed, however, that use of aerial photographs must be accompanied by examination on the ground and this could be expensive if not confined in extent. We await a further report from the Working Party on this subject.

13. The establishment of an archaeological trail or walk was first proposed by the Working Party and approved at our first meeting. The proposal concerned the military 'environmental appreciation' courses that had been run in the past to make Servicemen aware of the archaeology of Dartmoor and suggested that these be extended to include instruction on the ground with an archaeological walk. We have to report, however, that there has been no progress in the setting up of such a walk. At our last meeting we were informed that the

Department of the Environment had made a film entitled 'Looking at Pre-historic Sites 1982' and we agreed that as part of the preparations for future Ten Tors Expeditions, participants should be told of this film and encouraged to view it.

VII TRANSFER OF MILITARY TRAINING - CRAMBER TOR

14. We reported in Paragraph 22 of our last Annual Report that military training had started on Cramber Tor on 4th March 1981 for a trial period of two years. We were told at our last meeting that the Ministry of Defence had applied to the National Park Authority under the Circular 7/77 Consultation Procedure for an extension of this use.

VIII THE ROLE OF THE STEERING GROUP

15. In our last Annual Report we referred to the consideration by the National Park Committee and the Countryside Commission of a broad joint policy approach to military training on Dartmoor. The Services view that this joint policy was inconsistent with the government White Paper and Lady Sharp's report, that it lacked balance and contained inaccuracies was also reported. The National Park undertook to take the Services views into account in finalising the review of the National Park Plan. We understand that this has happened and that the Plan now contains a statement on behalf of the Services as well as the formal adoption of the National Park/Countryside Commission policy approach to military training which was referred to in our last Annual Report. Included is the adoption by the National Park Committee of the following guidelines when considering development proposals by the Ministry of Defence:-

- (a) To resist investment in military facilities which might consolidate the present position.
- (b) To discourage all training that could be done elsewhere.
- (c) Not to approve the licensing of new land for military use in the National Park.

16. The implementation of this Commission/National Park Authority joint policy has already made itself felt, the objection to the Willsworthy proposals stemming directly from it. Such direct opposition has led to a degree of frustration on the part of the Services who feel that they desperately need these training facilities and still believe that this policy does not follow the spirit of Lady Sharp's Report and Government policy set out in the White Paper which accompanied it.

17. The fact that the National Park and the Services have fundamental differences in their interpretations of Government policy is making some aspects of our deliberations very difficult. This difficulty is at its most acute when we are considering proposals for capital investments, the life of which might be thought by the National Park to extend well beyond the "foreseeable future" referred to in paragraph 9 of the White Paper.

(Signed)

(Signed)

W.A. Burkinshaw

Lt. Col. R.S.A. Grey MBE (Ret'd),

Secretaries

Sir Peter Stallard KCMG, CVO, MBE

Chairman