

The National Parks of England and Wales

Introduction and the Park Scene

The title of this conference 'Tourism, Environment and Natural Parks' demonstrates an indissolubility between parks, their environment and people visiting them. It can be traced back to the beginning of the modern park movement in the latter part of the nineteenth century when Thoreau and Olmstead persuaded the US government to set aside land of natural beauty for public enjoyment and as a 'challenge to the human spirit'. From this beginning, parks as we know them today, have developed throughout the world and in many different social and political environments. They exist to protect their valued landscapes both natural and historical for the enjoyment of visitors while at the same time providing for the needs of residents. In achieving these objectives parks frequently have to balance conflicting, but nevertheless, valid points of view.

This task is becoming increasingly difficult world-wide in an age of mass tourism where people travel further and in greater numbers than ever before. The problem is well demonstrated in Sinai: there is only one Ras Mohammed National Park but the number of visitors arriving increases year upon year. The same situation exists in the Saint Katherine Protectorate. The problem faced in these fragile environments is how to expand tourism which is sustainable. Albeit in a very different environmental setting similar difficulties exist in 'honeypot' areas within the parks of England and Wales which receive well over 100 million visitors per year. For in-

stance, in the Lake District, large numbers of tourists concentrate in popular areas and along the roads leading to them causing serious problems. If such 'overload' is not tackled in a sustainable way increasing visitor pressure will lead to these highly valued parks being steadily eroded and being of little or no value to anyone (Hardin, 1968), be it Ras Mohammed or the Lake District parks.

The growth of mass tourism is only one of many continuing changes which parks must seek to manage. In the European context parks have been much concerned with the intensification of agriculture and the detrimental landscape changes often associated with it. Furthermore, in England and Wales there is the perennial problem of access to private land within parks and the countryside generally which is presently being debated in Parliament.

In today's world people are ever more closely involved with their neighbours and this is nowhere more apparent than in the fields of tourism and the environment; this has led to a considerable growth in co-operation in these fields as demonstrated by this international conference. It has also led to a pertinent extension of the parks transcending national boundaries in an increasing recognition that the management of these special environments crosses political boundaries. A well documented case in northern Europe is between the Hautes Fagnes (Belgium) and Eifel (Germany) parks (Groupe PRO ed. 1995). Also between Brecon Beacons (Wales) and Normandie Maine (France) parks (Brecon Beacons Nat. Pk. Plan 1993). Further there is the imagina-



tive creation of the Geres Xures park across the border between Spain and Portugal (Mitchell, 1999) where the natural park on the Spanish side and the national park on the Portuguese side of the border are implementing a common framework for operation and development aided by the EU cross border co-operation fund INTERREG II. Another fascinating extension of the idea has been the proposal for a 'Parco Mediterraneo' (Gramigna, 1999) comprising the islands of Sardinia and Sicily where a certain commonality of culture, together with specific commonality of economic interests, suggest closer co-operation. In these examples is seen the naissance of the idea of a 'park model' for development. Similar attempts are underway elsewhere to pioneer such models as examples of sustainable rural development.

National Parks of England and Wales

It can be said that the idea of national parks was born out of the work of the Shelborne Society in the nineteenth century whose objective, put simply, was 'to protect birds, plants and pleasant places'. This became the blueprint ten years later for the National Trust, a non-governmental organisation whose objective was, and is, 'to preserve places of historic interest or natural beauty'. Governments took up the idea in the 1930s and in 1949 the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act passed into law. Most of the present parks were created in the decade which followed.

The National Parks of England and Wales are not national parks under the IUCN category II convention. This is because there are no really 'natural' or 'wild' areas within their boundaries.

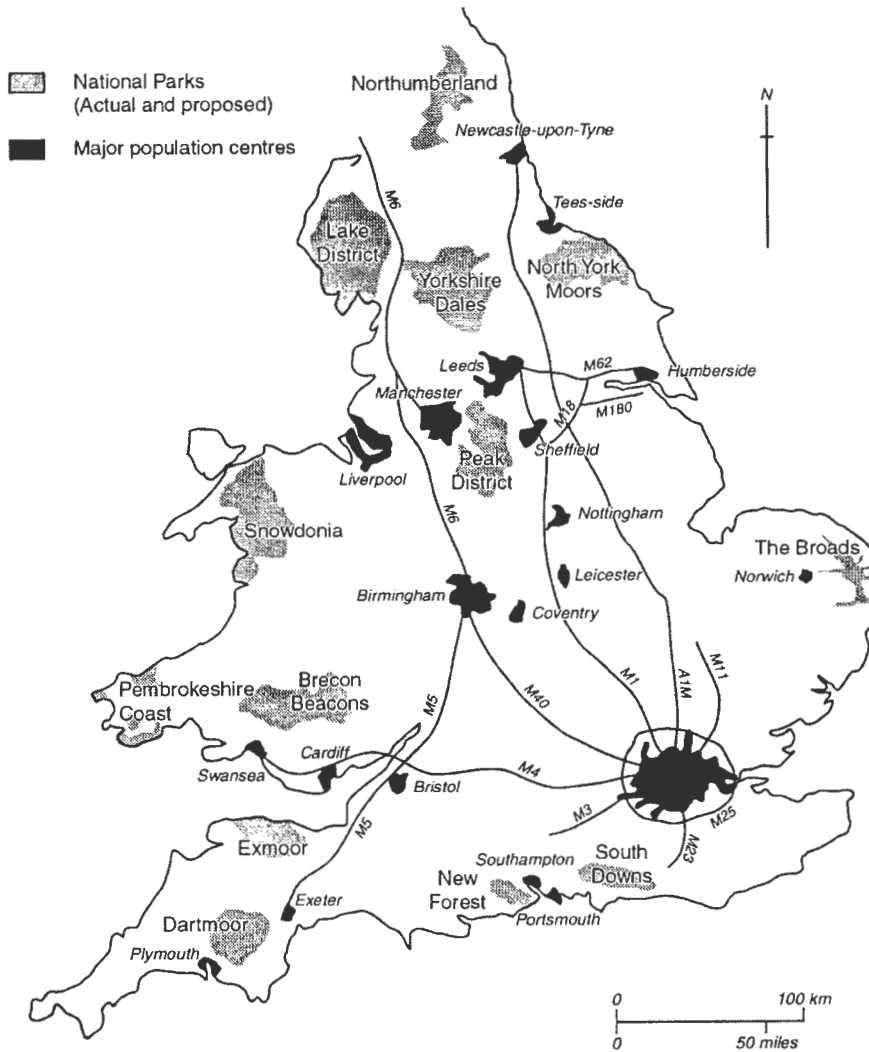


Fig. 1 - National Parks, motorway network and major population centres.



However, they are recognised internationally as IUCN protected landscapes category V. The best comparison is with the Parcs Naturels Regionaux in France. The parks in England and Wales, although designated nationally, are very largely in private hands; some 70% of the park land is owned by individuals, organisations and companies.

Number, location, size and population

There are eight parks in England and three in Wales at the present time; there are plans to designate two further parks in southern England (Fig. 1). These parks are mainly located in the north and the west in areas of the country generally regarded as having the most spectacular scenery and natural beauty and with large areas of open and common land attractive to visitors. They vary in size between the Lake District (2,243 km²) and the Broads (329 km²). The total park area is 14,000 km² or approximately 11% of the national territory. The resident population within parks varies between 40,000 in the Lake District to 2,000 in the Northumberland Park with Brecon Beacons in Wales having a population of 33,000. The overall resident population

of the parks is around 250,000 (see Table 1). However, visitors vastly outnumber these figures with the Lake District having some 40 million visitors with an overall total for parks of 178 million for 1996. From these figures it is obvious that park areas, not necessarily the parks themselves, are big tourist business.

Statutory duties

The parks have statutory duties (legally required objectives) which are shared, to a greater or lesser extent, by park systems throughout the world. They are:

- to conserve and enhance the wildlife, natural beauty and heritage;
- to promote access and opportunities for public enjoyment, recreation and education;
- to foster the economic and social well-being of the local population while having regard to their tranquillity.

If conflict arises in carrying out these duties greater weight should be given to conservation (Countryside Commission, 1995)

Each park produces a National Park Management Plan which serves as its blueprint for action. Since becoming Local Planning Authorities in

Table 1. National Park supplementary grant.

Park	Area km ²	Population Estimate '000	Grant 1995/96 £000	Grant 1998/99 £000
England				
Broads	329	6	1,550	1,500
Dartmoor	945	31	1,934	1,942
Exmoor	686	11	1,615	1,607
Lake District	2,243	42	2,941	2,836
Northumberland	1,031	2	1,265	1,184
North York Moors	1,436	25	2,151	2,179
Peak District	1,404	38	4,208	4,060
Yorkshire Dales	1,761	18	2,072	2,104
TOTAL			(17,736)	(17,412)
Wales				
Brecon Beacons	1,344	33	1,483	1,700
Pembroke Coast	583	24	1,732	2,500
Snowdonia	2,189	25	2,790	1,700
TOTAL	13,951	255,000	23,741	23,312

Source: Countryside Agency and Countryside Council for Wales



1995 Park Authorities have been responsible for the preparation of park-wide plans covering many activities such as waste disposal and land use planning, particularly with regard to building and industrial development. Planning control is critical for conservation and recreation management.

Park organisation and government

Each National Park Authority (the managing body) employs a small qualified staff headed by a National Park Officer. In the Brecon Beacons Park this is approximately eighty staff including rangers and wardens. The Authority itself is comprised of appointed members from the local government authorities whose areas overlap a park's boundaries. In England half the seats plus one (in Wales two-thirds of the seats) on the authority are apportioned in this way. The remainder of seats are allocated to people with specific expertise who will represent national and local interests. They are appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment for England and the Welsh Assembly for the Welsh parks.

Finance

At the present time parks are funded from four sources: national government (Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for England and the Welsh Assembly for Wales); Local Government authorities in proportion to

their area within a park's boundaries; self-generated income and other sources including grants from the EU and other bodies.

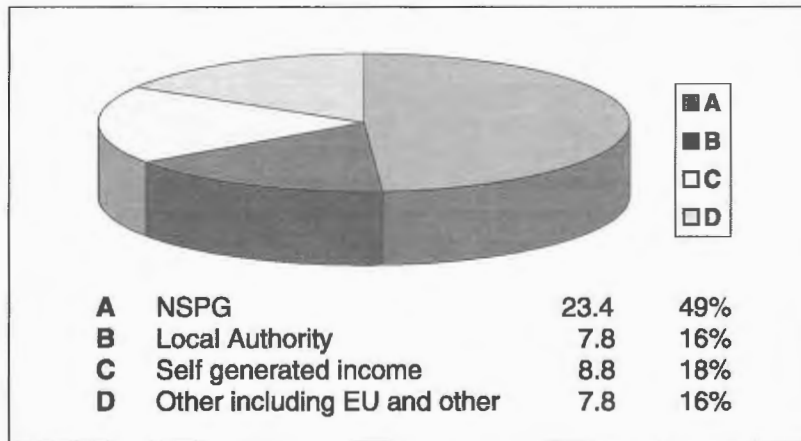
Seventy-five percent of the income finally approved by national government is paid through the National Parks Supplementary Grant (NPSG) and the remaining 25% is paid through the constituent Local Government Authorities. National and Local authority funding is based on the Barnett formula involving the number of residents, visitors and the area of each park. The overall income for the parks of England and Wales from government sources is in the order of £ 23.5 million per year. Many parks supplement their grant considerably through income generation with the sale of products, services charges... generating as much as 30% of their budget in this way. Fig. 2 shows nearly 20% of national parks' income as a whole came from self-generated income for 1998/9. Park income is further augmented by the receipt of grants from various quarters including Environmental Development Fund (Wales), Heritage Lottery, EU Structural Funds, LEADER ...

National Parks Today

Public perceptions

Over the last half century the National Parks of England and Wales have undergone a number of changes in their organisation and operation and this has undoubtedly led to an improvement of their performance and effectiveness in caring for

Fig 2 - Corporate income for the National Park Authorities 1998/99 (£ millions).



After Association of National Park Authorities Annual Review, 1999.



the countryside within their territories in an increasingly sustainable way. Nevertheless they are confronted with serious problems which, if not tackled imaginatively, will undermine their standing and image with the public at large.

Despite their clear objectives their role is challenged in some quarters as has been evident from the reaction to the proposals for the two new parks. What are they for? How can they improve an already well managed countryside? Although parks are well able to answer these questions there is still some truth in them. At the superficial level it is often difficult to see much difference in the state of the countryside on either side of a park boundary. Some criticism can be levelled at the compartmentalised, and inevitably bureaucratized, way park objectives are carried out, often emphasising their regulatory role rather than being in the vanguard of developing an integrative role, compatible with forward economic and social policies, showing how sometimes the seemingly opposing objectives of conservation and access can be harmonised for the sustainable development of rural areas.

Public involvement is not helped by the fact that parks are generally felt to be 'remote' from the people. They are perceived of as being 'imposed' on local people by national government, a top-down approach. Such a perception is emphasised by the so-called 'democratic deficit' in the composition of the National Park Authorities where the serving elected members are elected for their Local Authorities which lie within a park's boundaries. The presumption is that they are serving both the local and park authorities whose interests are not necessarily coincident. As park authorities are now local planning authorities there would appear to be a case for the residents of a park directly electing their local representatives and possibly choosing from a list put forward by national government to represent the national interest.

Public perceptions and attitudes towards conservation have changed significantly in the last two decades as an awareness of environmental issues grows with the increasing favour of organic products, concern over GMOs, the preservation of biodiversity, and the recognition of the need for sustainable rural development. However, paradoxically, during the same period, parks in England and Wales have slipped on the national awareness agenda, perhaps not entirely unrelated to the fact that the word 'park' has been pre-empted to cover almost any sort of open space.

The financial shortfall

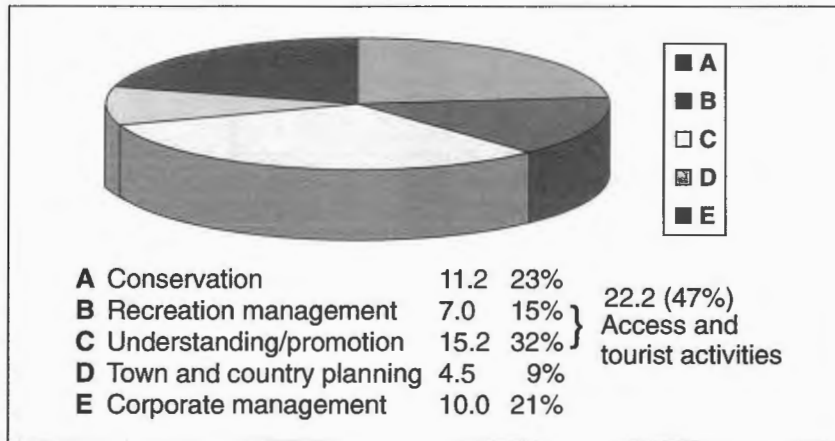
The major problem faced by parks is a lack of finance which is both absolute and comparative. Within the remit of the main statutory duties already outlined there are a number of further activities for which parks are wholly or partly responsible, ranging from management agreements with farmers and planning permission, to the provision of visitor centres to name but three out of nearly fifty which can be readily identified. For many of these local authority expertise is necessary and must be bought in by parks. Further, as parks are substantially underfunded with budgets less than for many secondary schools, they are unable to employ an adequate number of professional staff to fully fulfil their remit. They are only able to 'make ends meet' as it were by entering into many local partnerships which in themselves can be creative but which are costly in time and effort to bring on stream. The lack of an adequate financial base means that parks are small players in their local areas and are thus more easily sidelined when it comes to decisions on development and employment within a park's domain.

The financial settlements for parks are constrained by national and local authority priorities. Over the last four years the NPSG has not shown any progressive increase, indeed for English parks there has been a slight decrease between 1995/6 and 1998/9 (see Table 1). However outturn increases for the English parks from 1999/2000 and onwards for three years estimate increases of between 7%-9% (DETR, Annual Report 2000). As budgets have been previously 'frozen' it is evident that some specific priority objectives will not be met in the time-scale originally envisaged while other work will be postponed or shelved altogether. It is particularly difficult to see how the relatively new duty to 'seek to foster the economic and social well-being of communities within national parks' can be reconciled with the further statement that this should be accomplished 'without incurring significant expenditure'.

The distribution of the NPSG between parks is not always held to be equitable. The formula is complex and there are always special cases. Some parks may have additional legal expenditure as in the case of the challenge to power boating on Lake Windermere by the Lake District Park or the legal battle with the army in the Northumberland Park. In Wales there are grounds for dissatisfaction. Parks here have seen no projected NPSG increase which actually means a cut in real terms, although some additional but tied money



Fig 3 - Corporate expenditure by the National Park Authorities.



After Association of National Park Authorities Annual Review, 1999.

has since been allocated (ANPA, Annual Review 1999). The Brecon Beacons Park is particularly disadvantaged given its relatively high resident population. The situation is further exacerbated by local authority cutbacks in expenditure. Overall English National Parks will receive only 13% of the planned government expenditure on the countryside and wildlife for 2001/2 (DETR *op. cit.*).

A direct result of the paucity of financial resources, together with an increasing remit, has meant that parks' conservation programmes are limited. Under a quarter of park expenditures are devoted to conservation (1998/9) (Fig. 3), while 45% of corporate expenditure goes to recreation and promotion with the remaining 30% being distributed between management and planning.

Some parks do choose to spend more than others on conservation (Steadman, 1993). Some of the differences of expenditure from park to park may be explained by the different ecological importance of the landscape, land ownership and partnership agreements. In order to encourage conservation management of the national park estate, one of the system's primary remits, parks either purchase private land, or seek to reach agreement with landowners and pay compensation for 'profits foregone' from using their land 'sustainably' rather than 'intensively' (and being subsidised by the Ministry of Agriculture). Both purchases and agreements represent a considerable financial drain on any park's slender resources.

Access for visitors and encouragement of sus-

tainable tourism is the other primary remit for the park system and one with financial implications. There are considerable capital and running expenses in the provision of a number of facilities including footpaths, parking areas, visitor centres and hostel accommodation to mention but four. All facilities must be managed and maintained. Increased access to the countryside as envisaged in a Bill presently passing through Parliament will further add to parks' expenses. Success in encouraging tourism brings its own financial burden for parks such as the Lake District where the pressure of visitor numbers, especially those in cars, cause difficulties for the resident population as well as setting limits to the numbers that can be accommodated at any one time. Paradoxically, however, parks need the tourist industry and many would suggest it is their *raison d'être*. Although there is a financial cost, as indicated above, it is more than offset by tourist income generated within park boundaries (Fig. 4). This can be reasonably estimated as being over thirty times the NPSG income of the Lake District Park itself.

If parks are to play a role in economic regeneration, as their remit requires, it will be largely dependent on an expansion of the tertiary sector (tourism). Such regeneration can only be financed from outside the system, hence the need for a partnership between the tourist industry and parks which themselves represent 'a unique selling proposition' for the industry (Clarke, 1988). However it is a liaison which demands the development of a sustainable tourist policy having particular regard to the park environment and which involves a cost to the industry.

Fig. 4 - Estimated expenditure by tourists in the Lake District Park as a proportion of the NPSG for the park (1997/98).

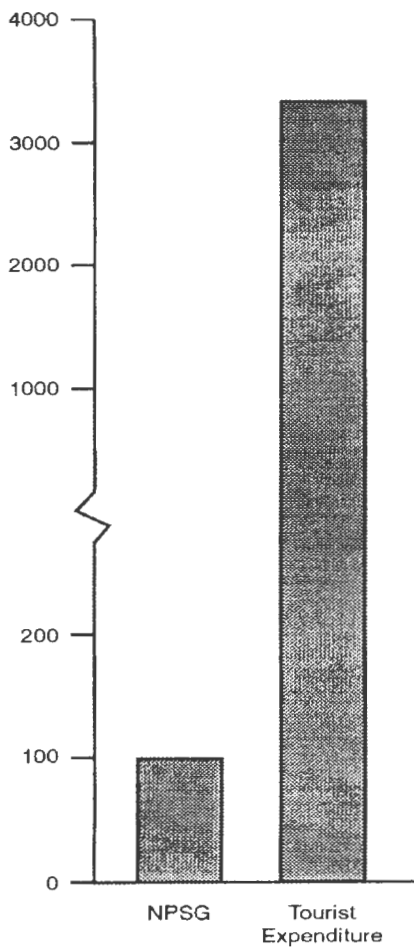
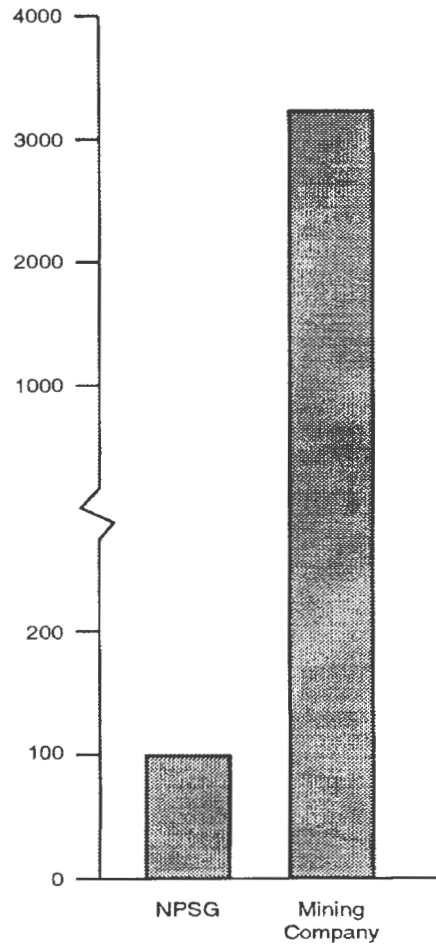


Fig 5 - Estimated expenditure by Cleveland Potash Company in the North York moors Park as a proportion of the NPSG for the park (1998/99).



Source: Author's estimate.

Minerals, motorways and military training

One of the unresolved questions facing national parks in England and Wales is to what extent can national (i.e. state) interests override the objectives set nationally for the national parks? The three examples indicated above illustrate some of the complexities of this problem. The only realistic answer would seem to be some degree of compromise. In many cases parks have been willing to compromise but the other parties with more resources at their disposal have been less willing.

A gladiatorial combat between unequal parties is the wrong way to settle these conflicts between competing interests (MacEwen and MacEwen, 1982). These words, written nearly two decades ago, still have a resonance today.

Mining

Mining, and particularly the quarrying of limestone, slates and other hard rocks, as well as the china clays of Dartmoor, has always been a problem for national parks as many of these valuable materials tend to be concentrated within parks. The blatant conflict between these operations and park objectives is self evident. However, the extraction of many of these materials is big business and plays an important part in supplying the needs of industry nationally. The situation has been further exacerbated with the search for oil and gas within national parks. Furthermore, mining forms an important source of income and employment locally, and some quarries continue to operate in Snowdonia and the Lake District where local jobs



are at stake. Many quarries were in operation before the establishment of national parks and in the case of the Peak Park the western boundary was drawn so as to exclude the major areas of activity; however mining companies soon wished to advance into the park and have been successful in extending their operations.

It is evident that parks are in no position to compete financially with mining companies (Fig. 5) and so if areas of parkland are to be saved from operations which are 'discordant, incongruous and inconsistent' with national park purposes a degree of accommodation has to be reached. Certainly there have been improvements in the last two decades with a tightening of regulations, some pressure from national government, the search for alternative sources of supply and the use of lower grade materials for some purposes. Recently the Peak Park was able to turn down an application by North West Aggregates to extend the life of the Eldon Hill quarry to 2004. However no final decision has been reached on the proposed extension to Blackdale quarry and objected to by the Peak Park.

Pressure to mine and quarry will continue and parks need to be rigorous in examining any applications which should not be approved unless the exploitation and proposed use of the material is vital to national interests or where local communities will be made redundant.

Motorways

Although the Manchester Sheffield motorway, which would have bisected the Peak park, was abandoned nearly two decades ago, pressure has continued for the upgrading of major roads within parks (A39 Okehampton bypass in the Dartmoor Park). The major problem within parks is that of traffic congestion. Various measures have been put into operation to improve traffic circulation and management; the paradox is that road traffic and particularly private cars, is the 'life-blood' of parks. With the present road infrastructure some twenty million people live within a couple of hours' drive of a national park (Fig. 1). It is also noted that four out of five visitors are happy to admire parks from the comfort of their cars.

National park policies are geared to traffic management, safety and containment with restrictions in particularly sensitive areas together with the exploration and introduction of innovative public transport schemes with pedestrian and cycle routeways for the more active minority.

Military training

One of the most vexed problems facing national parks is the occupation of areas of their land for military training. In the case of the Northumberland Park this amounts to nearly 20% of the total area, effectively bisecting the park in two.

There is an accepted national need for the maintenance and development of training areas which has become more acute with the loss of facilities for the British army elsewhere in Europe. The situation is further complicated in the case of the Northumberland Park by the fact that the army's ownership of land pre-dates the establishment of the national park. The army moved into the Otterburn site in 1911; furthermore, it provides direct employment for 120 civilians and spends £3.5 million on local contracts (*Independent*, 1996) thus helping the rural economy. For the park the problem of land occupancy is complex. The Authority objects to the basic incongruity of the situation and to the very evident environmental impact, especially the eyesores, the noise and the loss of 'rights of way' over the training areas for up to 300 days a year. The Otterburn enquiry is still ongoing.

So for the two parties it is a question of uneasy compromise where the park is always in a weak bargaining position, namely that the income generated by the army well exceeds the total budget of the park. Unfortunately it is a fact of geography that many of the parks of England and Wales are located in areas particularly suitable for military training and although Northumberland is an exceptional case, problems arise in Dartmoor, Brecon Beacons and in other parks. Under present conditions it appears that parks can only keep up pressure for concessions doing this unhappily with one hand tied behind their back.

The Way Forward

Funding parks

This rather bleak scenario does not belittle the work of National Parks, often carried out conscientiously and successfully in very difficult circumstances, but it does demand some thoughtful and continuing rethinking of the way forward. Are the present operational methods too bureaucratic and insufficiently innovative to achieve their objectives? It would be wrong to think that these questions are not addressed from time to time (Countryside Commission, 1984 and 1991). A stat-



utory audit along the lines of that now in operation for the Parcs Naturels Regionaux in France could be useful; however if the political will and the financial means are not forthcoming, worthwhile recommendations from reports will remain just that.

Faux de mieux it is becoming increasingly evident that parks are becoming less reliant on statutory grants and are now exercised in obtaining additional funding through partnerships with local business, exploring the niche marketing of 'park' products and further exploiting the opportunities presented by tourism as an income earner. Further co-operation and financial support is being exploited through EU sources and through the newly set up Regional Development Agencies in England.

Many parks are advancing in these directions. In the Peak Park approximately a third of their 'income' now comes from outside NPSG and Local Authority Sources (Gufogg, 2000); the park thus adds approximately £2 million to its grant budget. There are a number of local projects which attract out sourcing (Community Rail Partnership, niche marketing of rural products, Heritage lottery ...). As the park falls within an EU Objective 5B area (and partially within an Objective 2 area) it is receiving (1999-2000) co-financing for a number of projects from various funds. £663,000 from ERDF and £583,000 from EGGAF, the latter being directly matched through Ministry of Agriculture funding. LEADER II projects within the park attract further funding.

Agriculture and conservation

Apart from tourism, agriculture is the key to economic activity within national parks. It represents the major land use and is certainly the most important influence on the landscape and wildlife. In most parks farming enterprises are small family businesses and thus farming plays a vital role in the social and economic life of parks.

The present agricultural depression, particularly in livestock areas of England and Wales which include most parks, and the evident need to reform the Common agricultural Policy, have resulted in farmers and national park authorities establishing common ground between themselves and working more closely together as park objectives and those of agriculture move closer. The common objective being sustainable rural development which involves diversification but where farming is maintained as an

integral part of a park's environment.

Simultaneously, over the last two decades there has been a growing awareness of the rich biodiversity to be found on less intensively farmed land. This itself is leading to a gradual convergence between the interests of sustainable farming and conservation. Hedges, wetlands, wilderness areas, moorlands and pastures are some of the key habitats in need of careful management for conservation. Many sites are already theoretically protected within parks under various designations (such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest) and levels of management. Unfortunately some landowners resent 'outside' interference on their land and so sites need continuous monitoring. However, it can be shown that parks, through their persistence, are slowly engendering a more responsive attitude to conservation requests and will become key elements in conserving biodiversity.

Changing attitudes towards environmental protection on the one hand and better communication, co-ordination and targeting of activities by park authorities on the other, has led parks to fulfil their conservation obligations more effectively. Some parks have been specifically funded through specific EU programmes such as the North York Moors regeneration project. Other assistance has been forthcoming through NATURA 2000 (EU Birds and Habitats Directive). The framework for liaison between all the parties involved in conservation exists. The means are not always at hand.

Association

Another way forward is for parks to associate more closely with the many non governmental conservation, amenity and recreation trusts (CARTS) which exist in the countryside of England and Wales today (Dwyer and Hodge, 1996). These organisations range from local naturalists' trusts to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds with its membership of nearly 1 million, and the Groundwork Trust with its many volunteers to the National Trust which already owns 25% of the Lake District Park and lesser areas in most other parks. Obviously parks do work with these groups while each party reserves their legitimate independent status. However, a closer collaboration between their members and individual park authorities would not only harness potential manpower and money for more collective action but provide an active and supportive public voice at the 'grass roots' level within each park.



Concluding Remarks

The National Parks of England and Wales were established by the state more than fifty years ago. Their objectives remain essentially the same as when they were created; however, they now operate in a changed societal context. Parks work in an environment which is now more detached from government and where public funding represents a diminishing proportion of their overall budgets. The effect on parks has been mixed. It has created park authorities which are more entrepreneurial and at the same time the base of financial support has been broadened. Above all, this approach has strengthened and extended partnerships, the basis of park work today, with local people, the business community and organisations, both national and European, involved in conservation. However, self-generated income is not without its costs; it takes time to generate income as well as expertise which must either be bought in or employed. Furthermore, self-generated income sometimes comes with strings attached which may mean subtle changes in park policy.

The changing situation suggests that strong partnerships are crucial to parks' activities. Nowhere is this more so than in facilitating tourism and recreation where the natural assets of parks represent a unique tourist attraction and a source of added income both to the parks themselves and those who gain their livelihood from tourism within parks.

Conservation and visitor access are the twin pillars on which national parks were founded. To ensure their continuance park authorities must liaise ever more closely with the agricultural players, the environmental protectors and the inter-

ested visitors to forge a 'park model' for sustainable rural development integrating the environment with the economy which can be replicated in the wider countryside.

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