

# History and Development of the Dartmoor National Park Authority

## Dartmoor Factsheet



### The development of National Parks in the UK

The development of National Parks in the UK can be traced over a period of 150 years in response to three main driving forces. The first driving force was an early significant interest in countryside expressed most clearly by the romantic poets. William Wordsworth in the Lake District, whilst lamenting the potential of hordes arriving there by railway, famously expressed a view in 1810 of the Lakes as a *'sort of national property in which every man has a right and interest, who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy'*. Modern concepts of natural beauty and conservation started to develop from this with many voluntary societies being formed to hold land and argue for both its protection and public access. For example, in 1895 the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest and Natural Beauty (now the National Trust) was established with purposes similar to those which National Parks have today.

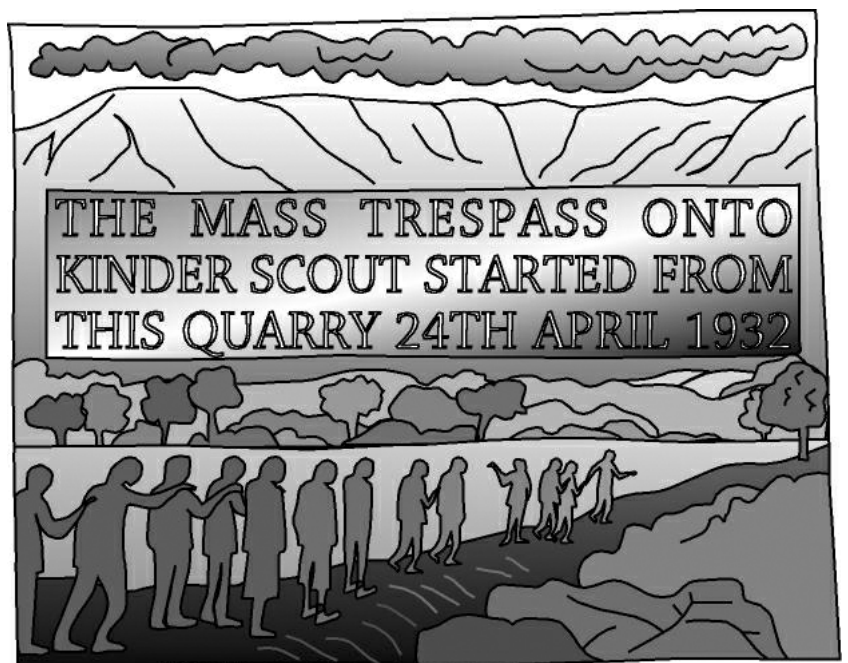
The second driving force came with the industrial revolution, as people moved to towns and cities. By 1851 half the population of England and Wales lived in towns and cities and access to the countryside for 'healthy outdoor recreation' became increasingly popular. This factor became especially important politically between the First and Second World Wars as demands for free access to the hills and open country escalated, with the Kinder Scout (Peak District) mass trespass of 1932 being a pivotal moment.

The third driving force was the international National Park movement which first emerged in North America, largely inspired by a visionary Scotsman, John Muir.

In 1872 an Act was passed establishing Yellowstone as the world's first National Park, followed in 1890 by congress approval for Yosemite National Park. Although the American concept of protected wilderness is somewhat different to the UK model of National Parks the notion of protecting valuable natural resources is shared.

These three forces came together and gained real momentum in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the Addison Committee in 1929 conducted the first committee of enquiry for establishing National Parks in Great Britain and the voluntary Standing Committee for National Parks, now the Council for National Parks, was set up in 1935. As Britain planned its post Second World War reconstruction John Dower, an architect, rambler and a member of the Standing Committee for National Parks, was asked to prepare a report. The 1945 Dower Report to Government recommended the establishment of National Parks and a new Government agency - the National Parks Commission.

*Illustration of the plaque in Hayfield quarry that commemorates the Peak District mass trespass*



The Report defined a National Park as:

'an extensive area of beautiful and relatively wild country in which for the nation's benefit and by appropriate national decision and action

- a) the characteristic landscape beauty is strictly preserved
- b) access and facilities for public open air enjoyment are amply provided
- c) wildlife and buildings and places of architectural and historic interest are suitably protected, while
- d) established farming use is effectively maintained.'

Dower clearly saw that National Parks in England and Wales would have to be different to other National Parks in the world - with the land remaining largely privately owned and their areas protected as working environments - this situation is still the same today. Whatever the local perception today in terms of success or failure, this model is of increasing interest around the globe in protected area debate and management.

In 1947 the Hobhouse Committee recommended the creation of twelve National Parks in England and Wales. The Committee proposed administrative systems and gave contemporary descriptions of the characteristics, problems and requirements of those areas. The 1949 *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act* then enabled the designation of the Peak District as the first National Park in England and Wales



closely followed by the Lake District, Snowdonia and, on 30 October 1951, Dartmoor.

The Government of the day hailed the Act saying that 'for the first time in English history an Act has been passed by parliament with the object of setting out in a workable form a comprehensive charter of rights for all lovers of the open air'.

The Committee and administrative arrangements for the National Parks continued largely unchanged up until 1974 when local government reorganisation arising from the 1972 *Local Government Act* was put in place. The 1972 Act directed County Councils to form distinctly separate National Park Committees ('Authorities') to which planning and countryside functions were delegated. The position of 'National Park

Officer' was set out in statute, and for the first time specific departments with separate and increased funding were established. At the same time the Government created the National Parks Supplementary Grant in which central government provided around 75% of the annual funding. A further clarification of the National Park's purposes explained that 'if there was an irreconcilable conflict between the conservation of the landscape and its enjoyment by the public the former must take precedence'. In addition the National Park Authority was given 'the duty to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Parks'. This completed the necessary legal framework with which the development of the National Park Authority could proceed.

In 1991 an Independent Review Panel produced a report called *Fit for the Future* with 176 recommendations for the betterment of National Parks. Its most significant outcome was the 1995 *Environment Act* which established new free-standing authorities for all of the National Parks in England and Wales. The Act revised the purposes of the National Parks as:

- (i) the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Parks; and
- (ii) the promotion of opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of their special qualities by the public.



Illustration © Marcus Byron

An explicit duty was placed on the authorities that, in pursuing these purposes, the authorities should seek to foster the social and economic well being of their local communities, but without incurring significant expenditure, and to co-operate with local authorities and other agencies whose specific task is to promote social or economic development.

## Specific activities and developments at Dartmoor National Park since 1951

Like all UK National Parks Dartmoor's original purposes were 'to preserve and enhance the natural beauty and to promote their enjoyment by the public'. The responsibility to do this was given to Devon County Council which in turn created a committee to carry out this function. Much of the work involved making planning decisions.

By 1961 the annual expenditure was £12,000 per year and there were five full time members of staff working on national park matters. 1962 saw the appointment of the first Head Warden (Ranger) whose duties included contacting the land owners, recruiting volunteers, opening and signing paths, removing eyesores and much more.

The *Local Government Act* of 1972 brought about a major change that led to the appointment of the first National Park Officer in 1974. By now the Dartmoor National Park Department (still part of Devon County Council) was up and running and began operating in a way similar to that of today, with 34 full time members of staff. After much consultation, the first National Park (Management) Plan appeared in 1977 (to be reviewed in 1983) and the present Head Office was established at Parke, Bovey Tracey in 1979.

A committee composed of 21 members governed the whole operation of the National Park Department made up of 11 Devon County councillors, 3 district councillors and 7 appointed by the government, usually local people with a special interest or knowledge. This body met regularly to consider major decisions of spending, policy and, of course, planning. The committee assisted by the paid staff, had to deal with many changes, some concerning large planning developments within the moor, new arrangements with

the military use of the moor and adapting to new legislation. The most notable of these was the passing of the *Dartmoor Commons Act in 1985*, which granted the legal right of access on foot and horseback on all Dartmoor common land. It also created a new Dartmoor Commoners' Council with powers to regulate grazing on the moor. The new Act provided an important new means of managing the higher parts of the moor especially through the Dartmoor Commons Byelaws, which came into effect in 1989. The Ranger Service now had legal powers to help regulate the general public's use of the common land.

There had been a steady growth in the staffing and funding of the the National Park Department so that by 1990 the gross expenditure stood at £2.3 million and 75 full time staff were employed. The workforce was organised into three sections: Park Management, Policy and Planning, and Support Services.

In 1994 the boundary of the Dartmoor National Park was amended following a lengthy review process. Most of the changes were minor but Sticklepath village and a number of small areas around the National Park's margin were included, whilst Lee Moor and all existing china clay workings in south-west Dartmoor were excluded from the National Park.

In 1997 a new free-standing Authority (governing body) was created to replace the original County Council National Park Committee. The governing body expanded to include 26 members: 7 appointed by Devon County Council, 7 by the District Councils, and 12 by the Government, 5 of whom represented parish councils with 7 being appointed in the national interest and for their particular experience or knowledge. Gradual changes have occurred in the organisation to take on the newly defined National Park purposes, especially concerning the increased significance of promoting understanding and in trying to conserve all aspects of the cultural heritage, but the main thrust of the work remains the same.

Changes in rural policy and agriculture are designed to support the conservation of the Dartmoor landscape and its communities, with the National Park Authority working closely with those communities and many rural agencies as well as other relevant organisations concerned.



Additional new funding sources have become important to support particular initiatives or projects and the Authority has worked in closer partnership with other agencies and ministries in all areas of its work ranging from tourism to conserving wildlife. 2001 brought Dartmoor National Park's fiftieth anniversary celebration.



By 2004 further gradual growth has led to the employment of 111 'full time equivalents' staff (at August 2004) and an annual gross expenditure of £4 million. All 100% of this funding now comes direct from central Government through the Department for Food and Rural Affairs, (Defra).

Drawing all this activity together is the consensus building approach to the *Dartmoor National Park Management Plan*, involving over 90 partners in a plan for Dartmoor which establishes common objectives, joint working, and healthy co-operation. The Management Plan sets out a clear vision with a long term view for the future of Dartmoor within a national, European and global context. It clearly identifies five year priorities for each of the services within the Authority. Progress against these priorities is reported annually through the Best Value Performance Plan.

## Some future challenges

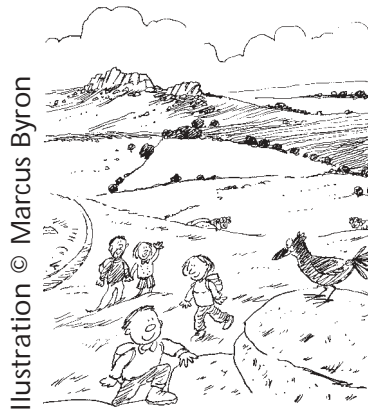
- ◆ The changing nature of agriculture, especially the increasing economic problems facing hill farmers and the environmental impacts and benefits of their activities;
- ◆ Increasing leisure time and wider appeal of the great outdoors to urban populations;
- ◆ Demographic changes - communities with higher proportions of older people, increasing numbers wanting to move to the countryside and the lack of affordable housing for young people;
- ◆ The need to support economic development, but not adversely affect local communities and environments;
- ◆ The Government's wish to increase energy production from renewable sources, such as wind-power.

### Useful web links for further information:

- Other factsheets:**
- General Information
  - The History of Dartmoor
  - Dartmoor Commons
  - Recreation and Tourism
  - Okehampton Bypass
- <http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/dnp/factfile/homepage.html>
- Other publications:**
- *Dartmoor National Park Management Plan 2001*  
<http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/dnp/planning/mplan.html>
  - *Dartmoor National Park Authority Performance Plan 2004-2005*  
<http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/dnp/pubs/bvpp0405.pdf>
  - *Action for Wildlife: The Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan*  
<http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/dnp/pubs/bap.html>

## Frequently Asked Questions

- **When was Dartmoor National Park Authority formed?**  
30th October 1951
- **Does Dartmoor National Park Authority own all the land?**  
No - it only owns a little and has to work with landowners and commoners to achieve its purposes. Landowners include: the National Trust, South West Water, the Ministry of Defence, the Forestry Commission, the Duchy of Cornwall and other private landowners. See the **General factsheet** for details.
- **Is there an entrance charge?**  
No - all National Parks in the UK are free to fulfil the 'second purpose' of promoting opportunities for understanding and enjoyment.
- **Is there a single entrance point?**  
No - people can access the open moor from many main and minor roads; see the Recreation and Tourism Education Factsheet for a map showing access and visitor numbers.



- **How many visitors do you get a year?**  
It is difficult to be precise because we do not have a single entry point, nor do we charge, but estimates range from 10 - 11 million day visits a year.

- **What facilities exist for visitors?**  
The main attraction is unrestricted access (for walkers and horse riders) to the wild open space that Dartmoor

offers with its biological and archaeological diversity. Dartmoor National Park Authority manages 4 visitor centres, including the High Moorland Visitor Centre at Princetown, and supports 12 village information points and another 4 Community Information points.

- **Do you charge for car parking?**  
Most car parks are free but some request a voluntary contribution. Car parks in towns and villages are managed by district councils and there is often a charge.



For further information, and a list of other Fact Sheets available, contact the:  
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