



# **DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP**

## **SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT**

of the

**Dartmoor Steering Group**

to the

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

**December 2002**

**DARTMOR STEERING GROUP**  
**SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT**  
**Covering the Period March 2001 to December 2002**

1. Since the last report was submitted to the Secretaries of State for Defence, and for the then Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Dartmoor Steering Group (DSG) has met twice under the chairmanship of Mr Jim Woolcombe, the independent Chairman. The DSG continues to be supported by the Dartmoor Working Party (DWP) under the chairmanship of the Joint Secretaries.

**Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD)**

2. FMD restrictions on Dartmoor had a severe impact on services training and the wider use of Dartmoor by the public. As well as carrying out their separate responsibilities, MoD and National Park Authority (NPA) personnel worked successfully together to patrol the exclusion zones in the Dunnabridge area during the spring and summer of 2001. The NPA submitted evidence to the Devon Inquiry, endorsed the Devon Recovery Plan, and, with other local authorities, has been developing contingency plans based on lessons learnt during the outbreak. The DSG felt that both services training and recreation/tourism interests would share a future objective that blanket access restriction be avoided if at all possible should the disease reoccur, and that DEFRA action, advice and guidance should serve this end.

**Cramber Tor**

2. Planning consent to dry train on Cramber Tor expired in July 2001. The requirement for an Environmental Impact Assessment and delays caused by the FMD resulted in a consent extension to 30 November 2001. The Notice of Proposed Development (NOPD) with its attendant Environmental Statement has been registered by the NPA and will be determined after due consideration.

**Code of Guidance for Mass Events**

3. There has been significant and successful liaison between MoD and the National Park Authority to ensure that as far as is possible relevant training activity complies with this National Park guidance which seeks to minimize community and environmental disturbance from large scale events and activities.

**Ten Tors**

4. The DSG accepts that the Ten Tors expedition (2500 teenagers walking for up to 55 miles on Dartmoor whilst visiting ten tors in 36 hours) is of such importance to the regional youth movement that it warrants treatment as a special case in relation to the Code of Guidance for Mass Events. However the MoD undertook to canvas participating organizations as to the possibility of moving the event from May (close to the lambing/nesting season) to November. The overwhelming response was that, given the current academic year, such a date change would be impractical. It was therefore decided that the event should continue to take place in May. The MoD

undertook to re-examine the case if there were significant changes to the academic year.

## **Access**

5. CROW Act. With respect to the CROW Act, mapping of Access Land on Dartmoor by the Countryside Agency is expected to start in the near future. The NPA has responsibility for the establishment of a Local Access Forum, and will shortly invite expressions of interest in membership. It was envisaged that a person with knowledge of military interests would be essential to the Forum's business.

6. Firing Notices. The MoD continue to strive to publish timely firing programmes and amendments to it so as to permit maximum access to the public over the training areas when no live firing is taking place. A local website is being used, in addition to normal communication of firing notices, to enable short notice amendments to be notified as soon as possible.

7. Ramblers' Association Access Request. Representatives of the MoD, the NPA and the Ramblers' Association have walked the ground to view the Association's proposal to move the Okehampton Range Boundary southwards in the vicinity of Cut Hill to facilitate public access to Cut Hill and Fur Tor. The proposal has been accepted by the MoD in principle. The NPA has confirmed that such a change will not require an NOPD, or Environmental Impact Assessment. However, it was agreed that English Nature and the NPA's ecologist should view the ground to assess the detailed line of warning poles which would become the access line. Any change will be subject to byelaw amendment and, of course, consultation.

8. Dartmoor Preservation Association and Open Spaces Society Access Request. The Dartmoor Preservation Association and the Open Spaces Society have requested the Duchy of Cornwall to exclude military training from Yes Tor and High Willhays. The MoD have been in discussion with the Duchy in order to agree a response to the request. Public safety is the paramount issue. From an MoD perspective, only requests which implied no diminution of training capability or safety cover could be considered. The NPA understands and accepts this position for the duration of the current Duchy license.

## **Byelaws**

9. The MoD are currently reviewing the primary legislation that enables MoD to enact and enforce its own byelaws. This review will be complete by Mar 03, thereafter permitting local byelaw review as directed.

10. An intervisibility study, the aim of which is to confirm the location of lookouts and flags at the same time as reducing the visual intrusion of such infrastructure, will be completed shortly. This study will inform the local byelaw review which will include boundary changes agreed with the Ramblers' Association.

## Conservation

11. Active liaison between the MoD, the NPA and the Duchy of Cornwall has resulted in some significant conservation work on Dartmoor. Work has included hedging, ditching, track repair, tree planting and some military artifact repair; the latter only after consultation with the appropriate authorities.

12. The DSG recognizes the need for environmental monitoring covering not just military training, but also the activities of graziers, recreational users, together with the implications of climate change. English Nature have kindly agreed to look at the status of current information and the variety of monitoring already undertaken by different agencies. This will enable a more coordinated approach so as to better inform the decision making process in relation to conservation activity in the future.

## Dartmoor Forest Environmentally Sensitive Area Scheme

13. The DSG noted that whilst progress by the commoners to agree entry of the Forest of Dartmoor into the ESA scheme had been slow and difficult, this had now been achieved and DEFRA approval has been given. MoD had been active in the consultation on such matters as stock clearance, which had been helpful towards a successful outcome.

## Unexploded Ordnance Clearance

14. FMD and higher priorities resulted in the suspension of activities during the period of this report. However, clearance is expected to resume in the not to distant future with a particular emphasis on the clearance of land for a fire break trial at Hangingstone.

## Conclusion

15. The DSG continues to achieve the balance between the needs of military training and National Park purposes, especially when these requirements seem to be in conflict. Further, the work of the DSG and DWP generates healthy and continuing liaison resulting in problem solving at the lowest levels. Evidence of this excellent liaison is manifested in a total lack of complaints reaching the DSG for resolution during the period of this report. The NPA recognizes through the DSG that MoD has satisfactorily fulfilled its duty on Dartmoor to have regard for the purposes of National Parks as required by, and set out within, the Environment Act 1995.



Jim Woollcombe  
Chairman



Lt Col R C B Nutting



Dr N Atkinson

Joint Secretaries