

DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP

THIRD ANNUAL REPORT

THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The second annual report was submitted to the Secretaries of State for Defence and for the Environment in January 1981 and covered the fifth, sixth and seventh meetings of the Group. Since then we have held three meetings: the eighth at HQ Commando Forces RM, Plymouth on 10 December 1980; the ninth at County Hall, Exeter on 4 March 1981 and the tenth at the Commando Training Centre RM, Lympstone on 13 October 1981. A statement has been issued to the Press after each meeting.
2. Our supporting Working Party have held three meetings and we are grateful for them for their continued assistance.

II. PUBLIC ACCESS

3. We are unable to report any further increases in public access during this period.
4. The National Park have now reconsidered their position on access to the Tavy Cleave in the light of the proposed modernisation of the Willsworthy ranges. The MOD proposals would have given the public unrestricted access to the Tavy Cleave on all but six days a year but this would have meant the positioning of lookout posts and stables and marker posts nearby so as to ensure public safety. The National Park had to consider whether better access to the Tavy Cleave was worth the environmental damage that would be caused by these additional military artefacts and they decided that conservation must take priority over access.
5. In our last report we mentioned that the National Park, having consulted all interested parties, would be taking action to curtail egress by civilian cars from the Ring Road to Hangingstone Hill. We have since been informed by the National Park that they have encountered some practical difficulties in doing this but the experiment is being continued. We were also informed that the Duchy of Cornwall, as landowners, were proposing to convene a meeting of local interests to discuss the problem of the Ring Road and, while welcoming the proposed meeting, we decided to await its outcome.

III. WILLSWORTHY: PROPOSED MODERNISATION OF THE RANGES

6. We have discussed the proposed Electric Target Range and Mechanised Moving Target Trainer which the Services propose to construct on Willsworthy. We were originally informed that financial provision was in the Naval Building Programme estimates for April 1982 and that the Property Services Agency (PSA) were about to the detailed designs. We have since been informed that completion of the designs is expected in April 1982 and that financial provision is now 1983/84. The start date will not be before April 1983 although PSA regard this as realistic.
7. We have noted that as the Tavy Cleave is not now to be freed, this will give greater flexibility in the alignment of the ranges and could possibly reduce the amount of earth moving in their construction. In view of this change, however, it will be necessary for the Ministry of Defence to re-site the ranges and this could delay the preparation and submission of the detailed proposals. We have agreed that the Working Party should consider the detailed proposals prior to their being considered by the Group.
8. These discussions are of necessity without prejudice to the formal procedure for consultation under Circular 7/77. It is hoped to initiate this shortly; the National Park will then advertise the proposals in the usual way.

9. We were informed that the present annual availability for live firing on Willsworthy amounted to 215 days a year and that it was extremely unlikely that this would be exceeded when the ranges had been modernised; what would happen is that there would be a more intensive use of the ranges and thus more training could in fact be achieved in the same number of days.

IV. WILLSWORTHY: PROPOSED REBUILD OF THE CAMP

10. We were told that the requirement derives from the appalling state of the existing buildings and the need to provide day/overnight accommodation for small units or sub-units of up to 130 men using the fixed ranges at Willsworthy and/or the adjacent training areas at Willsworthy, Merrivale and Okehampton. We were also told that this accommodation must be close although 10-15 minutes marching distance away would suffice. Common rights restrict the choice of site and Okehampton Camp was too far away, particularly with traffic congestion in the summer. The accommodation would be used throughout the year, mainly by units based in the South West. Plymouth-based units are only expected to use it if doing two or more consecutive days training in the area.

11. It was acknowledged that there might be possible alternative sites and we have 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 Committee as soon as possible.

12. We were informed that it was likely that the proposals for the Camp would conflict with the joint policy paper by the National Park Authority and the Countryside Commission on military use of Dartmoor. We expect that this is a matter which will concern us considerably in the coming year.

V. ARTILLERY AND MORTAR FIRING

13. The artillery and mortar firing has remained a matter of concern to the National Park who wish the question of moving the artillery and mortar firing from Dartmoor to be kept under constant review. The firing of the FH70 on Dartmoor in mid-1980 was of particular concern to the National Park and they have indicated that they would like to see such firing removed altogether.

14. We understand that on 24 April 1981 representatives of the Dartmoor National Park Committee and of the Countryside Commission met the Under-Secretary of State for the Army and that the matter of artillery firing on Dartmoor, in particular the firing by FH70, was discussed. We also understand that as a result of that meeting, the Minister agreed to put in hand an examination to determine whether concessions could be made and that he had directed that the FH70 would not be fired on Dartmoor pending the outcome of that review.

15. We further understand that following that meeting the Minister wrote to the Chairman of the National Park Committee with a proposal linking the modernisation of the ranges, the rebuilding of the Willsworthy Camp and concessions over the artillery firing.

16. We were informed by the National Park that whilst the package contained in the Minister's letter might seem to the MOD to be a convenient way of tackling the problem, the National Park was both disappointed and concerned by the introduction of the Willsworthy Camp proposals as these cut directly against its joint policy with the Countryside Commission on further MOD investment on Dartmoor.

17. We were advised by the Ministry of Defence representative that, whilst the National Park might wish to look at the artillery firing and the Willsworthy proposals separately, the Minister's concession on artillery firing is conditional and cannot stand in isolation.

18. We are agreed that this subject will be kept under regular review.

VI. CONSERVATION

19. We have been informed that the Ministry of Defence Conservation Group for Willsworthy has now been set up. It has already done some useful work and established valuable information about Willsworthy's plants, insects, geology and archaeology. However, we have nothing further to report about the group for the larger area to be formed by the Dartmoor National Park and referred to in Paragraph 8 of our last report.

20. As regards the survey of archaeological sites, we were informed that all documentation had been completed and that it was now a matter of discussion between the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments and Devon County Council. It would appear that the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments favoured the marking of sites and that this would be discussed at the same time.

21. The establishment of an Environmental Base Line was first proposed and accepted in principle at our first meeting, and mention of this was included in Paragraph 10 of our first annual report. There were, however, practical difficulties and the Working Party had concluded that the military impact could best be monitored by a combination of aerial photography and ground survey. We have discussed this matter further and we are advised that the process of monitoring would entail expenditure of about £1,500 - £2,000 a year which is beyond the resources of the Nature Conservancy Council. It has been suggested that this should be paid for by the Ministry of Defence. We have tasked the Working Party with examining all the issues raised, including the preparation of estimates of the cost and to what extent these were referable to military training.

VII. TRANSFER OF MILITARY TRAINING - CRAMBER TOR

22. We reported in Paragraph 14 of our last annual report that after lengthy negotiations a compromise proposal to use an area around Cramber Tor under closely specified conditions for a trial period of 2 years had proved acceptable to both the Ministry of Defence and the Dartmoor National Park Authority. We also mentioned that the landowners were agreeable to the use of the land but that legal difficulties had delayed the completion of licences to train. These difficulties were overcome and training started there on 4 March 1981.

23. We were told that training was to be monitored by the National Park who would receive advance notice of all exercises and be present for some, and that the licence from the South West Water Authority had made provision for this. We have been informed that monitoring is now taking place and that there has been some negotiation about digging areas but that this is now settled for the rest of the two year trial period.

VIII. MILITARY STRUCTURES

24. We have been informed that byelaws have to be advertised on notices around the edge of the ranges and that it is a common objective of all concerned to keep these to a minimum consistent with adequate warning for the public, and that agreement is being sought on where they need to be erected. We have also been informed that 10 'permanent' observation posts on the Okehampton Range have been demolished by the Army, which is 3 more than originally agreed; the lookout hut on Winter Tor has also been removed.

IX. TIMING OF THE TEN TORS EXPEDITION

25. The National Park expressed some concern about both the timing and scale of the Ten Tors Youth Expedition which takes place annually on Dartmoor and is organised by the Ministry of Defence. This issue was referred to the Working Party who reported that the weight of opinion was against a change in the date. After discussion, however, we have agreed to note the National Park's continuing concern over the increasing use of Dartmoor for sponsored walks and similar events.

X. MILITARY USE OF DARTMOOR: JOINT PAPER BY THE CONTRYSIDE COMMISSION AND THE NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

26. We were informed by the National Park that when the first National Park Plan was prepared, Baroness Sharp's report was still awaited. The Plan is now being reviewed and a number of papers, including one on the military use of Dartmoor, were being prepared on the context of that review.

27. We were told that the National Park Committee, in conjunction with the Countryside Commission, had been considering their broad policy approach to military training, which they had based on the Government White Paper. The National Park Committee felt that Government attitudes justified the adoption of the following guide lines 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 licencing of new land for military use in the National Park.

28. The military were not prepared to endorse the Paper and said that it lacked balance and was, at some points, inconsistent with the White Paper and Baroness Sharp's report. In particular, they challenged a statement in the Paper which suggested that all recent benefits had accrued to military training interests, the general statement that "Military training in the National Park is wrong" and they suggested that it under-rated the significance of the Government's decision that military training must remain in the foreseeable future.

29. Whilst we were agreed that the acceptance of the White Paper as a base for all parties to move forward was valuable, the Ministry of Defence were concerned that the document should fully and accurately represent the Government's view. They inquired whether the Paper could be altered but both the National Park and the Countryside Commission felt that that was not possible although they conceded that there might cases in the document where the wording could be better expressed. We understand that the Services have now expanded on those points in the document where they considered there were inaccuracies and that they have indicated the wording which they feel should be altered. The National Park are now engaged on finalising the review of the National Park Plan (which is a document which they are by statute required to prepare) and will have regard to these points in preparing the final text. This should be published within the next twelve months.

XI. VALUE OF THE SERVICES' PRESENCE ON DARTMOOR

30. We received a report prepared by the Services outlining the considerable efforts that have been made by them to protect the environment on Dartmoor and describing the benefits which, in their view, had accrued from the military presence.

○ We were informed by the National Park that whilst nothing in the Paper justified the retention on Dartmoor of artillery and mortar firing, due consideration will be given to the points made in preparing the final text of that part of the National Park Plan Review which deals with the contribution made to the objectives of the National Park by major land holders.

(Signed)

W.A. Burkinshaw

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

(Signed)

Sir Peter Stallard, KCMG,CVO,MBE

○ Secretaries

Chairman