

DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP

SIXTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT

of the

Dartmoor Steering Group

to the

Secretaries of State for Defence and
Environment, Transport and the Regions

March 2001

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Covering the Period July 1999 to March 2001**

- 1 Since the last report was submitted to the Secretaries of State for Defence, and for Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Dartmoor Steering Group has met twice, once informally under the chairmanship of the Chairman of the Dartmoor National Park Authority, and once in January 2001 under the chairmanship of the newly appointed independent Chairman, Jim Woollcombe. The Steering Group continues to be supported by the Dartmoor Working Party under the chairmanship of the Joint Secretaries.
- 2 The Steering Group remains a highly effective forum for assuring the best possible reconciliation of the requirements of military training, conservation, and public access within the Dartmoor National Park. Throughout the period under report proceedings have been held in good humour and with good rapport. In addition to servicing the discussions and negotiations of the Steering Group, the Working Party has facilitated practical action related to improved public access information, the conservation of artefacts and wildlife, and the enhancement of the Defence Estate on Dartmoor.

Chairmanship and Membership

- 3 Sir Anthony Barrowclough QC retired as Chairman at the end of 1999. Following a lengthy selection period Jim Woollcombe CBE was appointed by the Secretaries of State as successor in December 2000.
- 4 There have been no changes in the membership or constitution of the Steering Group other than to incorporate minor re-organisational changes related to member agencies and bodies. These are appended to this report.

Strategic Defence Review

- 5 It has been confirmed to the Steering Group that no net negative or increased training impact is anticipated following the Strategic Defence Review. The incorporation of environmental assessment of all new development proposals was welcomed.

The Ministry of Defence allayed fears expressed by the Dartmoor Commoners Council about the future use of Apache helicopters on the Dartmoor ranges.

Conservation

- 6 The Steering Group has helped further understanding by all parties of the cultural heritage of military artefacts and buildings, and has set in place procedures where assessment by National Park Authority specialists of the historic value of any such artefacts precedes any decisions concerning development or where they are deemed redundant for training purposes. The advice of English Heritage has also been taken.

- 7 Work has continued to enhance the appearance and landscaping of the built environment of Okehampton Camp, and to improve the crossing of the Moor Brook at Okehampton Moorgate by the provision of an Irish Bridge. A breeding birds survey on moorland Dartmoor including the Ranges will assist the safeguard of important breeding sites. The work of the MoD Willsworthy Conservation Group was recognised by the award of second prize in the National Park Authority's bi-annual Edward Morshead Award for outstanding contribution to National Park purposes.
- 8 MoD has contributed in full to the National Park Authority sponsored Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan and will deliver commitments to the Plan's targets and objectives on moorland in the coming years. The advice and assistance of English Nature has continued to be helpful in all this work.

Access

- 9 Close liaison continues to seek to provide maximum public information about live firing activity and range safety issues. A new indicator is being adopted to identify disparity between published days on which live firing is expected to take place, and actual live firing. This has been welcomed by Ramblers Association and user groups as a means to minimise lost opportunity, and to assist the planning of walks. The potential of Information Technology and use of the Internet is being fully explored as an aid to access communication.
- 10 In view of the Dartmoor Commons Act right of public access, allied to access agreements at Willsworthy, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 presents no new access opportunity on the Dartmoor Ranges. It will however facilitate greater consistency in respect of access provision, public awareness, and enjoyment.

Unexploded Ordnance Clearance

- 11 The Steering Group has welcomed progress in the clearance of unexploded ordnance at Great Mis Tor and on Okehampton Range. Policy and priorities for clearing areas most frequented by the public have been approved.

Other Matters

- 12 The Willsworthy Integrated Land Management Plan has been completed and welcomed by the Steering Group. Significant progress has been made in the implementation of some 71 objectives, involving MoD tenants and numerous other conservation parties. The cost to MoD in 2001 is of the order of £135,000.
- 13 A 'Dartmoor Armed Services Day' was held at Okehampton in June 2000 and was very well received by all attending. The value of Dartmoor to the military and the contribution of the military presence to the local economy was emphasised.

- 14 The hill farm economy is going through a depressed period. The Steering Group has received reports on the interaction of military training and hill farming, and the important co-ordination of training, grazing, and moorland management. The need to maximise economic benefits of the military presence direct to the hill farm community has been well recognised.
- 15 Some local and national amenity bodies have continued to raise negative press commentary and to promote perceptions of conflict between national park purposes and military training. The substance of specific public complaint throughout the period of this Report has however been very limited, and all such complaints are kept under review by the Working Party.
- 16 In the view of the Dartmoor Steering Group over the period of this Report the Ministry of Defence has satisfactorily fulfilled its duty on Dartmoor to have regard for the purposes of National Parks as set out in the Environment Act 1995.



Jim Woollcombe CBE
Chairman

Lt Col R C B Nutting

Dr N Atkinson

Joint Secretaries