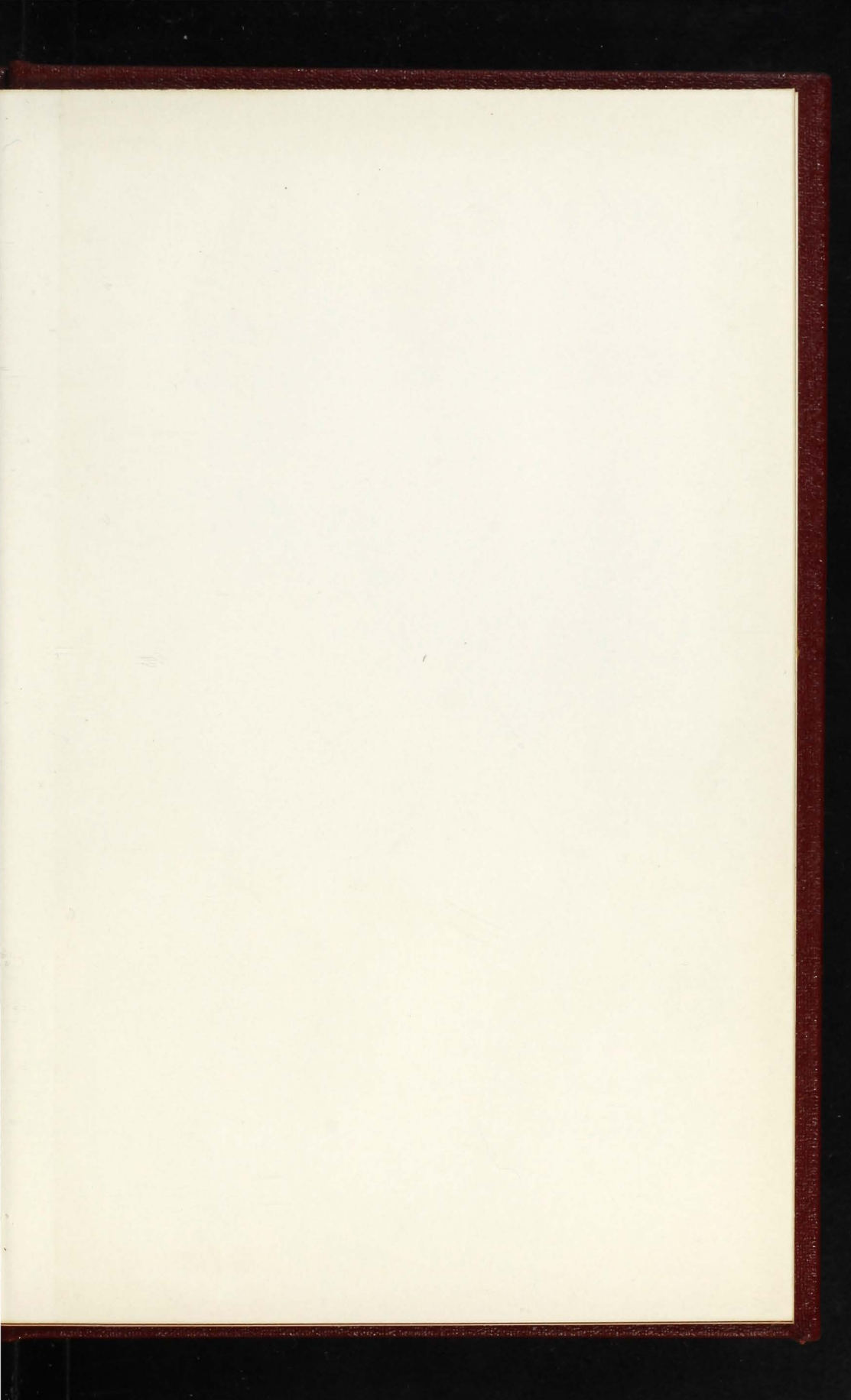


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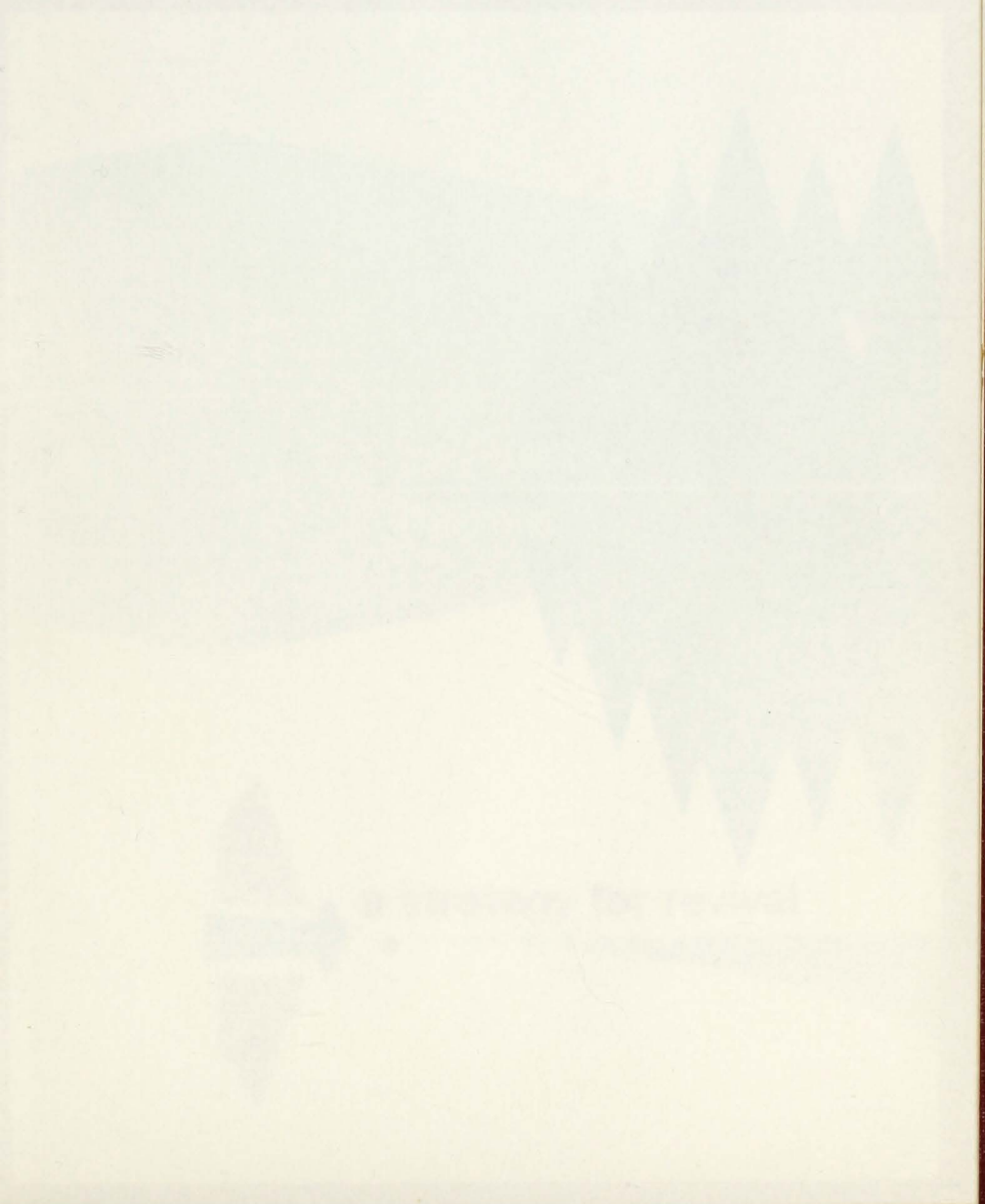
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National Parks

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National Parks



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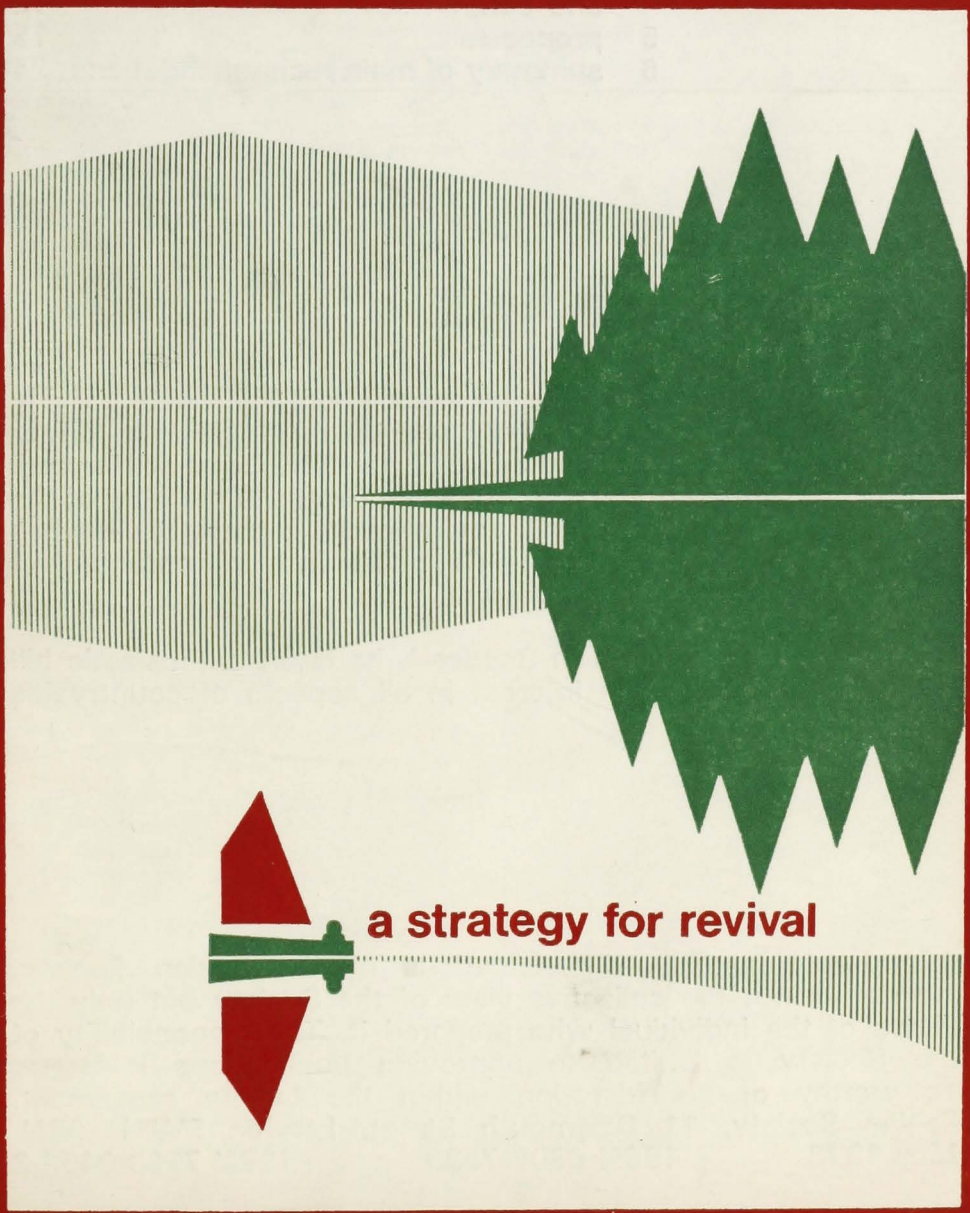
national parks

Chris Smith
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a strategy for revival



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national parks

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1. introduction

The Labour movement has a long and important tradition of concern for our countryside, of campaigning for our freedom to enjoy it and to assert that this land really is our land, after all. For many decades this concern was central to the Labour party's thinking—to that spirit of irreverence for established privilege which used to be the hallmark of the party's radicalism. There were meetings of thousands to march against the landowners in the Peak; the ILP used to gather for days of walking in the Pennines; and unemployed Clydesiders would flock northwards from Glasgow to the hills. It was in this same spirit that the Labour Party's campaign for access to and protection of the countryside was conceived and waged throughout the thirties and forties.

Nowadays, this concern has gone—as has the spirit of irreverence, and much of the radicalism—and the party is immeasurably the poorer for it. This pamphlet sets out, in a small way, to bring the whole issue of the countryside back on to the political agenda and to reassert its significance for a socialist party. It takes its stand on a firm and unashamed belief in the value and importance of our countryside. In an increasingly urbanised society, the freedom and fulfilment offered by our open spaces and wilderness areas are of the very highest worth. It is surely one of the great tasks of our society, now more than ever, to recognise these values and to cherish them.

These same aims and hopes gave birth to the campaign within the Labour movement that led, in 1949, to the establishment of our system of national parks. The intention was to give a special level of protection to those countryside areas under the greatest pressure—the most beautiful, and vulnerable, parts of our landscape. The demands on our countryside are now, in fact, far greater than they were thirty years ago, and the need for special protection is all the stronger. It is often supposed that a concern for these issues of countryside policy is an exclusively bourgeois interest. Nothing could be further from the truth. The struggle for access, for example, has

consistently been waged by the working class, particularly in the great meetings and marches of the thirties. The social base of recreation has now widened even further. The hundreds of people who take the train out from Manchester on a Sunday morning, who walk the hills or climb the gritstone, who drive their families to see the scenery, are no social elite but come from all backgrounds.

We in the Labour movement must wake up to the fact that working people have needs beyond the purely material. As a governing party over most of the last fifteen years, we seem to have lost all sense of this. With a few noble exceptions, we have concentrated on economic needs to the exclusion of all else. What has become of the bold initiatives in social policy to enrich the life of ordinary people—in all its aspects?

For a Labour Party supposedly committed to the social control of resources that are important to the well being of the mass of ordinary people, our lack of concern about the countryside and what happens to it is particularly shameful. In this area of policy, no government of any political complexion has really had any clear goals in recent years. There is no general direction; ideas are canvassed for bits of countryside policy, but not all; there are too many different public bodies trying to do too many different but overlapping things; and accompanying this there has been a bland governmental complacency that all is well.

All is not going well. The pressures are increasing and the countryside does not have sufficient protection. This pamphlet, therefore, is—more than anything else—a plea for action, in countryside matters in general and above all in the most beautiful areas where a stronger park system is the only safeguard. It sets out to describe our existing network of parks and to assess its inadequacies and the difficulties confronting any proposals for change. The recent and continuing debate on the whole issue will then be discussed. Finally a series of proposals are advanced to demand improvements which are all too urgently needed.

2. the present park system

National parks were first established in Britain under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949. The major official impetus for this came from a report by John Dower of April 1945 (Cmd 6627, *National Parks in England and Wales*, HMSO) followed up in the succeeding two years by the Hobhouse Committee, which reported in 1947 with detailed proposals for the establishment of a national park system in England and Wales (Cmd 7121, *Report of the National Parks Committee*, HMSO).

The definition of a National Park, applied to Britain, was given by the *Dower Report*—and accepted by the Hobhouse Committee—as: “A national park is 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) wild-life and buildings and places of architectural and historical interest are suitably protected, while (d) established farming use is effectively maintained” (quoted in *Report of the National Park Policies Review Committee “The Sandford Committee”*, DOE and Welsh Office, HMSO, 1974).

The 1949 Act put these proposals into effect, making possible the creation of national parks, with the main purposes of preserving their natural beauty and of opening them up to people who wished to enjoy them, while at the same time protecting existing agricultural uses. The Act set up a National Parks Commission—converted into the Countryside Commission by the 1968 Countryside Act—which has a wide responsibility for countryside matters generally and power to initiate experimental work, which it has done with considerable success. The Commission is also specifically responsible for designating national parks in England and Wales, subject to ministerial confirmation.

Ten national parks have now been designated and confirmed under the 1949 Act. Each national park is the responsibility

NATIONAL PARKS IN ENGLAND AND WALES

	designation confirmed	area in acres 1972
Peak District	1951	346,880
Lake District	1951	554,240
Snowdonia	1951	540,800
Dartmoor	1951	233,600
Pembrokeshire Coast	1952	144,000
North York Moors	1952	353,920
Yorkshire Dales	1954	435,200
Exmoor	1954	169,600
Northumberland	1956	254,720
Brecon Beacons	1957	332,160

Source: The Sandford Report, *op cit.*

of an executive board or committee. The Peak District and Lake District both have separate planning boards, while each of the other parks comes under a national park Committee within the structure of local government. The members of all these park authorities are appointed two thirds by county councils one third by the Secretary of State. In terms of permanent staff employed, the Peak District has been particularly fortunate in having had for many years its own staff and director. The other parks were previously required to share staff with their overseeing local authority, but now have their own national park officers and some independent staff.

Ministerial responsibility does not really exist, in full, for the conduct or policy administration of national parks. They fall, albeit tenuously, within the sphere of authority of the Secretary of State for the Environment; and there are also links with the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Industry, and the Ministers for Sport and for Planning and Local Government. With such a diffusion of interest true control rests if anywhere with the local authority in whose area the individual park falls.

The powers of the park authorities are remarkably limited. They are charged with administration of existing planning procedures within the context of national significance which the national park has; they exercise all the countryside func-

tions of local authorities under the 1949 and 1968 Acts for their area and most of the planning functions under the Town and Country Planning Act of 1971. They have limited special powers, for the provision of recreational facilities and services—for example, to enter into access agreements with landowners and failing agreement, to make access orders; to provide accommodation, camping sites, and car parks; to provide a warden service; and to acquire land compulsorily for specific recreation purposes.

ownership

Designation as a national park does not alter the ownership of land within the area. Most of the land in national parks is privately owned and privately controlled. But designation does also encourage visitors to think of the park as “theirs”—owned by and for the nation—although this is in reality not the case. This poses one of the greatest problems at present. Designating a national park creates the expectation of national ownership and control without producing the reality.

Designation does not confer any additional rights upon the public, other than those specifically negotiated or arranged by the park authority. Neither does it provide any definite safeguards against intrusive development. As the Sandford Report (*ibid*) puts it, the effect of designation is largely “to define and give national significance to the purposes for which these areas should be planned and managed.” That, effectively, is the entire degree of protection and management given to most of our parks. It is not enough.

areas of outstanding natural beauty

In addition to the network of national parks there are 33 “Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty” (AONB). It is a designation conveying that the landscape of the area is of national importance; but the majority of these areas tend to represent a different kind of landscape from

that of the national parks, more intensively used for agriculture, and less immediately suited to recreation. They do receive a special level of protection, although not as complete even as that of the parks. Some have a separate committee in charge, but in most cases an AONB falls fairly directly within the remit of local government.

There must obviously be some areas of countryside which are not guarded or used as intensively as national parks might be and yet are worthy of protection, under a form such as an AONB. At present, however, these areas are the most neglected in countryside policy and they receive little attention and publicity because of their lowly status. The quality of their landscape merits better treatment.

Similar conditions apply to the “Heritage Coast”—a title so far applied to 18 stretches of coastline, covering about 400 miles. Some priority is given, in planning terms, to the landscape values of these parts of coast, but the designation is not a statutory one.

Scotland

Scotland has no national parks. In this, it is almost alone among the developed nations; and indeed, as the Countryside Commission for Scotland points out in its recent pamphlet on a Scottish park system, Scotland even lags behind many Third World countries in this respect. This is all the more surprising in a country famous for the beauties of its landscape.

A report on *National Parks in Scotland*, prepared by the Ramsay Committee and published in 1945 (Cmd 6631), did recommend the creation of five national parks in Scotland: Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, Glen Affric, Ben Nevis and Glencoe, the Cairngorms, and Torridon and Loch Maree. Three further areas were suggested as reserves for future consideration. These proposals were never implemented, whereas in England and Wales progress towards the

creation of parks, though slow, was steady. The reasons for non-implementation seem to have been twofold. One is that the Ramsay Committee recommended that the parks should be "owned or controlled by the nation", and the idea of public ownership, which was again suggested in a report of the Scottish National Parks Committee in 1947, drew more opposition than the non-ownership proposals in England and Wales. The other reason was that the Scottish countryside was thought at the time to be in less danger from threats of development, and to be less difficult of access, than that south of the border.

Since then, the pressures on the Scottish countryside have grown and they will continue to grow, particularly the problems brought by oil-related development, and commercial activity such as at Aviemore. Scotland contains much of the most beautiful landscape in Britain, some of it readily accessible from towns and cities. It also contains most of our last remaining wilderness areas—some of the only truly remote tracts of countryside far from the roads. There is an urgent need to protect these before too much encroachment takes place.

As far as the question of access goes, at certain times of the year—notably during the shooting season—it is often more difficult to walk and to wander freely than it is further south, in England and Wales. It is a bitter irony that at the moment we rely, for the protection and careful use of the Scottish Highlands, on the good intentions of private landowners—many of them absentee—to preserve the countryside, not for us, but for their own sporting purposes.

Scotland does, of course, have Forest Parks (which are quietly providing a remarkably good service to visitors) and Nature Reserves and National Trust land, as in England and Wales. It also has five National Park Direction Areas, which require special consultation with the Secretary of State for Scotland before any planning applications for development can be approved; but this system has not brought many safeguards

in reality. There are a number of Areas of Great Landscape Value designated by local authorities, although these have no consistent standards right across the country. There is, in addition, an exciting new development which was pioneered by Renfrew County Council: a regional park of about 45 square miles, which (although not permitting public access throughout) does provide for recreation facilities and maintenance of the character of the landscape. A similar scheme is being developed for the Pentland Hills just outside Edinburgh. The picture, however, remains a bleak one in Scotland and the most sensitive areas of all remain especially vulnerable.

country parks

The Countryside Act of 1968 provided for the setting up of "country parks" throughout England and Wales; a similar provision exists for Scotland under the Countryside (Scotland) Act. Country parks are smaller areas of land, managed for intensive and generally gregarious recreation purposes; so far about 120 of them have been established. They are complemented, in the provisions of the Acts, by the establishment of "Picnic Sites", which are usually under ten hectares (25 acres) in area; at present there are around 140 of these.

Both country parks and picnic sites are usually run by their relevant local authorities including, if appropriate, the national park authorities. They are designated primarily for recreation; there can be parking viewpoints, offering people simply a chance to stroll or sit; or they can include walks, trails, boating and sporting facilities—places to take the family to for a day's enjoyment in the open air. Country parks can offer ideal goals, too, for excursions by public transport, laid on specially at weekends, and with a diversity of activities available at the parks themselves.

One of the aims of the country park idea is to take recreation pressure off the national parks and other vulnerable parts of the countryside—to provide within

easy reach of urban areas places of interest and activity to attract the day visitor.

other "public" areas

There are a number of other public bodies who own land in the countryside which are of important relevance to any consideration of conservation and recreation. The most outstanding of these is probably the National Trust, partnered in Scotland by the National Trust for Scotland. Not only do they own and run monuments and stately homes and parklands which are prime recreation areas but, in addition, they own much of the land in many areas of high landscape value—such as the Lake District, Glencoe or Torridon—and managed it for the enhancement of its qualities and for the benefit of the public.

In fact, the work done on some Trust properties in pioneering and encouraging public recreation has frequently shown the way for many other organisations. Most of the land management ideas developed by the Trusts have been highly successful. Their work could well serve as an example for other countryside and park authorities to follow.

The aims of the Trusts and of a park system run in tandem are the dual purpose of conserving beauty and providing opportunities for recreation. With two other major public landowners the situation is, however, different. The first, the Nature Conservancy Council, administers the system of National Nature Reserves, of which there are now 147; there are also a number of local nature reserves, under the auspices of local authorities. The primary purpose of all these reserves is a scientific one: the study and conservation of the natural resources, flora, fauna or geology of each area. As a secondary aim, in some reserves, public access is encouraged and provision made for it. But wherever ready access might endanger the primary purpose, it is actively discouraged. This leads to wide differences between one reserve and the next. For example, the

Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve has, long followed an energetic policy of provision for the public, while a little further north at Inverpolly the priorities are very different and access is discouraged.

The scientific purposes of the reserves must obviously always come first. Rare birds must be protected, the herds managed or the flora preserved. But provision should be made for recreation wherever possible—even if that means simply enabling the public to view and understand those things of scientific interest which led to the original creation of the reserve. This principle should be more consistently applied.

The largest public landowner of all in the countryside is the Forestry Commission, and here again the aims clash. The main purpose of the Commission is afforestation, not provision for recreation, and clearly this will always be the case. Forests can, however, also provide good recreation areas, particularly for day-visitors, and to its credit the Commission is coming increasingly to realise this. We are beginning to see the designation of large areas as Forest Parks, the issuing of guidebooks, the provision of car parks and picnic sites and visitor centres and trails of various kinds. All these are all to be greatly welcomed.

Other aspects of Forestry Commission policy are still far from perfect, however, and this is particularly true of the scenic value of some of their planting and felling policies of their fondness for straight lines and unrelieved evergreens. Fortunately, the Commission's policies in this respect have been improving in recent years, but they still have a long way to go.

These are the weightiest of the public bodies with some degree of responsibility for amenity provision in the countryside. There are in all fourteen statutory organisations with a remit for different aspects of countryside policy and little is done to coordinate their activities. One of the strongest points made by the House of Commons Expenditure Com-

mittee Report on the countryside in 1977 was that there would be much to gain by a greater degree of liaison and rationalisation between them. The three authorities dealing with water resources and recreation could, for a start, be brought together.

ministry of defence

There is, however, another public body to be considered here whose remit in countryside terms in no way involves a contribution to the public amenity. The Ministry of Defence owns 22 per cent of the Northumberland National Park and 5 per cent of the Pembrokeshire Coast and Dartmoor Parks, as well as sizeable holdings of land in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It uses these areas for military training and in many cases prohibits access to the public. This situation is surely unacceptable in areas which have been dedicated to conservation and recreation, and the recommendations of the Nugent Committee (*Report of the Defence Land's Committee*, HMSO, 1973) were too anaemic in this report.

Almost as bad has been the recent "non-statutory" report by Baroness Sharp on the continued use of Dartmoor for military training. She found that "military training and a national park are discordant, incongruous and inconsistent", but came up with the inconsequential recommendation that there should be "no change in the defence land holdings on Dartmoor", this despite the fact that those defence holdings amount to almost a third of the open moorland available for public access in the whole of the park. In responding to Lady Sharp, the government has been even more unhelpful, sweeping away the values of the national park as secondary to defence needs.

The minority recommendation of John Cousins of the Sandford Committee is much more in keeping with the aims of the parks: while realising that there are military needs he suggests that the aim should be progressive reduction in

defence land holdings in the national parks and that the land thus released should be handed over to the park authorities.

private land

There are, of course, many areas of beautiful countryside which are privately owned and not publicly designated in any way and there probably will be for many years to come. Apart from rights of way, access in these areas exists by custom and tolerance of the landowners. As far as farm land is concerned, access must obviously be controlled to some extent to protect the agricultural uses of the land.

Access to open country, however—to hill and moorland, not used intensively for agriculture—is still needlessly restricted in some places. There is too much lingering reverence for the rights of property and too little for the rights of the public to enjoy a common resource. The problem becomes particularly acute where it is claimed that public access will interfere with "sporting" rights especially in Scotland—rights which seem to debar the public, sometimes threateningly, from access to vast areas of countryside for months at a time, and at popular holiday periods too. Things are clearly better by far than they were in the days of the old battles for the right to wander on Kinder. But all is not yet won, even now.

3. problems of the present system

There are many weaknesses in the current pattern of parks and countryside provision. Where the care of the countryside is left largely to individual effort with little national guidance or standards and meagre financial support, it is not surprising that a fairly chaotic picture emerges.

Strengthening the park system, however, is not an easy task. The needs for change must be stressed, but we must also be aware of the problems involved in change—problems dictated by the character and purposes of the parks themselves. In this chapter, some of these needs, and the concomitant problems, will be discussed, before an attempt is later made to sketch a few possible answers.

an inhabited landscape

The first problem that should be borne in mind is the unique character of Britain's landscape. The *Sandford Report* (*ibid*) quoting Hobhouse (*ibid*) points this out with great clarity: "Here are no vast expanses of virgin land . . . which can be set aside for public enjoyment or conservation of wild life.

Instead we are dealing with a closely populated and highly developed country, where almost every acre of land is used in some degree for the economic needs of man and has its place in a complex design of agricultural, industrial or residential use. Yet it is just because this is a densely populated and highly industrial country that the need for national parks is so pressing . . . Since it is not possible to sterilise great tracts of land, like the Yellowstone or the Kruger National Parks . . . it is all the more urgent to ensure that some at least of the extensive areas of beautiful and wild country in England and Wales are specially protected as part of the national heritage." The problem is that Britain's national parks are, in large measure, places where people live and work and go about their daily business. America, by contrast, possesses large tracts of beautiful and wild terrain which contain virtually no forms

of habitation or industry or even agriculture; our parks are more varied, more populated, and consequently more difficult to organise and manage. Indeed, one of the great qualities of our landscape has always been the way in which it has been cultivated over so many centuries. It would be as harmful to sterilise it completely as it would be to neglect any level of protection at all.

In France's Vanoise Park, officially opened in 1963, as in the older Gran Paradiso Park in the same range of mountains across the border in Italy, the problem was solved by drawing a high contour line as the lower limit for the park boundary, rarely falling below 1,200 metres. In effect the valleys running into the area, containing the main centres of population and activity, were excluded. But this could not really serve as a solution for Britain, as the hills are not so high, the lines are more difficult to draw and much of the particular beauty of the parks derives from the lower ground as much as from the higher levels. In Britain, it would be neither easy nor sensible to divorce the valleys from the mountains or moorland in such a way.

In setting up our ten national parks, we have failed to decide for certain what we want them to be. Are they to be extensive areas of nationally controlled and completely preserved land, as in America? Or are they to be glorified green belts in beautiful parts of the countryside, locally organised, with some restrictions on development, a benign overseeing authority and little overall control? The impression given by our parks at the moment is that we haven't really decided. In the absence of decision, we have veered involuntarily toward the latter concept. Certainly, the needs of local people and activities forbid American-style separation of large areas; yet the demands of conservation and recreation should take our parks far beyond the glorified green-belt idea. Our national parks at present do not have enough national identity or purpose. The potential conflict between local and national needs was well illustrated in the

Commons debate of 17 January 1975, on a motion to take note of the *Sandford Report* (a motion which incongruously lumped together the *Sandford* and *Nugent Reports*). Many of the contributions to the debate were, inevitably, strongly influenced by local needs in the areas covered by the national parks, with the more general principles behind the Report tending to be forgotten as a result.

The same impulse, to downgrade the national aims of the parks, was all too clearly and astonishingly shown by the Information Officer of the Snowdonia National Park, who in a letter to the *Climber and Rambler* (April 1975 magazine a few years ago urged them to "encourage responsibility and self-discipline among your readers who should have realised long ago that the national park was not created for them." Surely, if our national parks are to mean anything, it is that they *were* created—definitely, though not exclusively—for them.

A good example of exactly the same problem of priorities has occurred recently on Exmoor. Over the past twenty years or so, about one fifth of the open moorland and rough grazing land on the moor has been ploughed up and brought into agricultural use, thus depriving the public of a large area of accessible land. There is obviously a good case to be made in favour of these changes: increasing agricultural production and a stimulus to the local economy are valuable developments. But there is, equally obviously, a good case for sounding the alarm at the loss of so high a proportion of a precious and fragile resource, particularly in the south of England where areas of wild and open country are so scarce.

At present, however, the value of conservation is not allowed an effective voice in the argument. The Park Authority is subordinate to the County Council, nearly all of which are in favour of such development, and some of whose members are quite probably carrying it out. There are, in addition, Ministry of Agriculture grants available

for ploughing up land for agriculture, while there are no funds available to preserve this same land for the park. The Park Authority is left standing helplessly on the sidelines, unable to counter the forces ranged against conservation, unable even to put a strong case for the values it is charged to uphold.

access

Related to this whole debate is another difficult problem—the question of public access. Indeed, one of the major forces behind the initial establishment of national parks in England and Wales was the campaign for unimpeded access to open upland country. Designation as a National Park or an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty does not, however, confer any unconditional rights; access other than on rights of way has to be negotiated by the park authorities, and the process of negotiation is a long and painstaking one. There are reserve compulsory powers, but these have only been invoked on the rarest of occasions.

The present conditions work largely to the advantage of the landowner and not to the advantage of the public. A recent example in the Forest of Bowland (an AONB) illustrates the point: access over a piece of uncultivated moorland, used primarily for shooting purposes by the owner, was fiercely contested for years, until finally an access agreement was drawn up. Over a substantial part of the area covered, access was restricted to one path, marked by a series of posts; no access would be allowed on shooting days or during droughts; wardens would ensure adherence to these conditions and a considerable sum of money would be paid every year to the owner as a consideration. In other words, on virtually the only days when access has any likelihood of damaging the owner's interests, it is prohibited, and the prohibition is ensured by wardens. The payment of public funds as "compensation" in such cases is questionable. It is not enough to say, as the *Sandford Report*, (*ibid*) does, (page 31) that "the public had long enjoyed access to the

hills by custom or tolerance and this situation has continued." That is by and large true; but there are too many exceptions. Access in some places is still difficult, and with increasing numbers of visitors many landowners are becoming even more reluctant than before to permit ready access.

To cope with the cases of intransigence, the park authorities should be given a more positive role in creating access agreements, and the agreements themselves should be less hedged about with qualifications. This would not guarantee the right to wander uninhibitedly in open country, but it would make it much easier.

Such access can of course lead on occasion to the disturbance of livestock and to damage to fence and walls. The only ultimate answer must lie in greater public education and the role of the warden service can be crucial here. As the *Sandford Report* has pointed out, in the parks with exceptionally large numbers of visitors there have been relatively few local complaints about visitor behaviour—and these are the parks with the most fully developed warden services. If damage were to be caused in any way, then suitable recompense would be necessary, or the maintenance or repair work could be carried out by workers employed by the park authority. The problems are not insuperable.

development

New developments of buildings or roads or open-cast mining or large commercial enterprise are more often than not unsightly and intrusive in an area supposedly devoted to conservation and recreation. It is sad that this truth still needs emphasising, but it does.

On the whole, small scale private developments have been fairly well controlled in recent years, although there have been some problems. For example the General Development Order system enabling some farm building and road

development to be carried out without applying for specific planning permission needs substantial revision. And at present, the bull-dozing of "agricultural" tracks across hill or moorland needs no planning permission, and especially in the Eastern Highlands of Scotland this has caused a large amount of unsightly damage—indeed, one of the worst offenders has been the Balmoral Estate. In addition, too many commercial developments trying to tap the tourist trade have been of an unnecessarily ugly character. This is particularly true of caravan sites. No-one has yet really succeeded in reconciling the legitimate requirements of caravanners for sites in convenient locations with the necessity of hiding and screening them so that they make no impact on the landscape, and of siting them in appropriate rather than obstrusive locations.

The major problems, however, arise over large scale developments, both private and public, which are claimed to be "in the national interest". This category covers such projects as road building or improvement, reservoirs, power stations, mining for essential minerals and oil-related development. These cases present an unavoidable clash between two sets of justifiable values: on the one hand the practical advantages to the nation or to local people of such a development; on the other, the qualities of the park or of the countryside—qualities which are intangible and cannot be weighed in an economic balance, but which are of immense and enduring value.

It is a question of cash savings and foreign currency (and the other social needs those could meet) against the damage to the parks. The equation is not an easy one to reconcile; but at present, the potential harm to the parks does tend to be dangerously underestimated and under-represented in the argument. In cases such as these conflicting claims of parkland and economy, we have not even realised the full nature of the problem; we have failed to sort out our priorities, to decide what environmental damage, if any, is acceptable and for what reasons. It is surely in the national

parks, more than anywhere, that we should be trying to sort out the answers, to define those boundaries, imposing constraints so that alternatives can be tried, moving the frontiers of acceptability towards higher standards and higher expectations.

Simply because a mining company states that there is only one place or one way in which it can extract a particular mineral does not mean that they should be permitted to do so. The controversy over Rio Tinto Zinc in Snowdonia is now well known, when RTZ proposed large scale open-cast copper mining at Coed y Brenin, aiming to extract 35 million tons of rock a year. They were even allowed to go ahead with explanatory drilling operations. In general, there has been a tendency for too few questions to be asked, by planning officers, or government or at times even the park authorities themselves.

In other spheres of national life, we have made a start on legislation to prevent excessive pollution, but we have been unable to apply this to the countryside. To a certain extent, we can impose restraints on noise levels and on effluent discharged into rivers and on city smoke; why not, then, on the visual impact of developments in the countryside? The criteria are more difficult to delineate, certainly but the principle—pushing up the standards by imposing restraints—is the same and could be effective. It is only by the creation of such restraints and standards that economic activity can ever be stirred to find the more difficult—but ultimately the more beneficial—alternative courses of action.

There is another important fact, however, which affects this—the question of local employment. Rural districts often have high unemployment and low wages, and this consideration, quite rightly, weighs strongly in the attitudes of local authorities and of government to development proposals in these areas. Recently, on the west coast of Scotland, the Secretary of State for Scotland gave permission for the Howard-Doris Com-

pany's oil-rig building scheme at Kishorn (which is not in a park, but probably ought to be), largely on the grounds that the local people wanted it.

It is a telling argument, but sadly the benefit to local people proves all too often to be elusive. Workers are brought in from outside, placing great strain on the infrastructure and social fabric of an area; earnings from tourism are sometimes adversely affected; where local labour is used, manpower is often taken on for a relatively short period and then left high and dry; or once the scheme is started it becomes an expensive white elephant, like the oil-rig building platform at Portavadie on the shores of Loch Fyne. At Kishorn itself, orders are now apparently running out, and far from bringing any local benefit to the community, there is a grave danger that a social wilderness will be left behind.

Local unemployment can only really be solved by the introduction of long term smaller industries suited to the locality. We should be improving the ways in which we provide for, and encourage, this kind of industry and development—not running headlong into the arms of companies wishing to milk the resources of an area for a short period of time. However strong the case may appear to be, we must apply the highest and strictest standards to any proposals for industrial or commercial or mineral development in the parks. At present, we give in too easily. It has been said by John Rosenberg in his study of Ruskin that "Clement Attlee, in his austere history of the Labour Party, indulges in lyricism and wrath only when writing of the English countryside and its desecration by an economy obsessed with profit." That care, and that wrath, are still badly needed today.

duality of purpose

The principal statutory purposes of national parks are twofold: conservation of natural beauty, and provision for public enjoyment—while at the same time protecting the needs of local people.

There is, in fact, a major inherent conflict between these purposes of conservation and recreation, and it has become increasingly apparent over the last twenty years. The same is true of all areas of beautiful countryside, but the problem is most acute in the park, because of the added attraction of designation. Increased recreation opportunities and the expanding numbers of visitors, are beginning to destroy precisely those qualities and values that people are coming to the countryside to find.

The problems are clearest in the case of traffic. The great majority of visitors to national and country parks are now motorised, and their main interest is in driving, having a picnic, viewing the scenery and staying by their car or walking only a short distance from it. A consequence of this is a great increase in traffic—frequently on narrow roads—large car parks and picnic sites full of people, and the disappearance of the quietness and solitude that many of these visitors are seeking. The same is even true away from the road: a recent study of Snowdon, for example, estimated that half a million people visit the summit every year, half by railway and half by foot; the resultant condition of the summit is, sadly, all too obvious.

Yet much of this increasing activity, this appreciation of and desire to get into the countryside, is something to be warmly welcomed. We are caught in a terrible dilemma. On the one hand we want to encourage people to enjoy the countryside and the open air; on the other, we want to conserve these things, to ensure that there is countryside and quietness and beauty there to be enjoyed.

The *Sandford Report*, which illustrates this problem well, states as a clear principle for action that, where the purposes of the parks conflict, the aim of conservation must always come before the aim of recreation. This is undoubtedly right. There is no point in encouraging a search for things of value only to allow the search to destroy them. But it is also important that recreation

should be encouraged so long as it does not conflict with the primary aim of conservation. Prohibition or limitation of recreation should only be a course of last resort.

The only real way out of the dilemma lies in managing and planning for the most sensitive and appropriate use of each part of the park. Much can be achieved by a process of providing for different needs in different places, by concentrating or diversifying attractions as may be necessary. Those who are seeking gregarious activities can be catered for separately from those seeking solitude; warden and information services can be expanded; and the development of country parks, particularly nearer cities, can help to ease the pressure on larger areas. A reliance on planning or management of this or any kind is an inadequate guarantee; they are frail instruments, and cannot provide a whole answer. But they may at least provide the possibility of a solution.

4. the current debate: reports and committees

The past three years have seen a whole flood of reports and committees analysing the problems of Britain's countryside, and of its parks in particular. The most important of these has been the Sandford Report which carried out an intensive examination of the record and policies of national parks in England and Wales.

the Sandford report

The Sandford Report's investigation is in many ways an excellent and thorough one. Especially in its consideration of the detailed running of the parks—the different facilities that can be provided for visitors, the managing of farming, forestry and traffic—it poses the problems and recommends solutions with awareness and insight.

The Report is less cogent, however, in its approach to the wider issues of control and management. The kind of management and administrative structure the parks have is the key—in the short term at least—to their success or failure. The Report acknowledges this but does not really follow the logic of the problem and examine exhaustively the kinds of management structure necessary. To be fair, these questions were largely excluded from the Committee's remit, but nonetheless the majority of its members have assumed too readily that the problems can be solved within the existing arrangements, and moreover within existing institutions.

It is partly because of this gap in Sandford that the following chapter of proposals concentrates primarily on the status and management of our parks. These are the most important questions of all. Yet while Sandford may have skated over them, even less attention is paid by the other surveys and reports.

The only notable exception is a valuable pamphlet published by the Countryside Commission for Scotland in 1974 entitled *A Park System for Scotland*. It refers specifically to Scotland; but its comments are of much wider relevance,

and form part of the discussion of a general park system in the chapter that follows.

circular 4/76

Most of the other assessments of park and countryside policy in recent years, however, have been far more complacent and in one case in particular outrageously so: the Government's official response to Sandford, which was DOE Circular 4/76, dated 12 January, 1976, (HMSO). The whole circular is imbued with a faith in the effectiveness of existing arrangements and an expectation that everything will work out for the best.

In the Circular the government refuse to amend the procedures for designating new national parks to allow for an automatic recourse to a public inquiry if designation is rejected. They do not accept the idea of a compulsory power of last resort to acquire land to conserve its natural beauty. They do not believe it necessary to introduce planning control for forestry operations and they do not accept the establishment of the safeguards proposed by Sandford against mineral workings. They see the strengthening of development controls in national parks as the preserve of the structure plan drawn up for each park—a process which will, in fact, produce *ad hoc* rather than systematic safeguards. They provide no suggestions for the improvement of public access to open country and they play down the significance of defence land holdings in national parks.

The Circular, it is true, does contain a number of valuable proposals, especially in the Department's advocacy of public transport (and the use of supplementary grant in support), and in their suggestion for the disposal of land in lieu of estate duty. But in most of their recommendations, they fall far short even of the relatively mild proposals of the *Sandford Report*. Nowhere is this clearer than in the sections on administration and staffing. The inclusion of the park authorities

within the county council system and the present provisions for the sharing of some staff are accepted with blithe confidence, completely ignoring the many problems these arrangements are causing.

expenditure committee

The Sixth Report of the House of Commons Expenditure Committee in the 1975-6 session was entitled *National Parks and the Countryside* (HC 1975-6). The Report's main thrust is a strong, and effective, criticism of how little overall strategy there is in Government for countryside policy. It highlights well the ramshackle jumble of different authorities responsible for different (and in some cases the same) aspects of countryside policy; the fourteen statutory authorities, and relevant ministries, will sometimes duplicate effort needlessly, or even pull in opposite directions.

In its examination of expenditure, too, the Report's comments are perceptive. It proposes a sliding scale for the percentage payment of National Park Supplementary Grant, to accord with the varying prosperity of local authorities in park areas; it makes a number of valuable suggestions on the actual payment of grant; and it proposes a capital fund for opportunity purchases. What the Report also does, very strongly, is to make a plea for the value—and extreme fragility—of expenditure on the countryside. Especially in the current economic climate, it is a plea that cannot be made too strongly.

The Report is more timid when it comes to other questions. Its examination of the staffing and administration of the parks, like Sandford's, fails to take full account of the difficulties and strains imposed by the existing arrangements. It does mention the problems—the stresses, for example, between park authorities and their parent county councils—but it lamely concludes that "the relationship between the national park committees and the county councils be examined in the review", and that the review should be brought forward to

1979. The Government, meanwhile, has refused to entertain even this mild suggestion.

the countryside

Most timid of all, however, have been the recent discussion and topic papers from the Countryside Review Committee, an interdepartmental committee, established under the auspices of the Department of the Environment. They have to date produced a general discussion paper *The Countryside—Problems and Policies* (HMSO, 1976) and two topic papers (*Topic Paper 1, Rural Communities*, HMSO, 1977 and *Topic Paper 2, Leisure and the Countryside*, HMSO, 1977).

As a background assessment of the growing problems faced in the determination of countryside policy, these papers are useful. They delineate the conflicts of interest between agriculture, industry, and recreation; they identify many of the problems of declining employment, of transport, housing, and pressure from increasing numbers of visitors. But there—with one or two exceptions—they stop. Their suggestions for improvement tend to be phrased in vague, unspecific terms, calling for greater cooperation, or more concentration on particular areas, or the creation of different employment opportunities—and yet rarely identifying what organisation or channels or groups of people could achieve these purposes, or what could be done, by administrative and legislative means, to help resolve the problems.

It is all very well to say, as they do in their discussion paper, that in our overcrowded country you cannot define an exclusive use for an area of countryside, that you must allow for a multiplicity of uses and determine priorities within them. But who exactly will decide on the priorities and ensure that they are recognised, and what back-up powers will there be, and to whom will the whole process be accountable? These questions are on the whole left unanswered, and in some cases unasked.

Their recommendation that ministers and organisations should be called to account, annually, for the exercise of their responsibilities under Section 11 of the Countryside Act 1968 is a glowing exception. This Section lays on ministers and organisations with relevant responsibilities the duty of having "regard to the desirability of conserving the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside." Formal accountability to Parliament under this Section—combined with a monitoring of their performance by independent "user" bodies—would at least be a step towards greater coherence in the administration of countryside policy. Would that the Review Committee had been as definite, and as bold, elsewhere.

the american comparison

The inadequacy of current arrangements and proposals can be emphasised by a brief comparison with the way in which America organises its park system. In all, the USA has 38 national parks, and a far greater number of national forests, national monuments, state parks, national recreation areas, and national lakeshores or seashores. These national parks and many of the subsidiary park areas are owned by the nation a rare example of common ownership being at a more advanced stage on the other side of the Atlantic. Their administration is the responsibility of the National Park Service, and the degree of provision for the public is superb. There are attractive visitor centres with exhibitions and films and explanations of geology or botany or climate. Leaflets and maps are handed to you as you enter the park. There are trails of all kinds and lengths; careful management of traffic; campsites which are well sited and screened and provide individual plots for each group of campers; picnic areas in the right places, and with good facilities; and a warden service, increased in the summer months with student staff, which is almost universally helpful.

In some ways, the Americans go too far. They tend to over-organise their parks.

There are too many distinctions with category after category of park and too rigid a system of classification. There is too much regimentation of the visitor in some places—littering a footpath with notices, putting out localised messages for your car radio, covering a path into the hills with tarmac, or requiring permits for overnight camping in the back-country. There is sometimes an unfortunate sense of the park as a hermetically sealed unit, a series of "sights" somehow divorced and different from the active world outside.

But it remains powerfully true that the Americans do a very good job of running their parks. By comparison our own system has a lot to learn. We must not, of course, go the whole hog. Our landscape simply is not suitable for total preservation in the American way; and above all, we must try never to forswear the freedom from restriction which is the essence of wilderness country. There is, however, much scope, and much need, for improvement on our part.

5. proposals

It is hardly surprising that, faced with the present tenuous system of countryside provision, the public has formed little identification with the idea of our parks. Few people have anything but the haziest notion of what they are or signify. And the shameful fact remains that designating an area of land as a national park—however dedicated most of our park authorities are—means very little, in terms of ownership or protection or public provision.

This chapter outlines a number of proposals which could help to improve the way we regard and care for our parks. Many of the proposals can be initiated at least within the present legislative framework and expenditure ceilings. Ultimately, however, a new Countryside Act will be necessary to enshrine new purposes and forms for the parks and park authorities, and ideally a rationalisation of countryside policy-making as a whole could be carried out at the same time.

the park system

Our first priority should be the establishment of a recognisable system, to replace the present jumble of different areas; and here the proposals of the Countryside Commission for Scotland, outlined in their pamphlet *A Park System for Scotland* (*ibid*) provides a useful catalyst. The Commission begins by assessing the differing uses to which areas of countryside are suited, and the differing recreation needs they are called upon to serve. The scale runs from intensively developed areas used for sports and games, through to primitive areas used for wilderness activities such as hiking and camping. Adapting this scale of varying use and need, the Commission proposes a tiered system of parks, and the range they suggest is fourfold: urban parks, country parks, regional parks and special parks.

This proposed pattern has its faults, but it provides a good starting-point for the construction of a park system for Britain as a whole. The idea of a tiered system

is the crucial one—although it must not be taken too far into the realms of landscape categorisation. Modifying the Commission's proposals, and applying them throughout England and Wales as well as Scotland, we can begin to form a viable and exciting park system on a national scale.

The pattern of countryside parks should involve three basic kinds. The first would be the country parks, for which provision exists already under the Countryside Acts. Most of these would be areas of pleasant countryside, publicly owned and managed, and devoted entirely to provision for public recreation, as at present. They might well be fairly small, the activities often but not necessarily gregarious, and the services of the operating authority could provide for both amenity and education. Many, though by no means all, would be situated within easy reach of urban centres, and at weekends special public transport facilities could be provided.

The second kind would involve somewhat larger and more diverse areas, and would perhaps carry the name of regional parks—similar to the idea pioneered in the Clyde/Muirshiel Regional Park by Renfrew County Council. There would be a wide variety of use, ranging from high intensity recreation to low; there would probably also be some areas in the park used for purposes other than public recreation, particularly agriculture. A similar principle lies behind the idea of the Lee Valley Park in London—a large and diverse area for outdoor recreation—although there the setting is of course a strongly urban one which could, in time, add a new and challenging dimension to the park.

There would be differences in size and in some of the uses of these country and regional parks, but the underlying concept is the same: the provision of a recreation and countryside area of great local significance.

The third kind of park would be the national park, and these should be areas

of countryside and seashore which have *national* significance. The model would be those existing at present in England and Wales, although with a different constitution and much stronger powers for the park authorities. The purposes should be the ones outlined in the 1949 Act, of promoting conservation and recreation, while still protecting present uses. The primary emphasis should be written into a new Act as being that of conservation; and the Act should also stress, in strong terms, the degree of national importance these national parks should have, to provide further safeguards in their day-to-day life.

It is appropriate that this idea of a "national" park—and the name—should be used in Scotland as well as in the rest of the country; the Commission's idea of "special" parks, though close, does not really go far enough. The national park concept applies just as readily to the Scottish countryside and the public could begin to form an identification with the name and the idea not only in England and Wales but north of the border too. At the same time, however, a concerted effort is needed to help the public understand exactly what a national park is, to try to erode some of the misunderstandings that currently persist.

It will not be possible, or desirable, to organise all areas of outstanding or valuable countryside into such a three-fold system of parks, and yet many areas outside the park system will still need protection and care. Accordingly, there should be a form of designation, possibly as at present as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which would not confer formal status as a park, but would require a special level of protection. As with a listed building, such a designation would alert the planning authorities, and the general public, to the needs of the area; and it would impose automatic constraints on proposals for development or restriction of access.

Linked to this tiered system of countryside parks, though not directly, would be the urban parks; these demand of

course their own forms of management and meet different purposes from those of parks in the countryside. They are included here rather because they should not be divorced too radically from other forms of park. Education for, and promotion of, the countryside starts in the neighbourhood or city park and not only at the edge of the suburbs. The countryside element as such is normally missing, and the recreation use is more intensive and often more organised; but the principle, of open air and open space is at heart the same.

the overseeing authorities : boards or committees ?

The most glaring inadequacy in our present system, however, lies in the committee structure which oversees most of the national parks. It seems specifically designed to remove any "national" element from the parks' function or ethos. Under the 1949 Act, modified by the Local Government Act of 1972, the running of each park is the responsibility of a planning board, or a committee of the local planning authority. In multi-county parks, the committee is responsible either to one of the constituent authorities or jointly to all. The crucial fact is that the management structure of the parks lies, more or less, *within* the framework of local government.

The overseeing authorities set up under this system are diverse in character and quality. The Peak District has its own joint planning board, as does the Lake District; two thirds of the members are appointed by the county authorities and one third by the Secretary of State—but they are independent of the county council framework as such. The other eight parks, however, are simply the responsibility of park planning committees of the relevant county councils, rather than independent boards. There is even, in these parks, a *de facto* rule which prevents any of the members (again one third) appointed by the Secretary of State from becoming chairman or the vice-chairman of the committee. Where the park authority is kept within the structure of local government, it is

often accorded a low level of priority in the spectrum of council affairs, and has diminished power to operate on its own. The park authority has to relp for some of its work on members of the council's staff, who have other preoccupations. And always, in the deliberations of the park committee and—much more so—of the local authority that can override it, local interests and priorities will be to the forefront, even if they conflict with the purposes for which the park was originally established. If a conflict of any kind develops, it is all too often the local authority which wins. The welfare of the park, its value to the national beyond the local community, takes second place.

The most glaring instance recently has been the development of serious tension between the North Yorkshire County Council and the National Park Committee for the Yorkshire Dales. There have been disputes about appointments, about the number of part time wardens, the frequency of committee meetings, even about the status of the park itself. There have been similarly strained relations in the Pembrokeshire Coast Park. And in the days when the Lake District Planning Boards; despite its board status had to depend on the local authority for administrative staff, there was a stark refusal by Cumberland County Council to provide the board with the services of council officers in preparing a case against the improvements to the A66. Such a situation is unforgiveable, and is a direct consequence of the committee system.

Not only does the quality and achievement of the national parks suffer because of this system, but it also varies widely, with the diverse standards of wealth and interest of the relevant local authorities. The number of full time wardens employed ranges from two to eleven of part time wardens from none to 160 of voluntary wardens from none to well over three hundred. The establishment of visitor and information centres proceeds quickly in a few parks, painfully slowly in most. Always, it tends to be the two parks with boards at their head,

rather than county council committees, that provide the best service.

On all counts, the park that comes out by far the best is the Peak District. It does have natural advantages, especially in the high rateable value of the surrounding local authority areas. But it also has to cope with strong and difficult pressures. It is the closest of all national parks to London and it lies in the midst of large urban concentrations, with a particularly high level of weekend use. Its success, in provision for the public and care for the land under its remit, and in the initiatives it has taken and is taking in recreation is by any yardstick remarkable. And this is largely due to the independent management structure the Peak District has been allowed to have, radically different throughout its lifetime from that of any other park. The only other which comes remotely close, even now, is the Lake District.

In reforming our national parks, therefore, four vital conditions must be met. The overseeing authority must be a planning board, not a committee of the local authority. (This is a change that was urged by witness after witness before the House of Commons Expenditure Committee). The board must be independent in action. The management and planning staff, who need not be great in number should work only for the board and not for two masters at once. And the board must have, written into its statutory duties, a primary responsibility to the aims of the park and to the Secretary of State, rather than to the wishes of the local county authority.

Local interests are nonetheless of great importance, and for this reason the board should still be an individual one; each single national park should have its own board, charged with responsibility for that park alone. There should be close liaison with the relevant county and district authorities, and formal provision for consultation with local interests and groups. The park should have its own representatives on the water authorities, Forestry Commission and similar bodies. The

interests of the rural economy should be taken into account and written into law, along with recreation provision, as one of the aims of the board; but the principle of conservation must come first. An annual report should be made to the Secretary of State, accounting for progress during the year.

The local authority should appoint some members of the board, but no more than a third of the total. All other members should be appointed by the relevant minister, with whom the ultimate responsibility and democratic accountability must reside.

The Government still talks of waiting until 1981 before even considering such changes in management and seeing in the interim how the present system proves itself. We have waited too long already. The present system quite patently is not proving itself: there is increasing friction between county councils and their park committees; there is gross disparity between the effectiveness of different committees; intrusive development is being pushed through with the park authorities relatively powerless to protest and far from improving even in the local aspects of park management and guidance, there is rather an impasse with no progress in any direction.

A structure of the kind described here would be that most suited to the management of a national park. This would not necessarily be the case with a country or regional park, where the significance is regional rather than national; and the responsibilities of local authorities should in these cases be greater. The principle of a board, largely independent in action, could, however, still apply. The best scheme might well be to bring all country and regional parks within a region under the management of one separate planning board, whose members could be appointed two thirds by the local regional authority and one third by the minister. This balance would give an appropriate emphasis to the local importance of parks.

In a new system of this kind, there will also be a need for a strong central co-

ordinating authority to determine priorities and co-ordinate policy across the various parks. The authority should be a small separate department, or statutory body; and the Countryside Commissions—which have consistently done valuable work in initiating and financing innovative ideas in park management—could develop to fill this role.

a co-ordinating authority

The co-ordinating authority should, however, have a much wider job, with responsibilities for all countryside matters other than those which are specifically agricultural. This is a crucial task, for the continuance of rural communities as living entities rather than museum pieces for visitors will become increasingly important. Within the broad remit of the authority, section responsibilities could exist for the various aspects of countryside work at present carried out by a variety of different bodies. Some of these organisations, such as the Nature Conservancy Council, could retain their individual identity, but fall under the linking role of the new authority.

One of these smaller units could be given a special brief for conservation, recreation and the national parks. It should take overall care of the park system, bringing the parks together, providing back-up services if needed, initiating experiments and representing the parks to the public and to Government. It could advise on appointments to park boards and could act as a clearing house for permanent staff.

There should also be a separate ministerial appointment with responsibility for countryside affairs, as there is for sport and for the arts. At present the countryside is the cinderella of ministerial responsibilities, tagged on variously at the bottom of the priority list of the Secretary of State for the Environment, and the Ministers for Agriculture and Sport. The only way in which the care of the countryside will receive a sufficiently authoritative voice in the face of conflicting pressures is to have a ministerial spokesman of its own, with direct responsibility for the

co-ordinating authority. Fighting the combined forces of, say, a multi-national mineral company, a county council, and the Department of Energy, is not easy for Countryside Commission or park authority with no clout to its name.

staffing

Within this new structure, the administrative staffing of all kinds of park should be on the basis of a park service, small but on a national scale. The United States has a service of this kind, which staffs everything from historic monuments to vast and remote tracts of Wyoming or Alaska. Such a spread of service would be unsuitable for Britain, but the idea is a valuable one. By having a service covering the whole of the countryside park system, much could be achieved that is lost under a piecemeal local structure.

A park service would be able to generate a pool of experienced and qualified manpower for park authorities in country, regional and national parks; it would allow greater mobility of expertise from park to park; it could help to unify, and give an identity to, the whole park system; it could be flexible, allowing movement into or out of the service; and it could channel available resources of talent and idealism into areas where it is greatly needed.

There is also a fund of local and voluntary interest to be tapped. The enormous enthusiasm that carries through much of the conservation work of the National Trusts and the wardening of our parks at present—all of which could not otherwise be achieved—shows what is possible.

In terms of the principles of public provision, we are beginning in the Labour Party to feel our way gingerly towards ideas of community participation and smallness of unit within a wider bureaucratic framework. The care of our countryside and for its visitors is ideal for this form of endeavour; and a park service of a consistent national kind could provide just that identifiable cause and

excitement of purpose, within which participatory action could develop.

expenditure

Carrying out more vigorous policies in and for the parks will inevitably involve higher costs and a period of severe economic restriction is not the easiest time to argue for more funds. But as the Sandford Committee pointed out any increase in park costs represents a tiny addition to overall public expenditure. Expenditure on national parks in 1974-5 was £3.2 million, on country parks approximately £6 million, on the Countryside Commission £1.7 million and on the Nature Conservancy Council £3.4 million. In 1976-77, total expenditure on national parks was £4.6 million. Park spending is less, by a large margin than current expenditure levels for the arts or for sport and physical recreation. There is also great economic benefit to be derived from tourist income in park areas, and especially of course from foreign currency. Above all, we should always remember, in any assessment of park expenditure, that the value of what we are gaining is far greater than the relatively small outlays of public funds involved.

Under the current arrangements for apportioning expenditure on the parks, the Exchequer does bear the greater part; this share should, if necessary, be increased—particularly where the national stake in the running of the parks is increased. The sliding scale proposed by the Commons Expenditure Committee, to take account of the varying wealth of the different authorities involved, would be much the best principle. The Exchequer's share could be increased also, but probably to a lesser extent, in regional and country park expenditure.

planning control

A new management structure is a necessary precondition for improvement. The park authorities, however, must also be given sufficient power to fulfil the purposes for which the park were created.

They need, first and foremost, wider powers of planning control and scrutiny of proposed development. All planning or development applications within the boundaries of a national (or, indeed a regional park, should be made in the first instance to the park authority. There has been a considerable improvement in this in the last few years: the park authorities now do carry out many planning functions for their area, especially in the case of the board-run parks. The procedures and powers should, however, be regularised and strengthened, and not left retractable by the local authority.

The park authority should have a statutory duty to consult the local authority, and attempt to come to an agreed decision. The final decision would, however, be taken by the park authority, and in cases of disagreement, the normal appeals process would always be available.

There must, as Sandford suggests, be the strongest presumption against proposals for development in the parks. Sandford does not go far enough, however. The following principles should be written in to the park authority's planning brief, for major and pressing development of any kind. Before the development is allowed to proceed, it must be incontrovertibly proved: first, that the work is without qualification crucial to the nation; second, that there are no alternatives elsewhere, and that all such possibilities have been exhaustively examined; third, that the environmental consequences have been fully considered, and ameliorated; fourth, that the development is carefully sited, in the position which will cause the least damage; and fifth, that every effort is made during the lifetime of the projects, and after completion, to minimise its environmental impact. Even then, no automatic go-ahead should be given. There are some parts of the national parks where there should be a strong rule against *any* development, to be breached only after full deliberation by Parliament.

In other words, the balance must be shifted in favour of the park authority and its statutory duties. The principle all

the way through—in the consultation process, in the stringent screening of applications, and in particular at any public inquiry—must be that the onus is on the developer to prove his case, not on the objector; the principles represented by the park authority should stand throughout not only with greater weight than they do at present, but with an assumption that they are paramount until proved otherwise.

public ownership of land

At present there are no great public holdings of land in the national parks. Land held by the National Trust in national parks is usually privately owned. The whole question of land ownership is an important, and neglected one. The Hobhouse Committee recommended a progressively greater public holding in the national parks; and the Ramsay Committee in Scotland set a more immediate goal of national ownership or control. This has not occurred, and on present showing does not seem likely to occur. This is surely a matter for great regret. A certain amount can be achieved by management and access agreements; but the only way of ensuring, ultimately, that the aims of the park are secured is, where necessary, by public ownership.

The Sandford Committee proposes that park authorities should have the power to acquire—compulsorily if there is no alternative—any land which is in danger of being used or changed in a manner detrimental to the purposes of the park. They also propose the idea of "opportunity purchases", of land that happens to become available.

These ideas, though valuable, should however be taken further. As a long-term aim, there should be a policy of progressive acquisition of land in the national parks by the park authorities. As a beginning at least, park authorities could be given responsibility—though not laid down in a formal structure of any kind—for the special, particular protection of the areas within their parks of the very highest landscape value. Within these

special areas a policy of gradual land purchase could be initiated. The only constraint on acquisition should be the limited financial resources available; and in this context, the unexplained disappearance of most of the Land Fund from available Treasury monies—a fund set up for exactly this kind of purpose—has been especially regrettable.

other management and planning policies

On the question of the more detailed planning controls and management policies that should be available to park authorities, the Sandford Report is admirably thorough. A few points, however, deserve special attention. One of the thorniest of all planning dilemmas is presented by traffic, and the problem here is a microcosm of some of the larger problems of the parks as a whole. Most visitors to all types of countryside park come by car, and their recreation is centred around the car. If the answer were simply to provide the roads and car parks they need, and allow and encourage the traffic to come, many of the essential qualities of the parks would be destroyed.

The demands of conservation and recreation can probably best be satisfied by a careful policy of "organising" the traffic, bearing in mind also the transport needs of the local community. A valuable experiment in integrated traffic management of this kind—"Routes for People" has been carried out in the Peak District.

The nature of, and current lack of planning control over, forestry operations in parks is a further cause for grave concern. This is especially the case with the operations of private groups or companies who are aided by handsome fiscal concessions and grants, and whose concern is purely with profitability and not with landscape value or amenity. Much of the planting of bare land carried out by such groups in recent years has been incongruous and unsightly. The only restraint is a small financial one, for some of the grants are subject to Forestry Commission approval; the concessions are

available anyway. In this light, it is particularly alarming that the Government's response to Sandford specifically excluded the possibility of strengthening the planning procedures for forestry.

In future, there should be a clear degree of public control over all forestry operations within the parks: forestry proposals, by the Commission or by others, should be brought within the planning system; all proposals should be subject to the approval of the park authority; there should be a process of consultation and agreement between the Forestry Commission and the park authorities; and there should be particularly strict supervision of private operators.

The agricultural use of previously non-agricultural land should also be brought within planning control—agriculture, like forestry, lies outside the planning system at present—and this should be particularly enforced in the case of bull-dozed tracks.

In addition, greater use ought to be made of land management agreements and also, where necessary, of access agreements. The emphasis should still be on a voluntary process but, in both these cases, compulsory legal powers should exist in reserve, as they do at present for access. Access agreements could also be expanded in scope, as has been suggested by the Ramblers' Association, to apply to lakeside, woodland and riverbank areas, as well as the normally relevant "open" areas of country. Moreover, such agreements ought to become more advantageous to the public, less being sacrificed to satisfy the landowner; the basis on which compensation is calculated should be radically changed, to allow for proven detriment rather than hypothetical inconvenience.

Another aspect of park management which is of great importance is the provision of warden services, and the Sandford Report rightly emphasises this. The role of a warden service, both professional and voluntary, in providing advice and help to visitors, and developing co-operation with farmers and local people, can be invaluable. We should avoid the mis-

take of creating a service which turns into a "police force of the countryside"; that would defeat the whole object. What can be achieved, however, was illustrated well by a Countryside Commission for Scotland project on Speyside, a pilot scheme which could eventually develop into a much wider warden or ranger service—working closely with local agencies, and aiming to provide the public with advice, help and information, in as friendly a way as possible. The stress should primarily be on a communication service for all the parties involved—forging links between the locality, its people, and the visitors.

The hardest task of all in managing a national park, however, will be to link the development of the purposes and facilities of the park with the interests of the local community, trying to balance the often conflicting demands of national and local concerns. As a major priority, a long term strategy for employment and small scale industry in the communities within the parks must be drawn up; rural communities cannot be left to become the preserve of bed-and-breakfast accommodation and second homes. In conjunction with the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas (COSIRA) and the county and district councils, there should be regular consultation by the park authority—to monitor the development of the park area, chart a future programme, and ensure that the long term employment needs of the community are not forgotten. The park authority would have a direct responsibility to co-ordinate and supervise these discussions, and to endeavour to meet the appropriate employment needs of the area. The process of consultation should be formalised in statute, with a duty to report regularly on progress to the minister, at the same time as progress in all other aspects of the park is reported.

In the day-to-day management of recreation facilities in a park, the park authority has a particularly exciting opportunity to initiate new ventures. Much is being done at present, although the pattern is not consistent; guided walks, landscape trails, nature trails, information and interpretation services,

the opening up of old canals, turning former railway lines into walks, reopening old railways, creating picnic sites, restoring mills, setting up quarry museums, holding farm open days, building "landmark" centres which present an area in all its aspects and history in exhibitions, films, slides and talks. Other possibilities should be investigated, such as the provision of study facilities for students and researchers, and schemes for elderly and handicapped visitors. These should be a special priority: trails could be made for wheelchair use, and special trips and walks organised for the blind. There should also be close attention to the needs of schoolchildren—and even closer liaison with schools than exists at present. All these projects should not, of course, be confined simply to formally designated areas; but such areas do provide an ideal place at which to start.

The principle behind all management policies and decisions should be a very simple one: to draw people to different areas, depending on the activity appropriate to that place. Some parts of the parks should be managed for relatively high-density use and some for relatively low-density use. An area by a roadside, for example, may have facilities for cars, picnics, trails, sports, and perhaps boating, and may be well populated; a few miles away in the midst of the hills there may be silence and untampered beauty. Each area within a national park demands different use, and each person who comes demands different facilities. Satisfying and balancing these demands, and ensuring in the process that the beauty and wildness of the countryside, the most precious things of all, are not destroyed, is the principal task of a park management.

conclusion

The main purpose of this pamphlet has been to advocate the creation of a stronger park system for our countryside. We need such a system, and we need it urgently, because the pressures on the most beautiful and valuable parts of our landscape and seashore, pressures of development and recreation alike, are becoming so

strong that they need to be channelled and controlled. It is no longer sufficient to leave things to custom and tolerance, or even, in the most important areas, to locally determined authorities. We need a coherent pattern of parks, on a nationwide scale and with a national purpose; and we need an organisational structure with the aims and the powers that can bring it to fruition, protecting and promoting the countryside as may be appropriate.

It is a task of considerable political importance and difficulty: not simply an "environmental" issue, but a problem requiring political will and initiative, for it concerns the apportionment of resources, and the strengthening of public control, and the improvement of inadequate provision, and the balancing of different and often conflicting demands. For too long it has been regarded as an easy, agreeable area of public policy; that in itself is perhaps a sign that not enough has been done.

What has been suggested here is a set of tentative goals, a possible strategy for improvement. It is by no means an attempt to burden our countryside with a rigid structure or an inflexible bureaucracy or endless classification. It is rather an attempt to ensure that the means exist, flexible and responsive, by which we can guarantee that the beauty and value will be there for those people who come to the countryside to walk or to look or too seek enjoyment. It is for these people that our parks are created and organised; it is for the schoolchildren who can begin to explore environments different from those in which they live; it is for those who want the chance to find, for a while perhaps, freedoms and values they can find nowhere else. If we have too little regard for these values now, we may find that when we need them most—and we shall increasingly need them—they are no longer there.

Meanwhile, at Government level, there is no clear national statement of policy for the countryside, no sense of direction, and little assessment of priorities. The debate that has arisen in the aftermath

of the Sandford Report deserves a more vigorous response than it has yet received, and a more vocal one.

The task of creating a stronger park system, in the context of a clearer policy for the countryside as a whole, is one of immense importance, important not only now but for the future. This country of ours has some of the most beautiful and some of the most fragile countryside in the world. The least we can do is to use it, and care for it, not only with affection, but with wisdom too.

6. summary of main recommendations

1. The creation of a clear tiered park system: country parks, regional parks and national parks. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty as dedicated areas with stricter planning controls, but without formal park status. Closer liaison between countryside park authorities and urban parks.
2. The primary purpose of national parks to be conservation; the other statutory aims to be provision for recreation, and concern for the economic needs of the locality. A statutory duty to report to Secretary of State or minister regularly on progress on these fronts. It must, however, be spelled out clearly that the principal focus of administration is to be the national rather than the local importance of the area.
3. Creation of national parks in Scotland. Designation of further national parks in England and Wales, as appropriate.
4. Each national park to be the responsibility of its own independent planning board, not a committee of the county council. Each board should have its own staff. Members of the board to be appointed two thirds by the relevant minister, one third by the county or regional council(s). A voluntary advisory council to monitor progress on a regional basis.
5. Other boards to be established on a regional scale, for all the regional and country parks in a region; members to be appointed one third by the relevant minister, two thirds by county or regional authorities.
6. A co-ordinating authority to be formed out of the present Countryside Commissions and other agencies, with responsibility for countryside policy in all its aspects, and section responsibilities for different policy areas—with a special unit specifically concerned with conservation, recreation and national parks.
7. The appointment of a minister with special responsibility for countryside policy and parks. This minister to be called to account annually for the exercise of his/her responsibilities under Section 11 of the Countryside Act 1968, as suggested by the Countryside Review Committee.
8. Creation of a park service for the staffing of all parks in the countryside.
9. The House of Commons Expenditure Committee's suggestion of a sliding scale for Exchequer contributions to national park authorities to be adopted.
10. National Park Authorities to have full planning powers within their area, but a statutory duty to consult with the local authority. Development proposals to be stringently scrutinised, and the onus to be on the developer to prove his case. Before a major development is permitted, a set of criteria—to prove its essential nature and to show that the effects can be mitigated—to be closely examined.
11. Progressive acquisition of land by the national park authority, especially in the most beautiful and important areas.
12. Progressive reduction of defence land holdings in national parks.
13. Bringing forestry operations, and agricultural use of non-agricultural land, within planning control. Stronger requirements on building materials and designs used in park areas.
14. Clear powers for national park authorities to organise the traffic within the park, creating a "hierarchy" of road uses (as Sandford suggests) and prohibiting traffic altogether in some cases. Improvement of public transport services to the parks, especially at weekends; expansion of postbus services.
15. Compulsory legal powers to exist in reserve for management agreements, as well as for access agreements. Access agreements and orders to be broadened in scope, to include woodland, lakeside and riverside areas. Compensation to be paid, in all access agreements, only on grounds of proven detriment, rather than hypothetical inconvenience.

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national parks

Chris Smith argues that our countryside, especially in its most beautiful parts, is coming under increasing pressure from visitors and developers alike. There is an urgent need to create a viable system of parks in the countryside to help preserve our heritage for the good of all. The pamphlet describes the present park system in Britain, analyses its weaknesses, and delineates the conflicting values arising from the demands for local use, for visitor access, for development, and for recreation. Above all, it stresses that under the present system creating a national park is a relatively meaningless exercise. A much stronger framework is needed.

After a discussion of the various reports recently issued on countryside policy, the author outlines a series of proposals for reviving our park system and countryside provision in general. He argues for a clear network of parks ; an administrative structure with a wider, more national composition ; a park service to provide proper staffing ; the appointment of a Minister for the countryside ; progressive land acquisition in the national parks and park authorities with greater powers and responsibilities in planning, traffic management, forestry and employment. Only by a strategy of this kind can we provide adequate protection for our countryside and in so doing revitalise a traditionally important—but recently neglected—part of Labour thinking.

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