

Dartmoor Steering Group



Nineteenth Annual Report

of the
Dartmoor Steering Group
to the

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

July 2007

DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP

NINETEENTH ANNUAL REPORT

Covering the Period January 2005 to December 2006

Introduction and Membership

1. 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 officer support to the DSG, 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.
2. Since the last report the DSG has met twice under the new Chairmanship of Mr Richard Thomas, the independent Chairman. Mr Thomas is the fourth Chairman of the DSG since its inception in 1978 and, following a period of interregnum, succeeds Mr James Woolcombe who had filled the role successfully for 5 years. The present report covers a two year period in consequence of that interregnum. The DSG continues to be fully supported by the DWP under the rotating Chairmanship of the Joint Secretaries.
3. During 2006 Natural England was formed and incorporated English Nature, the Countryside Agency and the former Rural Development Service of DEFRA. The Membership has been updated to reflect these changes and the Terms of Reference amended accordingly.

Conservation

4. Conservation is given high priority in the management of the Dartmoor Training Estate (DTA) and the training activities which take place there. On both the DSG and the DWP representatives of the statutory agencies continue to work in close harmony. The DSG has not been required to exercise its duty of reconciling the interests of these parties, or any conflict with public recreation and access on the ranges.
5. On MoD freehold land at Willsworthy, the Willsworthy Conservation Group continues to engage voluntary specialist support, and to set exemplary standards for habitat management, species recording, and environmentally sound land management within the National Park.

Access and Recreation

6. In order to improve access to Cut Hill and Fur Tor agreement was reached to change the range danger area boundary at the juncture between the Okehampton and Merrivale Ranges. This had been an initial proposal by the Ramblers Association that had been endorsed by the DSG.
7. The DTA website (dartmoor-ranges.co.uk) has been steadily developed and improved throughout the period. It has become a well-visited site, and a principal source of

information for the public on firing times. It has also proved a useful vehicle for placing documents and studies relevant to the DSG's work in the public domain.

8. Firing Notices for Dartmoor Ranges are published on the DTA website and in local newspapers. These Notices detail the dates on which the various ranges are 'live', and the public excluded. The Notices had been published 2 weeks in advance of firing and drawn criticism for giving too little advance warning. After a trial period, it was agreed by Defence Training Estates (DTE) that the warning time period would be increased from 2 to 6 weeks. This has been met by general approval and should improve access by the public who are now better able to plan visits to the moor in advance. The negative impact on military training through loss of flexibility has proved small and manageable.

9. The Heritage Open Days have continued at Okehampton Camp and have continued to attract over 1,000 visitors over a 2 day period.

10. It remained a concern for all parties on the DSG that the Ordnance Survey (OS) mapping of Dartmoor subsequent to the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000* shows the DTA range danger area uncoloured and surrounded by solid red triangles, denoting a danger area, rather than the yellow colour wash depicting access land. The effect of this is felt to be misleading and to discourage access and the DSG resolved to ensure that its concerns were registered formally prior to any future review the OS undertakes following the introduction of new mapping.

11. The Ten Tors remains a highly successful and popular challenge for young people of all abilities with both the 2005 and 2006 events completed in, respectively, demanding and favourable weather conditions. The Exercise Director, Brigadier Jackson, undertook to reactivate the Working Group (WG) set up by his predecessor in order to review the environmental issues surrounding the event, together with its pre-event training, and the DSG will consider the outcome of the WG in due course.

Management and Training

12. The Army Training Estate has become part of the Defence Estates organisation and is now entitled Defence Training Estates (DTE). As such it has taken on responsibility for additional ranges and training areas formerly controlled by the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. The change will have no effect upon Dartmoor.

13. The ecological and visual impacts on the landscape resulting from damage caused by a convoy of BV 206 low ground pressure vehicles during an exercise in 2003 has been monitored by periodical inspection walks. It was established that the tracks were still visible in parts, but that re-growth was visible everywhere, although it may take several more years for the impact to disappear completely. The results of these inspections were discussed by the Dartmoor Working Party (DWP) which recommended to the DSG that, since all relevant lessons had been learned from the incident, formal monitoring should cease. This recommendation was accepted.

14. VIKING (a newer version of BV 206) has now entered military service. In order to allow stakeholders and relevant subject matter experts to compare the two versions a demonstration day was held at Okehampton Camp which was well attended. Negotiations continue between MoD and Natural England (NE) on permission to drive these vehicles off

tracks within the SSSI, an Appropriate Assessment (AA) being required. The Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) continues to hold the view that these vehicles should not be permitted off hard tracks. The DSG will consider the matter further as and when necessary.

15. Funding has been identified by MoD for the appointment of two Training Area Marshals (TAMs) to assist the Commandant of the DTA, as recommended by the DSG. These uniformed posts would allow better scrutiny of training activity to ensure adherence to DTA Standing Orders by units in order to reduce public complaints. The TAMs will also be involved with access and recreation duties, working alongside DNPA personnel and attending DNPA Ranger training in order to improve their local knowledge and effectiveness.

16. Following public complaints, in order to address the visual impact of the commercial toilets (Portaloos) that are from time to time sited for reasons related to health and safety around the moor, MoD has developed a smaller portable unit which is less intrusive. This new unit has been introduced on a trial basis and, if the trial is successful, it will replace Portaloos in all but exceptional circumstances.

17. Other complaints from the public reported to the DSG remained very few in number, of a minor nature, and all were dealt with promptly. The most serious incident was a managed burn on MoD property at Willsworthy running out of control. Lessons were learned on the planning and carrying out of such fires and MoD undertook to ensure compliance with standard Dartmoor practice not to conduct such burns after 1 April each year in future.

18. Working with other statutory agencies and bodies the DNPA has developed a common vision for Dartmoor covering the next quarter-century. This 'Dartmoor Vision' foresees a fully-grazed landscape to be achieved by 2030 which safeguards access, archaeology and wildlife and supports the hill farmers' livelihood. The Vision also meets the foreseen needs for the terrain most suited to military training. The strategy required input and co-operation by the Dartmoor Commoners Council, Natural England, the Environment Agency and English Heritage, and has also been actively supported by MoD. This alliance of statutory bodies continues to work together to achieve the positive delivery and achievement of the Vision by all appropriate means whether practical, policy or resource encompassing. The DSG has considered and welcomed this initiative by the DNPA.

19. A new statutory Management Plan for Dartmoor has been prepared to final draft stage by the DNPA with the involvement of all Dartmoor stakeholders. The Plan is not for the DNPA alone but is a plan written for all those with an interest in Dartmoor to pursue in line with the key principles set out within. The Plan contains a series of 19 'Ambitions' for the year 2027 (twenty years) together with sets of short term goals to 2012, and the means by which these can be achieved. The Ambition for Military Training is that by 2027 all military training taking place on Dartmoor will be consistent with national park purposes, and that Defence Estates land is managed as an exemplar of conservation and recreational opportunity. Responses to the draft Plan are awaited. In the meantime work continues within the DWP to ensure maximum synergy between this Management Plan and that of the DTA.

20. The DSG annually endorses range utilisation statistics for Okehampton, Merrivale and Willsworthy ranges. These are produced at Annex B. Long term trends showed a decline in usage levels from the time that recording began in the mid 1950s through to the late 1980s after which usage has remained generally stable. A graph is attached at Annex C.

Sustainable Military Training on Dartmoor

21. MoD has undertaken a body of work intended to demonstrate the sustainability of military training on Dartmoor (SMTOD). This has followed the external audit of the DTA Environmental Management System (EMS) in 2005 and has consisted of a wide range of ecological, environmental and other studies, together with papers analysing the need for military training on Dartmoor and an options study. The options study recommended, *inter alia*, that an Environmental Appraisal (EA) be carried out, and Ministers were briefed accordingly (MoD and DEFRA).

22. In order to ensure that the EA would be transparent and comprehensive, a scoping study was undertaken. Its draft was widely circulated and two public meetings were held in Tavistock and Okehampton, all to inform the final document. The methodology for the EA is to set up a number of MoD working groups (WGs) in order to examine environmental issues in depth during 2007. Subject matter expert input into these WGs would be sought through participation of Statutory Bodies (SBs).

23. The DSG has a key oversight role in the SMTOD process. It has been kept fully briefed on developments and will discuss the conclusions of the EA at its annual meeting in January 2008.

Public Relations

24. Facts Sheets covering military training on Dartmoor have been jointly produced by DNPA and DTE and are available on both organisations' websites.

25. At the instigation of the Chairman and in order to facilitate greater transparency and confidence, the DSG Publication Scheme has been updated and the DSG decided to publish the Annual Report and the Minutes of the Annual Meetings on the DNPA and DTA websites.

Conclusion

26. All parties continue to regard the DSG as a valuable and effective body and contribute substantially and constructively to its work.

Richard Thomas
Chairman

Lt Col James Porter
Comd DTE SW

Dr Nick Atkinson
Chief Executive (NPO) DNPA

Joint Secretaries

Dated: 11th July 2007

DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP AND WORKING PARTY 2007

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 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 & Joint Secretaries:

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

Annex B

MILITARY LIVE FIRING ON DARTMOOR 2005

DAYS	OKEHAMPTON	MERRIVALE	WILLSWORTHY
Permitted (1)	115	179	245
Notified (2)	73	115	206
Actual (3)	56	83	146
Cancelled Bad Visibility (4)	10	26	29
Cancelled Good Weather (5)	4	3	6
Cancelled User (6)	2	3	25

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 the National Park Authority are informed of 95% of all good weather and unit cancellations by 1600 hours the previous day.

MILITARY LIVE FIRING ON DARTMOOR 2006

DAYS			OKEHAMPTON	MERRIVALE	WILLSWORTHY
Permitted	(1)		118	174	245
Notified	(2)		43	92	162
Actual	(3)		35	75	123
Cancelled	Bad Visibility	(4)	6	11	20
Cancelled	Good Weather	(5)	1	2	3
Cancelled	User	(6)	1	4	16

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.

Live Firing on 3 Ranges

