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PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK (United Kingdom)

On-the-spot appraisal

by

Professor A NOIRFALISE
(Belgium)

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PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK

On-the-spot appraisal with a view to the renewal of
the European Diploma (Category C)

by Professor A NOIRFALISE

1. INTRODUCTION

The visit to the park was carried out on 20 and 21 September 1984, in the company of Mr Ribaut of the Council of Europe Secretariat. We met the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the board and the park director and spent two days studying the situation in the field with those in charge of research and management. Our terms of reference entailed reporting on the state of conservation of the environment, the landscapes, the flora and fauna, planning and management measures, visitor numbers and facilities, as well as any changes in the legal status of the park and the budgetary resources. The survey also included action taken on the recommendations in Committee of Ministers Resolution (81) 9 concerning the Peak District.

It is worth reiterating that the park covers an area of some 150,000 hectares, with a total population of 38,000 inhabitants living in a number of villages. The park caters for some 20 million visitors a year.

It comprises two very different regions:

- a limestone area (of approximately one-third of the total), mainly given over to farming and grassland, where however the very long-standing industries of vein mineral extraction and limestone quarrying remain active today; this provides considerable opportunities for employment in the region, but does not fail to have an impact on the landscapes;
- an area of gritstone uplands and rough grazings, with large tracts of moorland (acid moors and grassland) which are of considerable importance for the conservation of wildlife, hunting, grazing and open-air recreation.

2. THE PROBLEM OF QUARRIES

There are 15 quarries still active inside the park. They are generally situated in escarpments or valleys, whence their visual impact on the landscape. After studying the various sites and weighing up the special situation of each deposit, the park either accepted or rejected applications for limited extension and insisted that the companies concerned should restore exhausted workings to the best of their ability, while the park would take charge of «greening» operations (planting sward and trees). Nevertheless, the final decision depends on the government authorities, which take the employment and economic requirements into account.

The main problem concerns the largest quarry situated right on the edge of the park (in the Buxton area). The proprietor has just been granted government permission for an extension several hundred yards wide inside the perimeter of the park, despite the unfavourable opinion of the latter. Such a decision can be understood in view of the investments being made on this site and the jobs thus procured.

Owing to the lie of the land, the extension to these workings is visible only from the top of the crest which dominates them, and it affects only a limited area of the landscape. Nevertheless, the decision constitutes an unfortunate infringement of the legal status of the park; the park authorities feel that there are other deposits in the Midlands which are suitable for extracting limestone aggregate for road surfacing, which accounts for virtually the whole of this quarry's output.

It would be much less tolerable for disused quarries already recolonised by vegetation to be reworked. This danger exists in the case of the former Hartshead quarry (used as a campsite), whose new owner has had his right of exploitation confirmed by the courts of law.

We believe that the public authorities should prohibit further commercial exploitation of this site on the grounds of the legal constraints inherent in the existence of the park. These should be regarded as having priority, at the risk of undermining the credibility of the laws and regulations governing the park's status.

3. CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF LANDSCAPES

Apart from the problem of quarrying, the landscapes of the park have lost none of their character, diversity and amenity.

Various major studies have been undertaken since 1980 with a view to improving the planning and management of rural and pastoral areas.

3.1. The first study relates to moorland erosion, caused in the past by the combined effects of climate, over-grazing, accidental fires and burning for grassland management purposes. After a catalogue was made of deteriorated areas (1981) experiments in regenerating vegetation were carried out with success (1983) and may serve as a basis for restoration projects.

3.2. The conservation of the moors for a variety of purposes (grazing, biology, hunting and recreation) implies a reconsideration of grazing practices and the restoration of damaged sites (regression of heather, invasion by bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*)). The park accordingly became proprietor in 1983 of an extensive area (2,600 hectares) in the Big Moors where problems of good management and restoration will be studied. The site also lends itself to leisure activities and biological study (grouse colonies) which should be carried on alongside grazing activities. Studies have commenced, thanks to the recruitment of an ecologist.

3.3. Another project concerns Leek Moors (Roaches Estate) where the park has become proprietor of an area of 380 hectares, including 300 hectares of heather, 64 hectares of semi-natural woodland, and 16 hectares of high acidity grassland. The aim of the study is to compare the evolution of the moors in an area free of grazing compared with the part where grazing is still practised, in order to test the natural dynamics of moors and their fauna. The woodland will be managed according to criteria designed to regenerate natural forest by means of self-sown clearings. The area is of great interest for the conservation of fauna (red grouse, black grouse, deer) and for open-air recreation (walking, mountaineering, gliding). Another recently acquired site is Harpur Crewe (1,840 hectares). Part of the area is nevertheless used for military purposes (shooting practice) which does not threaten to damage the site as long as the military convoys keep to the metalled roads, as is currently the case.

3.4. A study on integrated rural development was carried into farming communities in the park (Monyash in a limestone area, Longnor in a gritstone area). This undertaking was financed by the EEC (1981-83), and subsequently by the Ministry of Agriculture (1984-85). The programme entailed rural renovation projects in the villages (light facilities, urban planning criteria, local crafts) and improvement of the rural landscape (restoration of the drystone walls, extensive grazing on certain slopes with a view to diversifying their flora). These schemes are carried out by the local authorities and the farmers (representing 50% of the population), so that this represents a significant example of voluntary participation by the inhabitants and the local authorities in environmental conservation, which may serve as a model for other parks.

3.5. In the park as a whole, individual projects are many and varied: tree planting in derelict sites, biological rehabilitation of a stretch of river, removal of overhead electric cables (in three villages), rejuvenation of small woodlands with the reintroduction of native species (12 plantations amounting to six hectares in 1983-84).

3.6. Lastly, the park authorities have drawn up a general space planning strategy published under the title: «A guide to policies affecting the Peak District National Park» (1983) which covers the following objectives:

- the conservation of semi-natural and rural landscapes;
- providing for the public (leisure areas, accommodation, information, ranger services);
- biological conservation (reserves, sites of aesthetic or archaeological interest);
- promotion of rural life (designation of conservation areas, employment in craft trades);
- inventory of buildings of historical and architectural value (\pm 800 items, with 50 projects under consideration);
- general services (road network, communications, water supply);
- the problem of quarries.

4. PROTECTION OF FLORA AND FAUNA

Apart from the relevant implications in the above-mentioned projects, mention may be made of several new nature reserves created either at the initiative of the park, of the Nature Conservancy Council or by private initiative (the National Trust).

The Nature Conservancy Council is also compiling a systematic inventory of areas of scientific interest in the northern part of the park, and has set up a research unit at the park's administrative headquarters (Bakewell). Observations concerning the two characteristic species of local moorland fauna (red and black grouse) indicate that their populations have remained stable in recent years.

5. ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE PUBLIC

The Losehill Hall Study Centre continues to function normally. A section of the former Millers Dale railway has been laid out for walkers, entailing the restoration of a viaduct, the re-use of the former station as a park ranger centre (ranger service, information), the restoration of old limekilns as an example of an industrial archaeology site (1983-84). Discreet signposts have been installed at various places along the trails and illustrative leaflets published.

The very high level of visitor frequentation poses problems in connection with camping and caravanning. The park endeavours to limit the size of existing sites and to relegate large-scale camps to locations outside the park. But the final decision in this respect lies with the Department of the Environment. Farmers are encouraged to restrict their campsites to five units for a duration of 28 days, using a rota system designed to reduce the number of eyesores. There is considerable and growing demand, however, and it is to be hoped that the strategy worked out by the park (see paragraph 3.6 of this report) will be adopted by the supervisory authority.

6. LEGAL STATUS OF THE PARK

The park's status remains unchanged and is still governed by the National Parks Act as well as by statutory implementing regulations, including a government order of 1976 that national parks should pursue a policy which incorporates biological and landscape conservation, farming and grazing activities, hunting and recreation. This is not possible without some compromise with regard to total conservation, a fate common to all areas listed in category C of the Council of Europe.

The park nevertheless has an important role to play in endeavouring to strike a balance between the different activities, and the schemes reviewed in paragraph 3 of this report show evidence of an original and imaginative approach.

7. BUDGETARY RESOURCES

The increase in the budget (+ 15% between 1981 and 1983) barely offsets the rate of inflation and therefore entails no increase in real terms. Expenditure (£2,148,440 for the 1983-84 financial year) nevertheless represents £14 per hectare, which can hardly be regarded as a negligible amount. Resources are drawn from the central government (70%), the county councils bordering on the park (26%) and a variety of other sources (contracts, public agencies, the Countryside Commission etc).

The park employs a staff of 150, 80 of whom work for the administration and the board at the park headquarters (Bakewell), the remainder belonging to the ranger services, the information centre (Losehill Hall) and other peripheral services. The board and administration account for 40% of the budget, ranger and information services (Losehill Hall Centre) for 26% and studies and amenities for 33%.

The staff is therefore very large, but this is justified by the variety of tasks, studies and operations. Great stress is laid on information, particularly by the Losehill Hall Study Centre. Moreover, an increase in the

budget for planning, management and provision of facilities will no doubt prove necessary to enable current projects to be continued and completed within a reasonable time. It would be desirable for exceptional grants to be made by other government agencies for specific projects within their sphere of competence.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the writer's opinion, it is perfectly obvious that, between 1981 and 1984, the Peak District National Park went through a decisive phase in the development and consolidation of its conservation and management objectives. The park's achievements and state of conservation also impressed many participants at the session of the European Federation of Nature and National Parks which took place at Losehill Hall from 22-24 September 1984.

It may be added that action has been taken on Recommendation 1 of Committee of Ministers Resolution (81) 9, since the scheme for a dam at Longendale has been indefinitely postponed. With regard to Recommendation 3 (policy for camp sites and caravan parks), an appropriate strategy has been worked out and provisional progress has been achieved. As regards quarries (Recommendation 2), the solutions adopted in the meantime, although not entirely satisfactory, constitute an improvement and hold out a promise of future progress, thanks to the stand taken by the board.

In conclusion, we have no hesitation in recommending the renewal of the European Diploma for a further period. It is felt that this proposal should nevertheless be accompanied by certain recommendations:

- i. the re-working of disused quarries and the creation of new quarries should not be authorised. Extensions to workings inside the park should be restricted as far as possible, unless justified by the special quality of the mineral deposit (high quality building material, chemical industry);
- ii. the membership of the board could well be enlarged to include a scientific specialist familiar with the problem of the biological management of moorlands, including grazing activities. The board might also benefit from establishing close links - if these do not already exist - with the Countryside Commission, the Nature Conservancy Council and the various private trusts. This might be achieved by inviting the local representatives of these bodies to sit on the board, although it is realised that inflating the membership in this way is likely to strain the decision-making machinery;
- iii. in view of the great mass of visitors, there is a permanent threat of «visual pollution» of the landscape owing to camp sites and caravan parks. It would be desirable for the Department of the Environment to take account of the relevant studies and recommendations of the park authorities;
- iv. the planning and management projects already under way will shortly require increased budgetary resources for their completion (eg moorland restoration project, protection of the historical and architectural heritage, stimulating conservation awareness among the rural population). The public authority is justified in considering the Peak District (one of the oldest national parks of England) as a pilot area and a testing ground of outstanding quality and originality at national and international level.