

DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP - FIFTEENTH REPORT

1. Since the last report was submitted to the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Dartmoor Steering Group has met three times. It has been supported by the Dartmoor Working Party under the chairmanship of the Joint Secretaries. Project Sub Groups have been used, where appropriate, to drive forward several initiatives to successful conclusion.
2. The meetings continue to keep under review the best possible reconciliation of the requirements of military training, conservation and public access. The discussions and negotiations have been conducted, throughout, with pragmatism and good humour. In addition to the meetings acting as a forum for solving problems and exchanging views, they have also been a catalyst for the reconciliation of issues before meetings.

MEMBERSHIP

3. With the agreement of the Secretaries of State, a representative of the Commons' Council (a Statutory Body created by the 1985 Dartmoor Commons Act) joined the Steering Group from the 37th Meeting.
4. The Chairman has announced his desire to retire and a successor is being sought.

TRAINING AREA AND RANGE SAFETY

5. The measures authorised by the Under Secretary of State for Defence following the accident at Great Mis Tor in June 1995 have all been implemented. In consultation with the National Park Authority and the Duchy of Cornwall warning signs and notices were designed and erected to inform the public without intruding excessively into the landscape. Specialist teams continue to clear old munitions from areas frequented by the public outside of the present range area with many Second World War devices being found.
6. In parallel, a risk assessment had been carried out into the effects of dry training using blank ammunition and pyrotechnics on stock and the public who share Dartmoor for the majority of the year when live firing

is not taking place. Measures to increase the awareness of Service personnel had been introduced and more information given to the public.

DUCHY OF CORNWALL LICENCE

7. At the 38th Meeting, in the seventh year of the twenty one year Duchy licence, the significant elements were reviewed:
 - a. Longer term enabled forward planning.
 - b. Improved environmental safeguards.
 - c. Cessation of artillery high explosive firing from September 1998.
 - d. Greater public access guaranteed.
 - e. Increased use of horses instead of vehicles.
 - f. Better monitoring and policing with the appointment of a Deputy Bailiff.
 - g. Removal of unexploded ordnance.
 - h. Firmer control of vehicle movement and improved vehicle recovery procedures.
 - i. Reversion of redundant tracks to moorland.
2. Concerns were also addressed:
 - a. Need to develop non damaging methods of unexploded ordnance clearance.
 - b. The potential for damage by a heavier version of BV206.
 - c. The practical problems of the Loop Road maintenance policy.
 - d. The importance of the design, siting and landscaping of buildings.
 - e. The dislike of portaloos being used on the Moor.

DARTMOOR ACTION PLAN

8. The Conservation and Recreation Initiative Action Plan is complete having achieved its objectives. Over the last six years redundant military artefacts have been removed, unauthorised vehicular intrusion prevented, tracks restored, the appearance of military structures improved, public knowledge and awareness increased, and public access maximised *with* no constraints imposed by live firing.

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SAFEGUARDING MILITARY ARTEFACTS

9. Despite the removal of redundant and dangerous artefacts, many military structures remain on Dartmoor. Their importance as part of the cultural heritage is recognised with MOD maintaining those for which an operational requirement exists. Further work in liaison with English Heritage into the national significance of the structures used for training is planned.

INTEGRATED LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR WILLSWORTHY

10. On the instructions of the Secretary of State for Defence an Integrated Land Management Plan has been prepared for MOD's freehold land at Willsworthy. Through the Integrated Land Management Plan process, MOD intends to harmonize its activities with those of other interest groups and users, in a way that is consistent, economic, environmentally acceptable and reflect MOD's policy in pursuit of active conservation measures. Meeting within the Dartmoor Working Party, the relevant Statutory Bodies, advised by RPS Clouston (a leading environmental consultancy), have identified strategic aims, each supported by a number of objectives with performance indicators. From these are derived an action plan which will be updated annually. The Integrated Land Management Plan has been endorsed by the Steering Group and will be published in mid 1999. Because of the existence of mature liaison procedures the work has not exposed any new issues.

WILLSWORTHY CONSERVATION GROUP

11. Comprising of local experts and representatives from the National Park Authority and English Nature, the Willsworthy Conservation group continues to advise MOD on the maintenance and, where appropriate, the enhancement of habitats for native flora and fauna. The Natural Area Profile and local Biodiversity Action Plan have given additional impetus to the work of the Group.

WILLSWORTHY CAMP

12. The restoration work on the site of the demolished buildings of the old Willsworthy Camp is being continued by MOD with the assistance of National Park Authority. Although moorland brash was sown, the regeneration of heather has been slow despite the exclusion of livestock. The hedges planted around the new building are helping to absorb the building into the landscape.

OKEHAMPTON MOORGATE INITIATIVE

13. As part of the regeneration of Okehampton, a programme was devised to improve the first impressions of Dartmoor gained by visitors approaching from Okehampton which were uninspiring. A planting programme has been developed to meld the Camp into the landscape, colour and materials used for rebuilds within the Camp have been selected sensitively, security lighting has been reduced to avoid light pollution, the stream crossing has been rebuilt to improve it both visually as well as satisfying modern safety criteria and vehicle parking on the open moor has been constrained.

TEN TORS

14. Concerns about the effect on stock lambing and calving and also bird nesting of the 2,400 young people participating in the Ten Tors challenge in mid May were addressed at the 37th Meeting. ~~As it would be impossible to hold the expedition and the three month's training for it at other times because of school holidays and examinations,~~ MOD's proposal to implement various measures to reduce environmental impact, mainly during the training was accepted.

ACHIEVING A BALANCE

15. The Dartmoor Steering Group continues to help to achieve the balance between the essential need of the Nation to train its Armed Forces and the purposes for which the National Park was designated. As foreseen by Lady Sharp in her Report in 1965, discussions between the relevant bodies at a local level under an independent Chairman have found solutions to many of the issues, while continuing to strive to find the best possible resolution of the sometimes conflicting requirements. ~~The work of the Steering Group and its Working Party demonstrates that the MOD, as a relevant authority as defined by the Environment Act, has due regard for the purposes of the National Park.~~

16. *The Steering Group has considered the implications of the Strategic Defence Review which it will monitor closely, bringing its experience to the consideration and communication of any issues local issues which arise.*

Sir Anthony Barrowclough QC

Chairman

Lieutenant Colonel A H CLARK OBE PARA

Doctor N H Atkinson

Joint Secretaries