

DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP

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

March 1987

SEVENTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP (1986)

INTRODUCTION

1. The sixth Annual Report was submitted to the Secretaries of State for Defence and for the Environment in March 1986 and covered the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth meetings of the Group. Since then we have held two meetings: the eighteenth at Okehampton Camp on 25th March 1986 and the nineteenth at the National Park Headquarters, Bovey Tracey on 24th October 1986. A statement was issued to the Press after each meeting.

2. The Working Party has also held two meetings and we are grateful for the continued support afforded to the Group. In accordance with agreed procedures, in September 1986 the nominee of the General Officer Commanding, South West District, took over the Chairmanship of the Working Party from the National Park Officer until 1988, when the latter will reassume the Chairmanship.

3. In general some steady, albeit unspectacular, progress was achieved during the period of this report in further reducing the impact of military training on the amenities of the National Park.

4. The Group's second meeting marked the completion of eight years of consultation and we took the opportunity to review the existing machinery and to appraise our efficacy. It was generally agreed that in view of the sensitive and contentious nature of military use of National Parks every opportunity should be taken to provide a framework for dialogue between the Armed Forces and the National Park Authority, and in this context it was felt that the existing machinery of the Steering Group was adequate and the minimum required to ensure the existence of a forum for discussion.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL BASE LINE

5. The final version of this important project (which establishes a base against which environmental or ecological changes can be monitored) has now been tabled and the five component areas definitively established. Arrangements have been made for their resurvey in 1987: the outcome should prove very interesting.

This final version incorporates as an appendix the Bird Survey carried out in the spring by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

PROTECTION OF ANCIENT MONUMENTS

6. The leaflet mentioned in our last report has been produced and is being distributed to military personnel training on the Moor.

MILITARY ARTEFACTS

7. The military authorities have identified eleven structures on the Moor which are no longer required in connection with training and offered to remove them and restore the sites to moorland. A preliminary archaeological survey of these structures carried out by staff of the National Park revealed that there was a case for retaining some of these structures as they constitute historical examples of use of the Moor. The National Park will consider further and provide a definitive reply to the Army's offer.

RECONSTRUCTION OF WILLSWORTHY CAMP

8. Progress with this contentious proposal is inevitably slow and there is nothing positive to report. The Army remain convinced of the need for a small camp near the ranges, and the Countryside Commission and the National Park Committee continue to oppose any further new investment likely to prolong the military presence. One minor environmental improvement has been made by placing underground the overhead telephone cables from the A386 road to the existing camp.

RECONSTRUCTION OF WILLSWORTHY RANGES

9. The modernised ranges were brought into full use on 1 September 1986.

OKEHAMPTON RING ROAD

10. The policy of 'benign neglect' has come in for some criticism in the local press. This policy was a compromise solution reached as part of a consultation process on the Duchy of Cornwall plan and was subsequently included in the licence to the Army.

The road is deteriorating more rapidly than had perhaps been expected and has now become unsuitable for civilian motor transport, which was after all the objective of the Countryside Commission and the National Park Committee.

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COL. J S FORREST
Secretaries

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