

DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP

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

December 1993

TWELFTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP

INTRODUCTION

1. The Eleventh Annual Report to Ministers of the Dartmoor Steering Group was submitted to the Secretaries of State for Defence and the Environment in September 1992, and covered the twentyseventh, the twentheigth and the twentyninth meetings of the Group. Since then 3 further meetings have been held: the thirtieth at County Hall, Exeter on 29 October 1992, the thirtyfirst at Okehampton Camp on 7 April 1993, and the thirtysecond at Stonehouse Barracks, Plymouth on 22 October 1993. A statement was issued to the Press after each meeting.

2. The Working Party has held 3 meetings since the last Report and we are grateful for the continued support afforded to the Steering Group. Some really excellent work has been carried out by the Working Party in furtherance of the Group's principal task, namely, of achieving the best possible reconciliation of the requirements of military training, conservation and public access. The Dartmoor National Park officer presently chairs the Working Party and will continue to do so until the Spring 1994 meeting of the Steering Group following which, in accordance with agreed procedure, the Chairmanship will be resumed by the nominee of the General Officer Commanding Southern District.

3. The period covered by this report can probably be characterised as the most successful in the history of the Steering Group. In the eleventh report to Ministers it was reported that significant progress had been made in the formulation of objectives aimed at improved conservation measures and greater public access consequent upon the new Duchy licence. These objectives, however, were more wide ranging and more significant in relation to the principal task of the Steering Group than anything previously contemplated: However, they were but objectives. The Steering Group has now seen some of these objectives translated into material benefits on the ground, and others moving towards that end.

RE-ASSESSMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATIONAL BENEFITS

4. While a list of the 7 objectives, referred to above, was appended to the 11th Report to Ministers, it will be useful to set out briefly the progress that has been made:

a. Removal of Redundant Military Artefacts. These range from large, remote observation posts of granite sett construction, concrete gun platforms and hut bases and a grenade range, all requiring major work and the use of plant for removal, to relatively minor structures, earth works, protective walls and target mechanisms involving only manpower for removal. Twentyeight artefacts no longer required for military training were identified on the Moor. Of these the National Park requested that 7 should remain in situ since they formed part of the history of the use of the Moor. With the exception of 4 artefacts which are to be removed next summer, the military authorities have completed the task with benefit to the moorland scene.

b. Prevention of Civilian use of Unauthorised Tracks. While there exists a network of tracks on the Moor, the number is increasing and existing tracks extended further into the Moor as more people resort to 4 wheel drive vehicles for recreation. Many of these tracks are authorised for military use in connection with training under the terms of the Duchy licence but some are not. However, access to some of the remoter parts of the Moor, and particularly to some tors, can be gained by using the unauthorised tracks and this initiative is aimed at preventing use of these tracks. A number of these unauthorised tracks have already been blocked off with boulders/ditches and a further 9 await attention once commoners have been consulted. This has been a joint effort between the National Park and the military authorities and will markedly reduce vehicular penetration into the Moor which the National Park desires.

c. Restoration of Unnecessary Tracks to Moorland. Four tracks which do not form part of the military network have been identified for restoration to moorland. This initiative is complementary to the foregoing. Restoration of these tracks has been costed and work will be put in hand as soon as funds become available.

d. Improvement in the Appearance and Standard of Maintenance of Military Infrastructure. The Defence Land Agent, Plymouth has prepared a comprehensive list of all items of military infrastructure on the Moor. The list has been passed to the National Park prior to assessment and prioritisation of work by the Working Party at its next meeting.

e. Initiatives for Improving Public Knowledge and Awareness of Military Use of the National Park

(1) The General Officer Commanding Southern District mounted an Open Day for 180 visitors at Okehampton Camp on 23 June 1993 involving many groups with diverse interests in the Moor. The aim of the day was to explain to a wide audience of all those with an interest in Dartmoor, the Services use of the land and why it is needed. In so doing the speakers, from all 3 Services, explained the lengths to which the Services go to ensure maximum access to the public, to avoid damage and to conserve the environment. The Open Day, which was favourably reported by the media, was judged to be a great success with many of those invited writing to express their appreciation.

(2) A schedule of non-firing periods on the ranges has been placed in the 'Dartmoor Visitor' magazine published by the National Park.

(3) A plastic, credit card sized card showing Non-Firing periods on all ranges has been prepared and published by the military authorities and is on sale at National Park Visitors' Centres.

f. Efforts to Avoid Popular Visitor Sites for Dry Training. It has been agreed by the military authorities that the Cullever Steps area which is highly popular with visitors will only be used for military training on 2 or 3 days a year outside the main holiday season.

g. Increase Public Access including Possible Reduction of Danger Areas. Following a detailed study the military authorities agreed to release Watern Tor on Okehampton Range and Great Mis Tor, Roos Tor and White Tor on Merrivale Range from the range Danger Areas thus allowing public access at all times to these areas. There will be some delay in implementing these arrangements since the planning process with the National Park must be followed and, thereafter, the Byelaws will require amendment to reflect the new situation. When this is all done the military infrastructure associated with public safety will be repositioned.

5. It will be seen that great progress has been made on these important initiatives which have, or will, and taken together, greatly improve public access and conservation without military training being adversely affected.


ENVIRONMENTAL BASELINE

6. Following a recommendation by the National Park Officer that an inventory of tracks and military artefacts be prepared for all the military ranges, the Group was informed that surveys had been completed and a report on each of the 3 ranges prepared.

DARTMOOR ENVIRONMENTAL SENSITIVE AREA (ESA)

7. The Group was informed that introduction of the ESA on Dartmoor scheduled to be introduced in April 1994 was likely to be further delayed.

Mr R Gash


Colonel (Retd) J S Forrest

Joint Secretaries

Sir Anthony
Barrowclough QC

Chairman