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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION OF
NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Select Committee of Experts - European Diploma

PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK
(United Kingdom)

On-the-spot appraisal by
S M Ten Houte de Lange
(Netherlands)

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1. Introduction

The European Diploma (category C) was awarded to the Peak District National Park in 1966 and renewed for successive periods of five years in 1971 and 1976. The extension of the validity of the Diploma was based on the result of on-the-spot appraisals by Mr L E Esping (document CE/Nat (70) 82) and by Dr. J G de Molenaar (document CE/Nat/DE (76) 16).

In order to consider a further renewal of the Diploma in 1981, the Secretary General asked me to carry out an on-the-spot appraisal of the Peak District National Park.

The terms of reference for the expertise were:

- study the present state of the site and thus ascertain whether the site improved, deteriorated or remained the same since the date the Diploma was awarded or since the date of the last renewal;
- analyse the state of conservation of the flora, fauna and landscape (progression or regression of species);
- study the impact of the public on the flora, fauna and landscape and make proposals for improving the situation;
- examine alterations (material or legislative) already completed or in progress.

The on-the-spot appraisal took place on 3 and 4 October 1979. I was accompanied by Dr. J P Ribaut, Head of the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the Council of Europe. Both days were spent on excursions to the most important parts of the Park. During these excursions, organised by the National Park Officer, Mr T Burrell, we were accompanied by representatives of the National Park Office, the Peak Park Joint Planning Board, the National Park Ranger Service and the Nature Conservancy. This gave us the opportunity to discuss in detail the various conservation and management problems.

In spite of the short duration of the visit and the often poor weather conditions I was able to get a fairly good picture of the situation in the main parts of the park, of the most important management problems and of some planning aspects.

My conclusions and recommendations, based on my field impressions and on the written and oral information received, are given at the end of this report. In the next chapters I will give some facts about the present situation.

2. Conservation status of the Park

2.1 General

According to my information, the general conservation status of the Park has not changed significantly since the last appraisal.

2.2 Laws and regulations

A full review of alterations is given in the annual reports, submitted by the Planning Board. Some important matters should, however, be mentioned here.

- A 'Countryside Bill' was presented to Parliament in 1978 but did not reach the statute book. This Bill should, among other things, have given the Peak Park Joint Planning Board more powers to achieve National Park objectives and to ensure conservation of moorland areas.
- The Secretary of State proposed modifications to the Structure Plan for the Park which was submitted by the Planning Board. These modifications were considered a threat to the Park, in particular because they meant a more permissive attitude towards touring and static caravans, new road construction and quarrying and because on housing matters all reference to safeguarding the interests of local people was removed. The modifications to the Structure Plan are being discussed.
- In 1978 the Board published a "National Park Plan", which outlines the management and planning objectives for the near future. This National Park Plan has not yet been approved by the Minister of Environment. (See also 4.1.)

2.3 Ownership title

Since the last appraisal the National Park Authority has acquired an interest in several sites. So has the National Trust. The sites in question are listed in the annual reports.

2.4 Nature reserves

The number and extent of the nature reserves in the Park have grown somewhat. The total area protected as a nature reserve is, however, still less than 1% of the surface of the Park. There are over 50 Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

3. Conservation of the flora, fauna and landscape

3.1 Flora and vegetation

The spread of Elm Disease threatens the native Wych Elm (Ulmus glabra) in the Park. This species comprises about 30% of the total tree population in the National Park. Control of further spread is being tried. The injection of diseased trees with fungicide often fails.

On slopes with heather vegetation in the northern part of the National Park, quite large areas have become completely overgrown by Pteridium aquilinum. The cause of this development is not known. Possibly it is related to changes in the grazing regime.

Otherwise no significant changes in flora and vegetation are reported.

In 1978 a financial grant aid scheme was launched to promote:

- greater care and renewal of existing small broadleaved woods and
- the planting of new woods and shelter belts on farms.

A few sites of shale/grit semi-natural woodland with high nature conservation value are being protected. Fences are erected to keep the cattle out of these sites (for instance north of Longdendale). In Lathkill Dale a long-term programme of woodland management was started by the Nature Conservancy in 1978, aimed at reducing Sycamore (Acer pseudo-platanus) and at promoting the undergrowth of Ash and Elm. This is a positive step, because of the rareness of semi-natural woodland in the park. (It would in my opinion be interesting to observe in some places the long-term spontaneous development without either reducing Sycamore or carrying out any other treatment.)

In general, the policy of the Park Authority concerning woodland management is directed at increasing biological diversity. At the moment, about 5% of the surface of the Park is wooded.

3.2 Fauna

No significant changes are reported. The populations of Black grouse (Lyrurus tetrix) are still at a very low level.

3.3 Landscape

In general, the conservation situation of the landscape does not seem to have deteriorated since the last appraisal. As the Peak District National Park is a lived-in area with some 45,000 inhabitants and very densely populated surroundings, the present situation is quite good.

Various improvements have been made in spite of growing pressure on the Park. They are listed in the annual reports and some will be mentioned under 4. Some projects with serious negative consequences for the landscape will be discussed separately.

(A number of quarries and a cement factory in operation in the middle of the Park are in principle not in agreement with the concept of a national park. These activities however, were already in existence when the area became a National Park and when the Park was awarded with the European Diploma.)

4. Management

4.1 The National Park Plan

The National Park Plan, drafted by the Planning Board and based on many special studies and consultation with over 100 organisations, proposes the following management and planning options:

- a. careful management of the wild, natural areas such as the moors and dales to safeguard their character for posterity;
- b. continuing encouragement to farming and forestry in the farmland and woodland areas, with help to try and ensure that traditional Peak District features such as small woodlands and dry stone walls are maintained;
- c. identification and protection of features of historic, wildlife or geological importance;
- d. provision of additional opportunities for walking, horse riding, cycling, climbing, pot-holing, canoeing and sailing in suitable locations;
- e. provision of additional overnight accommodation, particularly where it can provide a supplementary income to farmers, but where the type and size of facility is appropriate to the locality;

- f. careful management of visitor traffic to encourage the use of the better roads, with most facilities for visitors being provided nearby;
- g. improved Ranger and Information Services to help visitors enjoy and understand the area while encouraging greater respect for farming and local interests.

4.2 Finances

In the financial year 1978-79 the Peak Joint Planning Board approved an expenditure of about £1,770,000 for the management of the Park, including Conservation (Landscape and Buildings), Ranger and Interpretive Services, Losehill Hall Study Centre, Visitor facilities (Provision and Maintenance), Planning Services and Administration.

4.3 Ranger Service

One of the very positive aspects of the management of the Peak District National Park is the Ranger Service. This service functions not only for the important aspects of direct help, rescue work and patrolling, but also organises and carries out a great amount of maintenance work with the help of volunteer workers. (During 1978-79 about 2000 person/days were worked by the Peak Park Conservation Volunteers.) One full-time Volunteers' Organiser is employed by the Ranger Service.

During our visit in the Park we were shown some very instructive examples of volunteer work, from which I mention the following:

- The experiment to find the most effective way of paving the badly eroded first section of the famous "Pennine Way" (near Edale) with stones from nearby broken-down stone walls.
- Work of volunteers at Hooks Carr: construction of a new footpath with a little bridge, leading from a camp site to the nearby Stanage Edge. This path was very nicely constructed and serves to keep climbers from damaging a little dale while seeking their own way from the camp to Stanage Edge.
- The restoration of a footpath along the Ashop river, to avoid erosion. Here we were shown how volunteers are instructed in the work to be done with the help of explanatory drawings and maps.

The volunteer work seems to me of great importance because it not only makes it possible to carry out projects which would be very expensive if done with paid labour, but also makes a positive use of a lot of potential enthusiasm towards the National Park and its natural values. This is of great educational significance.

4.4 Information and education

The Board and the National Park Office are making a big effort to inform and educate the millions of visitors to the Park. There are several Information Centres (some of them recently rebuilt) with very well designed exhibitions on various aspects of the Park: landscape, natural history, geology, architectural heritage etc. We were shown one very good example, using audio-visual methods, made recently by staff of the National Park Office.

Quite a lot of written information is available also. Several leaflets in different languages and a lot of larger publications have appeared in recent years. A good example is the book "First and Last - the Peak National Park in words and pictures", published by the Planning Board in 1978. There are also publications on management case studies, for instance "Management agreements in principle and practice" by J Wager, describing the situation in Monsal Dale.

Another important feature is the Losehill Hall Peak National Park Study Centre, headed by Peter Townsend. During the whole year courses are organised in the centre for school classes, students and adult groups. The centre has accommodation for 60 people. In 1980, among other things, a European Conference on Land Management and Conservation in National Parks and Equivalent Reserves will be held at the Centre.

4.5 Architectural conservation

The National Park Authority pays grants to owners of buildings listed under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act as being of special architectural or historic interest. These grants are a compensation for the cost of specialised repairs.

Parts of several villages have been designated as Conservation Areas, permitting more stringent control of development. The National Park Authority has prepared a set of proposals (Action Plans) for conservation and enhancement of each of these villages. These Action Plans include, for instance, burying power lines and the complete renovation of buildings that are important for the character of a village.

4.6 Other management aspects

Since 1978 a full-time Nature Conservancy warden has been employed for the Derbyshire Dales National Nature Reserve.

A full-time litter collector is now working for the National Park Authority.

Under the Job Creation Programme, a substantial number of repair works (footpaths, river bank reinforcement, restoration of limestone walls etc) have been carried out since the last appraisal.

Further detailed information is given in the annual reports of the Planning Board, for instance about the derelict railway lines owned by the Board and now remade into footpaths or cycle trails.

5. Public access

In 1977 there were about 16 million visitors to the Park. This number was exceeded in 1978 because of better weather conditions.

The Board aims at directing visitors to the less vulnerable parts of the Park. Where this is not possible, car parks are constructed at some distance from vulnerable or frequented places (for instance Dovedale). As a result, visual damage to the scenery or vegetation is fairly limited. During our visit (which was outside the holiday season) the situation was quite acceptable. Car problems, however, are reported to arise locally during summer time.

A point of concern is the situation regarding the visually conspicuous caravan sites, which according to my information, seems to have deteriorated in some respects. The touring caravan problem is identified in the National Park Plan as a top priority, and in consequence a joint study has been carried out.

It would be better if caravan sites could be kept out of the park as much as possible.

7. Roads

One very important positive fact is that the construction of the planned road of motorway standard through Longdendale was cancelled, on economic grounds, by the Secretary of State for Transport in early 1977. Now, only limited improvements to the existing trunk road (A 628) will be made.

Also positive is the decision not to carry out the 1977 project of the A 625 road up Mam Tor, but to build the route via Pindale, which bypasses not only Mam Tor but Castleton and Hope as well. This will take a lot of pressure from the beautiful Mam Tor and Winnats area.

The policy of the Board, which aims at no further extension of the road network, is very good.

8. Mining development

The Board are mainly coping well with the problems of mining inside the National Park although there are still some problems to be solved. An application to work minerals on a site near Lathkill Dale was approved by the Board following the company's offer of a financial guarantee to ensure adequate restoration of the land, in the form of a bond with an insurance company. This is the first time such a guarantee has been achieved in relation to mineral workings in the National Park, and it has set a valuable precedent.

In 1978, the Secretary of State for the Environment permitted extension of a large quarry on the boundary of the National Park. This permission was given with less stringent conditions of working than were previously agreed between the company and the Board. The Board is appealing to the High Court, challenging the validity of this permission and conditions. It has asked for specifications and justifications, for instance to prove the necessity of extending the quarry inside the Park, to evaluate the supply and demand situation etc.

9. Prospective pumped storage reservoir

There is a plan to build a pumped storage reservoir on Robinson's Moss, on the northern slope of Longdendale. Water should be pumped up into this reservoir during periods of excess electricity (when demand for power is low) to meet either peak demands during the day or to cover unexpectedly high periods of demand. The proposals are for a completely artificial reservoir of 55 hectares with a 20 metre dam wall in the above mentioned open moorland.

This scheme would have great impact and be a threat to the landscape and scenery of Longdendale, which are already under pressure from reservoirs, power lines, roads and railway. The Board is strongly opposed to a pumped storage scheme in the Park. The policy of the Board is, as with mining activities, directed at getting the party that plans an activity in the Park to prove the need for their plan as such and particularly of carrying it out inside the National Park.

10. Research

In different parts of the National Park joint studies on different management aspects have been carried out, as well as various research projects concerning geology, archeology, history, vegetation, game, etc.

According to my information, however, the universities of the surrounding cities are little interested in doing or promoting scientific research in the National Park. As a result there has been relatively little ecological research and the zoological aspect has been seriously neglected.

There is no research centre or biological field station in the Park, which is a lack. The Losehill Hall Study Centre is purely for educational purposes and has no accommodation for research workers.

11. Conclusions and recommendations

During the on-the-spot appraisal of the Peak District National Park I have come to the following conclusions:

- The Peak Park Joint Planning Board, the National Park Office and the Ranger Service, are performing a remarkable job in managing and preserving this big Park (850 km²), which is inhabited by some 45,000 people and is under heavy pressure from the surrounding urban area where millions of people live.

The Park's sophisticated management and control schemes to deal with this pressure can serve as an outstanding example for other regions in Europe.

- The present conservation situation is generally satisfactory, especially considering the actual regional setting of the Park. According to the available information, the situation has improved locally since the last appraisal as a result of various management and planning measures.

I therefore propose a renewal of the validity of the European Diploma (category C) for the Peak District National Park in 1981, but would like to make the following recommendations:

- A. The biggest threat to the Park at this moment is the plan for a pumped storage reservoir, to be built on one of the hills bordering Longdendale (see also 9). Such a scheme is in principle in total disagreement with the concept of a National Park. If this plan is accepted it will not only cause great damage, but also be an important precedent, making it difficult to stop other developments in future. In my opinion a withdrawal of the European Diploma should be considered if this reservoir is constructed.
- B. The extension of the big quarry on the eastern border of the Park should, if necessary, only be permitted in combination with strict obligations to be formulated by the Peak Park Joint Planning Board.

- C. Because of the visual and other negative aspects of caravans (especially static caravans) I recommend that the Park Authority give special attention to the problem of caravan sites and aim at keeping this form of accommodation out of the park as much as possible.
- D. In view of the situation regarding scientific (especially ecological) research (see 10), I suggest that a study be made of the possibilities of establishing a research centre (or biological field station) in the Park, possibly in co-operation with different universities.
- E. The strategy of the Joint Planning Board to keep developments conflicting with the concept of a national park out of the area, is to get those who plan something (a new road, a reservoir, etc) to prove the necessity of their plan as such in a broad context, and then to prove the necessity of carrying it out inside the National Park.

This strategy, which could be called "offensive conservation", is in my opinion a very good principle to which wider attention should be drawn.