

# **DARTMOOR STEERING GROUP**

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

**March 1986**

INTRODUCTION

1. The fifth Annual Report was submitted to the Secretaries of State for Defence and for the Environment on 14th August 1984 and covered the thirteenth and fourteenth meetings of the group. Since then we have held 3 meetings: the fifteenth at the National Park Headquarters Bovey Tracey on 23rd October 1984, the sixteenth at Wyvern Barracks, Exeter on 20th March 1985 and the seventeenth at County Hall, Exeter on 28th October 1985. A statement was issued to the Press after each meeting.
2. In July 1984 Sir Peter Stallard was re-appointed as Chairman of the Steering Group for a further 2 years.
3. The Working Party has also held 3 meetings and we are grateful for the continued support afforded to the Group. In accordance with agreed procedure, in September 1984 the National Park Officer took over the Chairmanship of the Working Party from the nominee of GOC SWDIST until 1986, when the latter will assume the Chairmanship again.
4. There was little of consequence to record in 1984 so this report deals mainly with 1985. Its aim is to show the progress made in the various fields in which the Group has concerned itself since being established in 1978.
5. There is still no prospect of a significant reduction in the demands of military training on the Moor in the foreseeable future. As the Secretary of State for the Environment stated in his decision on the Willsworthy Ranges

"the principle that military use of the Moor is inappropriate must be a long term aim stemming from the 1977 White Paper".

#### THE ENVIRONMENTAL BASE LINE

6. The Steering Group agreed back in 1978 that the Nature Conservancy Council should work with others to establish an environmental base line on the military training areas with a view to monitoring changes in the natural environment of Dartmoor.

7. In 1979 the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds mapped the distribution of semi-natural vegetation and breeding birds on the Moor.

8. In 1983 it was decided that a base line be established by utilising infra-red photographs backed by a detailed ground survey of sample areas. A series of photographs had been taken in 1979 by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

9. In 1985 a preliminary report was prepared jointly by the Nature Conservancy Council and the Dartmoor National Park Authority which definitively established the base line.

10. The project initially involved the survey of 4 sample areas, 3 of them on the Okehampton Range and the fourth on the Willsworthy Range; 2 of these are located in areas of deep peat which have suffered from cratering. An additional fifth area has recently been surveyed on the Merrivale Range to act as a control for areas with a low level of cratering. The intention is to resurvey these 5 control areas in every 3 years.

11. The Steering Group has also decided that a limited environmental survey of the Ten Tors route should be undertaken as part of the scheme, making use of the RSPB survey mentioned above.

#### PROTECTION OF ANCIENT MONUMENTS

12. The proposed extension of the environmental appreciation courses for units training on the Moor, by including an archaeological walk, has proved to be too ambitious so it is now proposed to produce a simple leaflet which will describe the various types of ancient monuments which troops may come across on on the Moor. This may also be useful to civilian walkers.

#### RECONSTRUCTION OF WILLSWORTHY RANGES

13. The modernisation of the ranges has been completed but the restoration of the turf and vegetation has not yet been totally successful. The Military have given an assurance that the affected parts of the ranges will not be used until regeneration is satisfactory.

#### RECONSTRUCTION OF WILLSWORTHY CAMP

14. This is inevitably a contentious matter. The existing Camp is reaching the end of its economic life and in spite of recent refurbishment to make it wind and weatherproof, it will only last for a few more years. It is also something of an eyesore, in an exposed position on the high moor and comprising a number of corrugated iron huts. The replacement camp proposed would comprise one single storey building in local materials in the style of the Moor and in a relatively unobtrusive position off the high moor. Planning is in the early stages and the Military intend to provide more information on their proposals in the Steering Group in March 1986.

## OKEHAMPTON CAMP

15. Repairs to buildings and renewals in the camp have led to the question being asked whether this camp is being unobtrusively expanded but the Military have stated definitely that it will remain solely a training camp with short-term occupation by visiting units and that there is no intention of conversion into barracks.

16. Inevitably a camp which was put up nearly 100 years ago requires the occasional improvement and replacement of buildings and facilities: for the avoidance of doubt and to assist the Park Committee in considering planning applications the long term plan for maintenance and improvement is being prepared.

## ARTILLERY FIRING

17. There has been a significant reduction in the past few years, but this is mainly due to overseas deployments and does not herald an end to artillery firing on the Moor. The FH70 has been purposely kept away and will not be fired without prior consultation with the Duchy in an emergency.

## RENEWAL OF DUCHY LICENCES

18. An agreement has been reached between the Ministry of Defence and the Duchy of Cornwall renewing the licences for military training for a seven year period expiring in September 1991.

CRAMBER TOR TRAINING AREAS

19. It has proved impossible to procure more than a year-to-year sanction for this project. The area is of importance for the training of the Commandos as its proximity to Plymouth cuts down the consumption of fuel and travelling time. Provisional agreement has been reached with the owners for the renewal of licences to run coterminously with the Duchy Licences (but the National Park Committee has objected to the planning application).

RADIO AERIALS

20. The fixed mast aerials at Holming Beam and Willsworthy have been replaced by demountable masts: this is a great improvement.

OKEHAMPTON RING ROAD

21. A policy of 'benign neglect' is being applied to this track which will remain passable for military vehicles but will become unsuitable for private cars.

(Signed)

(Signed)

W A Burkinshaw Esq

Sir Peter Stallard KCMG CVO MBE

Col J S Forrest

Secretaries

Chairman