

Dartmoor Steering Group



Twentieth Annual Report

of the
Dartmoor Steering Group
to the

Secretaries of State for Defence and Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

September 2008

Dartmoor Steering Group: Twentieth Annual Report

January 2007 to May 2008

Executive Summary

The Dartmoor Steering Group (DSG) was established in 1978 following the recommendations of Baroness Sharp's Inquiry into the Military Use of Dartmoor in 1975. It brings together the Ministry of Defence (MOD) plus the key statutory and landowning bodies that have an interest in the management of the Dartmoor Training Area (DTA) with the intention of achieving the best possible reconciliation of the requirements of military training, conservation and public access.

All parties continue to regard the DSG as a valuable, effective body and contribute substantially and constructively to its work. Good progress has been made on practical management of the Dartmoor Training Area to achieve conservation and public access objectives.

The DSG has focused on two key strategic issues during the period covered by this annual report: the review by 43 (Wessex) Brigade of Ten Tors and preparations for a potential new licence for the MOD to train on Dartmoor post 2012.

The review of Ten Tors by 43 (Wessex) Brigade focused on the timing and management of the event. A key concern is that Ten Tors is the only major recreation event that is allowed in the National Park during the bird breeding season. The review concluded that, for a variety of reasons (practical, military and school curriculum-related), May was the only viable time of year that Ten Tors could be organised, but that revised guidelines for the training period should help to reduce the pressure on the Moor during training. Following discussion at the Steering Group a series of practical management measures were agreed together with an annual process for learning lessons and a commitment to a full review in three years time.

Much of the area upon which military training occurs within the Dartmoor National Park is privately owned and training is undertaken under license. The licence from the Duchy of Cornwall expires in 2012. As part of the re-negotiation of the licence, the Secretaries of State for Defence and Environment, Food and Rural Affairs have set two tests: one relating to military need and the other to the management of the DTA.

Defence Estates has been developing the answers to these questions through its Sustainable Military Training on Dartmoor (SMTOD) project. Military need was assessed by two separate studies and the second test was addressed through an external audit of the DTA Environmental Management System (EMS) and an Environmental Appraisal (EA).

The DSG debated the SMTOD exercise at its meeting in January 2008 but did not reach agreement between the various bodies represented. The Dartmoor Working Party (DWP) was directed to draw up a list of 'outstanding issues' and this has commenced under the following headings:

1. Management of the cultural and ecosystem services
2. Maximising public access opportunities
3. Maximising socio-economic benefits
4. Monitoring programme
5. Need for military training

The Working Party has not concluded its discussions but the general feeling was that progress could be made on items 1 – 4 within the DWP/DSG structure subject to further discussion. On item 5, all parties accepted the short-term need for continued military training on Dartmoor. However, there was disagreement on the long-term objectives. The Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) and Natural England raised the issue of whether the expectation is that military use (contrary to National Park purposes) will continue indefinitely or that all or most of it will come to an end in the not too distant future and who determines the long-term objective. MOD's view is that they have proven, through independent study, continued military need.

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Introduction and Membership

The Dartmoor Steering Group (DSG) was established in 1978 following the recommendations of Baroness Sharp's Inquiry into the Military Use of Dartmoor in 1975. Its Terms of Reference and current membership, together with that of the Dartmoor Working Party (DWP), which provides support to the DSG under the alternating Chairmanship of the Joint Secretaries, are attached at Annex A. As required by the Terms of Reference an Annual Report is submitted jointly to the Secretaries of State for Defence, and for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

Since the last Annual Report¹ in July 2007, the DSG has met twice: in January 2007 and January 2008, and the DWP has met four times: in March 2007, September 2007, November 2007 and February 2008. The DSG continues to be fully supported by the Dartmoor Working Party (DWP) under the rotating Chairmanship of the Joint Secretaries. The Dartmoor Commoners' Council has been co-opted onto the membership of the DWP.

Conservation

Good progress has been made on practical conservation work. The MOD has continued to support Operation Wader. This is an initiative aimed at reversing the alarming decline in the number of breeding wader birds on Dartmoor and involves the Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA), The Duchy of Cornwall, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Natural England and the landowners and commoners who manage the breeding sites, as well as MOD. The project has been in operation for the past 4 years and through a process of habitat management and observation has sought to assist the number of young birds fledged. Of particular concern are Dunlin, Golden Plover, Curlew, Lapwing and Snipe, with the first four species now threatened with extinction as breeding birds within the Dartmoor National Park, the last area in southern England where they can all be found nesting.

As a result of the 2006 Breeding Bird Survey, the sensitive areas have changed and new maps are being issued to military users of the range danger areas and to Ten Tors participants.

Working with other statutory agencies and bodies, landowners and commoners, the DNPA has developed a common vision for the moorland areas of Dartmoor covering the next 25 years. This 'Dartmoor Vision' foresees a fully-grazed landscape to be achieved by 2030 which safeguards access, archaeology and wildlife, and supports the hill farmers'

¹ Nineteenth Annual Report of the Dartmoor Steering Group covering the period January 2005 to December 2006, submitted in July 2007

livelihood. This initiative has been actively supported by the MOD as it also meets the foreseen needs for the terrain most suited for military training.

Access and Recreation

The DNPA is grateful for the help provided by MOD for the construction of the new bridge in the Bovey valley which will improve access; financial support for the replacement of video equipment at High Moorland Visitor Centre to aid interpretation of the Dartmoor Training Area (DTA) and the hosting of a training day at Okehampton Camp for staff working in the Authority's Information Centres.

The fourth Dartmoor Military Heritage Weekend was held on 8-9 September 2007.

Management and Training

Two Training Area Marshals are now in post on Dartmoor working directly to the Commandant. Support by the DSG has been instrumental in gaining MOD funds for these posts.

A meeting of interested parties had been held under the auspices of the Duchy of Cornwall in order to discuss a way forward for the Loop Road.

Following a successful trial period, use of commercial 'Portaloos' ('Tardis' type) has been replaced by new 'Field Portaloos' which are much less visible and should reduce the number of complaints from the public.

A 'lessons to be learnt' note was prepared and distributed to members of the DSG and DWP following the incident in 2003 when a convoy of BV 206 low ground pressure vehicles travelled in convoy across the moor resulting in considerable damage to vegetation. Natural England and Defence Estates are working on an Appropriate Assessment for the VIKING (a newer version of the BV 206) which will identify potential impact and mitigation measures before any approval is given for the vehicle to be used off-track within a SSSI/SAC.

Firing and safety on Merrivale Training Area is controlled from a 1940s vintage prefabricated hut at Holming Beam, near Princetown. The hut is nearly life expired and an eyesore. Defence Training Estates continue to try to obtain funds to demolish the hut and build a more suitable hut that is of an appropriate design and better landscaped. This has been an ongoing issue for a number of years.

A new statutory Management Plan for the National Park was launched in December 2007 following an extensive period of consultation and engagement. The Plan is for the National Park and sets out a series of ambitions for a twenty year horizon and more detailed goals to be achieved within the five year period of the Management Plan. The ambition for military training is "All military training taking place on Dartmoor will be consistent with national park purposes, and Defence Estates land is managed as an exemplar of

conservation and recreational opportunity". Whilst signed up to the principles that underpin the Management Plan, MOD has not signed up to the ambition on military training, because the ambition precludes what MOD regards as essential operational training.

The DSG annually endorses range utilisation statistics for Okehampton, Merrivale and Willsworthy Training Areas. A summary is produced at Annex B.

Review of Ten Tors

43 (Wessex) Brigade completed a review of Ten Tors with the following aim 'to evaluate and balance the environmental and socio-economic impacts of Ten Tors with National Park purposes and make recommendations for a sustainable Ten Tors'. A particular concern has been the timing of the Ten Tors event as it is the only major recreation event that takes place during the bird breeding season.

The review concluded that, for a variety of reasons (practical, military and school curriculum-related), May was the only viable time of year that Ten Tors could be organised, but that revised guidelines for the training period should help to reduce the pressure on the Moor during training. The review highlighted the following improvements: an instruction to teams to conduct their initial training away from Dartmoor; a new training DVD to help raise awareness of the conservation value of the area and National Park purposes; and a limit set of two training walks per team on the north Moor. In addition, a new DTA map had been produced, with the latest information on rare bird sensitive avoid areas.

At the 47th meeting of the DSG Brigadier Jackson, Commander 43 (Wessex) Brigade, confirmed that the Military would actively 'police' the new guidelines in order to reduce any impact on nature conservation interests and that this would include additional scrutineers. It was further agreed that:

- Consideration would be given to an electronic checking system for the event;
- there would be an annual post-exercise meeting convened by 43 (Wessex) Brigade to review experience and identify lessons to be learnt and that this meeting would involve the Dartmoor Commoners' Council as well as Natural England and DNPA and an annual report would be brought to the DSG; and
- a full review would be undertaken in three years time to explore impact and timing issues and this would be reported to the DSG for deliberation.

Sustainable Military Training on Dartmoor

Much of the land upon which military training occurs within the Dartmoor National Park is privately owned and training is undertaken under license from landowners including the Duchy of Cornwall. This licence expires in 2012.

As part of the re-negotiation of the licence, the Secretaries of State for Defence and for Defra require confirmation that:

- There is a clear military need for military training on Dartmoor; and
- the management of DTA for military activities will continue to be sensitive to environmental, farming and public access issues and is thus sustainable in the long term.

Defence Estates has been developing the answers to these questions through its 'Sustainable Military Training on Dartmoor' (SMTOD) project. The question of military need was assessed through two separate studies one by independent consultants and the other by Defence Training Estates; both concluded that there was a continuing need to use the DTA for live firing and dry training.

The second test was addressed initially through an audit of the Dartmoor Training Area EMS, conducted by RPS (MOD consultants at the time). Subsequently an Environmental Appraisal (EA) was conducted by Entec UK Ltd (current MOD consultants). The audit, which involved all stakeholders, concluded that the MOD was managing the area in an environmentally sustainable manner; it made one or two minor recommendations which have since been incorporated into the EMS by the MOD. The terms of reference for the EA were described in a Scoping Study which was subjected to a consultation exercise involving all interested parties prior to the EA being undertaken. The Scoping Study made it clear that the EA would assess the environmental impact of the status quo within existing boundaries and at the current permitted level of military activity. The EA concluded that, with the exception of live firing which had a significant impact on public access for limited periods of the year, the MOD's presence on Dartmoor did not have an adverse environmental impact.

The DSG debated the SMTOD project at its 47th meeting in January 2008. There was no agreement on the EA as a basis for licence renegotiation. The DNPA stated that they were unable to endorse the EA in its present form as a basis for potential licence renewal arguing that there was no detailed options appraisal, insufficient weight had been given to National Park status in assessing 'significance'; and the appraisal focused on the past and present with little consideration of how significance might be assessed in the future. Natural England stated that their views were similar to the National Park Authority with particular reference to conservation and public access. The Dartmoor Commoners' Council asked that more work be done on the scope for local procurement (with particular regard to red meat) and that the outstanding issues be pursued in parallel with negotiations for the new licence over the next four years. Government Office South West expressed concern that the EA process was still evolving and that insufficient weight had been given to socio-economic impacts. Defence Estates emphasised that the whole EA had been undertaken openly and with transparency and in accordance with the terms of reference outlined in the Scoping Study which made no reference to a detailed options appraisal and that, whilst recognising that fundamental differences remained, suggested that there was every reason for the stakeholders on Dartmoor to continue to work together. This view was supported by Commander 43 (Wessex) Brigade and also by Commandant Commando Training Centre Royal Marines both of whom underlined the importance of DTA in the general training and preparation of service personnel for deployment on operations.

The Duchy of Cornwall suggested that they would look at any licence in a new way, separating administrative licence arrangements from practical matters of land management: there would be an overarching agreement and under that a requirement to prepare a management plan for the training area in order to manage the moor more flexibly within the framework of National Park purposes. The DNPA have welcomed this initiative and indicated their wish that the proposed management plan take a positive approach to the issue, with an emphasis on furthering (wherever possible) national park purposes.

The Chairman of the DSG proposed that members of the DSG take a little more time to work on this agenda item under the following headings:

1. A list of outstanding aspirations/issues will be drawn up and agreed, and work on them will be taken forward in the DWP and DSG, with a view to seeking resolution wherever possible.
2. Although on some issues the MOD's and the DNPA's objectives are inevitably conflicting, discussions will continue in any future licence period in order to narrow and manage the differences wherever possible.
3. Ministers will be recommended to establish an agreed consultation process in advance of any future licence renewal exercise.
4. The implications of the Duchy of Cornwall's proposal in relation to the format of licences, and the opportunities they offer for improved sustainable management, will be explored and a suitable text prepared for the DSG minutes.

This proposal was agreed unanimously by Members of the DSG and the DWP started work on the tasks at its meeting in February 2008.

A first draft of the 'outstanding issues' was prepared under the following headings:

1. Management of the cultural and ecosystem services
2. Maximising public access opportunities
3. Maximising socio-economic benefits
4. Monitoring programme
5. Need for military training

The DWP did not conclude its discussions but the general feeling was that progress could be made on items 1 – 4 within the DWP/DSG structure. On item 5, all parties accepted the short-term need for continued military training on Dartmoor. However, there was disagreement on the long-term objectives. The DNPA and Natural England raised the issue of whether the expectation is that military use (contrary to National Park purposes) will continue indefinitely or that all or most of it will come to an end in the not too distant future and who determines the long-term objective. MOD's view is that they have proven, through independent study, continued military need.

It was agreed that work on lessons to be learnt from the current process and the specific task of making recommendations on an agreed consultation process for any future licence renewal exercise should wait until the current process was concluded.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Thomas', written in a cursive style.

Richard Thomas
Chairman

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Porter', written in a cursive style.

Lt Col James Porter
Comd DTE SW

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Bishop', written in a cursive style.

Dr Kevin Bishop
Chief Executive DNPA

Joint Secretaries

Dated: 4 September 2008

Annex A: Terms of Reference for the Dartmoor Steering Group and Working Party

Terms of reference of the Dartmoor Steering Group – as set by Parliament in 1978

1 To keep under review:

- a. Progress made in considering those recommendations contained in Lady Sharp's report on Dartmoor and accepted by Her Majesty's Government in Comnd 6837.
- b. The achievement of the aims of Government as set out in paragraph 9 of Comnd 6837 namely the best possible reconciliation of the requirements of military training, conservation and public access.

2 To consider any matters referred to the Steering Group by the Working Party and to receive reports from the Working Party.

3 To report annually to the Secretaries of State for Defence and for the Environment.

The Steering Group will meet as often as required and may co-opt additional members. The Group may also invite other bodies to contribute on occasions to discussion of particular items.

Membership, Advisers and Joint Secretaries

revised 1996

organisation updates 2001 and 2007

STEERING GROUP

Members:

Independent Chair (appointed by the Secretaries of State for the Environment and Defence)
Commandant Commando Training Centre Royal Marines
Commander 43 (Wessex) Brigade
Defence Estates
Dartmoor National Park Authority (3)
Duchy of Cornwall
Natural England
English Heritage
Dartmoor Commoners' Council
Govt Office (South West)

Additional Advisers and Joint Secretaries:

Commander Defence Training Estate South West
Chief Executive (National Park Officer), Dartmoor National Park Authority

Co-options and Additional Advice:

The Steering Group may co-opt additional members and invited representatives of other bodies to contribute on occasions to discussion of particular items.

WORKING PARTY

Members:

Commander Defence Training Estate South West
Chief Executive (National Park Officer), Dartmoor National Park Authority
Dartmoor National Park Authority (1)
Duchy of Cornwall
Natural England (2)
English Heritage
Defence Estates
Commando Training Centre Royal Marines (2)
Commandant Dartmoor Training Area

Co-options: Additional members may be co-opted from time to time as required.

Arrangements: The Joint Secretaries will alternate every two years as lead Secretary (convener, agenda and minutes) to the Steering Group and Chair (convener, agenda and minutes) to the Working Party.

Annex B: Military Live Firing on Dartmoor 2007

DAYS	OKEHAMPTON	MERRIVALE	WILLSWORTHY
Permitted (1)	119	175	241
Notified (2)	59	110	161
Actual (3)	49	103	129
Cancelled Bad Visibility (4)	7	5	16
Cancelled Good Weather (5)	2	1	2
Cancelled User (6)	1	1	14

Notes:

Statistics for military live firing use of Dartmoor for live firing are divided into:

1. Days permitted by MOD/Duchy licence and/or agreement within Dartmoor Steering Group.
2. Firing notice issued weekly in local newspapers in accordance with byelaws.
3. Days on which firing actually took place.

The difference between the days published in the local papers to give notice of live firing and those actually used is caused by:

4. Bad visibility preventing clearance and observation of the range danger area in order to ensure public safety.
5. Good weather conditions that allow training objectives to be completed earlier in the booked period.
6. Units commitments, including short notice operational deployments.

The public are informed of cancellations through National Park Information Offices and BBC Radio Devon's announcements and via www.dartmoor-ranges.co.uk.

To reduce missed opportunities for public access to the Dartmoor range danger areas by ensuring that the National Park Authority are informed of 95% of all good weather and unit cancellations by 1600 hours the previous day.