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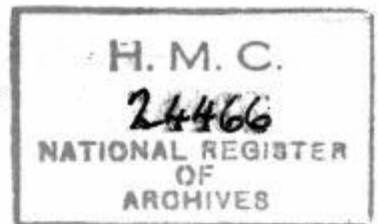
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A list of the historical records  
of the  
Standing Committee on National Parks  
(now the Council for National Parks)

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A brief history of the Standing Committee on National Parks (now the Council for National Parks)

It is impossible to outline the history of the Standing Committee on National Parks (hereafter SCNP) in isolation. Some details need to be given of the development of the concept of National Parks; of the conflict between their various proponents (over both the use to which they should be put and the administrative issues); and of the Government's piecemeal approach to the protection of amenity and wildlife and to the provision of outdoor recreation facilities. For it is in the light of these factors that the establishment and early development of the Standing Committee should be seen.

The emergence of the SCNP coincided with a growing demand to make more rational use of the nation's resources and for the introduction of central government control. Public interest in National Parks as such did not really materialise until the late 1920s, although there had been pressure on the Government to provide more general public access to open space since as early as 1884 when the first Access to Mountains Bill was introduced. This had been followed by numerous other unsuccessful attempts. Yet by the 1920s, the growing popularity of outdoor pursuits such as rambling, hiking, etc, and the increasing threats to the countryside (as evidenced by the founding of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England in 1926 to co-ordinate all those concerned with the preservation of the countryside) stimulated interest in National Parks. They were seen as a means of providing recreational facilities and of protecting wildlife and the countryside in face of increasing development and land use change. Interest in National Parks was also aroused by the creation of such parks in America, Canada and elsewhere.

In 1929 the CPRE made the first move in demands for a series of parks, submitting a memorandum to the Prime Minister in which it asked for an official enquiry into the need for a number of parks. As a result an official National Parks Committee was set up under the Chairmanship of Addison, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture. This Committee (commonly known as the Addison Committee) took evidence from numerous bodies and individuals and finally reported in 1931. Its main conclusions in advocating for the setting up of National Parks were 'to safeguard areas of exceptional interest against disorderly development and spoliation; to improve means of access for pedestrians to areas of natural beauty and to promote measures for protection of flora and fauna'. Yet there was serious conflict between the various proponents of National Parks. For example, the National Trust felt that the preservation of the countryside should be the primary object and that access was only a secondary concern. Others, however, such as John Dower, felt that access should be allowed so as to justify the expense of protecting the countryside. Sir Patrick Abercrombie claimed that Parks should be set up primarily to provide recreational facilities and so should be sited near cities. In addition, other bodies which gave evidence to the Committee (eg the Automobile Association, the Camping Club, the Ramblers' Federation) all had their own claims. The Addison Committee recommended that a National Parks authority be established for England and Wales, and one for Scotland. These would select National Parks and would assist committees set up by local authorities to draw up plans for National Park development, to schedule land of great beauty, to make agreements with landowners and to award compensation, etc. Furthermore, necessary funds should be made available by the Government.

Although the Minister of Health, Arthur Greenwood, planned to implement these recommendations, he wanted first to introduce a new Town and Country Planning Bill which would prepare the way for National Park legislation. Yet during its progress through Parliament the Government fell, and a weaker measure was passed by the new Government (although this did allow local authorities to control developments in the countryside). Moreover, by 1932 the country was in a financial crisis and consequently there was no money available to set up a National Parks authority. By the time the economy had revived, local authorities under the 1932 Town and Country Planning Act had begun to draw up planning schemes for many areas of potential parks, and it would have been impossible to transfer their powers at this stage to a National Parks authority. Clearly this was a very piecemeal approach to the preservation of the countryside and provision of recreational facilities: a large number of bodies were now involved, and there was much diffusion of responsibility.

But there was still an obvious need for a central authority since local authorities were not compelled either to draw up planning schemes or to liaise over such schemes. Furthermore, they were largely unable to prevent harmful land use changes implemented by statutory undertakings, or to meet claims for compensation, especially in remote areas where local authorities had only slender resources; (in fact, areas most likely to become parks). Moreover, there was still no improvement in the provision of access to the countryside.

Between 1931 and 1935 little was achieved by voluntary bodies in the campaign to establish National Parks, despite several efforts to create a new organisation to co-ordinate their efforts and strengthen their hand. However, in 1936 the SCNP was set up under the auspices of the CPRE and the CPRW specifically to sustain interest and to formulate a common policy based on the Addison Report for all advocates of National Parks (whether their chief objectives were to protect amenity or wildlife, or to provide opportunities for recreation). (A similar body was set up in Scotland.) According to Sandbach it appears that the initiative to establish the SCNP was taken at a conference held by the Joint Committee of Open Air Organisations (representing the Ramblers' Association, the Youth Hostels Association, the Camping Club, the Holiday Fellowship and the Countrywide Holidays Association) in November 1935. The CPRE was initially against the formation of another body, and it only took responsibility for the servicing and administration of the Standing Committee when a formation committee met to discuss the proposal. Membership of the SCNP was limited to national societies. It was run by an Executive Committee comprising representatives of the member societies, although provision was made for a number of co-opted members. A preparatory subcommittee was also appointed.

A wide cross section of countryside and recreation bodies was invited to send representatives, and most, if not all of these bodies had given evidence to the Addison Committee. (Those represented included the Royal Automobile Club, the Automobile Association, the Geographical Association, the National Trust, the Camping Club, the Fell and Rock Climbing Club, the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Holiday Fellowship, the Co-operative Holiday Association, the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves, the Youth Hostels Association, the Ramblers' Association, the Cyclists' Touring Club and the Pedestrians' Association for Road Safety.) Early members of the Committee included such influential persons as Lord Chorley, HG Griffin,



Clough Williams-Ellis, Patrick Abercrombie, Rev HHSymonds, T A Leonard, John Dower and Norman Birkett.

It was as a result of the establishment of the SCNP as a united and well organised lobby under the chairman of Sir Norman Birkett that the voluntary bodies were able to play such a key role in securing support for National Parks and for an improvement in general access to the countryside. In the years up to the outbreak of war in 1939 it drafted a Bill, circulated MPs and other public figures, distributed pamphlets, etc. As a result it aroused sufficient support to compel the Minister of Health to review the whole question of parks in 1937. Yet because many local authority planning schemes were nearing completion and because landowners had in many cases agreed to prevent development without compensation, it was felt that the provision of government grants at this point would prove to be both harmful and expensive. Such plans for grants were therefore postponed for a year by which time war was imminent and the plans were therefore shelved.

Yet there was increasing desire by the Government to exert greater control over land use changes. A number of events during the war (1939-1945) had great bearing on the National Parks issue. A Ministry of Works and Planning - later the Ministry of Town and Country Planning - was set up as a central planning authority. Deputations were sent by the Standing Committee to meet Ministers. These helped to convince the Government that National Parks should be set up as part of the programme of post war reconstruction (as indicated in the Government's White Paper on 'The Control of Land Use' published 1944). The Scott Committee reporting in 1942 said that 'the establishment of National Parks in Britain is long overdue'. Furthermore, an enquiry was set up (under Dower) to determine the needs of the future parks and to discuss general issues concerning them, including their administration. In his report published in 1945, Dower defined the type of National Park required and outlined the need for preserving landscape beauty and wildlife as well as providing ample access and recreational facilities. He also put forward his plans for a National Parks Commission with executive powers, which would play a positive role. A similar survey was carried out in Scotland. In 1945 Silkin as Minister of Town and Country Planning set up a committee under the chairmanship of Sir Arthur Hobhouse to consider Dower's proposals as to the areas which should be selected as National Parks and to draw up more detailed plans for them. Dower was a very influential member of this committee, which also included many other original members of the Standing Committee on National Parks (including Lord Chorley, Clough Williams-Ellis, Julian Huxley and Lt Col Buxton). Detailed reports of their selection - 12 Parks and 52 Conservation Areas were proposed - and administration were published in 1947. But by that time the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act was secured; and despite consistent lobbying by the Standing Committee, it proved virtually impossible to transfer powers thereby awarded to local authorities to a new non-elective National Parks Commission such as the Hobhouse Committee had advocated. However, the Committee had also reviewed the question of public rights of way and provision of access to open land, and many of these recommendations were included in the National Parks and Access in the Countryside Act of 1949.

The 1949 Act set up the National Parks Commission, which was given two main duties. The first was to designate areas as National Parks (of which there are now ten - Brecon Beacons, Dartmoor, Exmoor, Lake District, Northumberland, North York Moors, Peak District, Pembrokeshire Coast,

Snowdonia and the Yorkshire Dales). Secondly, it was empowered to give advice on the administration of the Parks to Park Planning Authorities and Ministers who were to have the executive powers on such matters as development plans. Therefore, although it did not supersede the planning arrangements provided for the country as a whole in the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, the 1949 legislation did make some additions to planning law within National Park areas (ie for the establishment of planning authorities, provision of grants, etc). As a result of this Act, a centralised administrative system was set up which would protect areas of high landscape value and develop recreational use of the countryside. Since the Act, the functions of the National Parks Commission have been extended and in 1965 it was replaced by the Countryside Commission.

Government policy was formulated to a great extent by outside influence, and especially by the lobby of the SCNP. The Standing Committee's cause was also promoted through the amenity group of the House of Commons for whom it provided briefs. The SCNP's parliamentary campaign (1936-1949) was of particular importance, and its deputations to Lord Reith and other Ministers in the 1940s were crucial for the inclusion of National Parks as part of the post-war reconstruction plan. Members of the Standing Committee such as John Dower, Lord Chorley and Clough Williams-Ellis were held in high regard and were appointed as members of Government committees and enquiries. The Standing Committee also had a reputation of being well researched and informed, and consequently its opinions were taken seriously. The fact that it represented the combined interests of many countryside organisations has also proved to have been of great value.

With the passing of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act in 1949, the objects of the SCNP were achieved to a large extent. After this date the Committee's activities were mainly directed to keeping the operation of the 1949 Act under review and in assisting the National Parks Commission, the local authorities and other statutory bodies in order to ensure that the purposes of the Act were carried out. The Standing Committee continued to lobby the Government over issues affecting developments in National Parks, to submit evidence at public inquiries and to make representations to a wide variety of bodies to ensure that the purposes of National Park designation are successfully maintained. In 1949, for example, the SCNP constituted the North Wales (Hydro-Electricity) Protection Committee with the British Mountaineering Council, the Merseyside Advisory Committee of Open-Air Organisations and the Birmingham Open-Air Societies' North Wales Committee. This successfully contested many schemes proposed by the Central Electricity Generating Board in the Snowdonia National Park. These included schemes to contract 17 power stations and 23 dams involving Snowdon, The Glyders and Moel Siabod, a pumped storage scheme on Cader Idris, a nuclear station at Ederm and a 400KV transmission line across the estuary at Portmadoc.

In 1977 the SCNP was replaced by a new and independent body, the Council for National Parks. Its aim is to promote the objects of National Parks. Membership of the Council consists of persons appointed by the Council for each national park, honorary officers and representatives of constituent organisations. These comprise both national and local amenity, sporting and other bodies and include the National Trust, the CPRE and some of its branches, the CPRW, the Youth Hostels Association and some of its Regional Groups, the Ramblers' Association and some of its Areas, the Friends of the Lake District, the Dartmoor Preservation Society, the Exmoor Society and

the Snowdonia National Park Society. The day to day running of the Council is conducted by an Executive Committee.

#### Bibliography

- J Sheail, 'The Concept of National Parks in Great Britain, 1900-1950'.  
Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers No 66, Nov 1975, 41-56  
G E Cherry, National Parks and Recreation in the Countryside. Environmental Planning Vol II, 1975  
F R Sandbach, 'The early campaign for a National Park in the Lake District'.  
Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, Vol 3, No 4, 1978, 498-514

#### Notes on the historical records

The chief surviving records of the SCNP are its general minute books which are complete. They contain minutes of meetings of the Formation Committee, the Preparatory Subcommittee, the General Purposes Subcommittee and the Standing Committee. Minutes of other committees and meetings are occasionally recorded, including those of a Parliamentary Subcommittee of the North Wales (Hydro-Electricity) Protection Committee, a Moveable Dwellings Subcommittee and of a meeting on petrol filling stations with representatives of oil companies and others. From 1977, the books record minutes of the annual meetings of the Council for National Parks, ordinary meetings of the Council and meetings of the Executive Committee.

The SCNP was serviced and financed by the CPRE and consequently the correspondence and administrative files relating to the SCNP are to be found amongst the records of the CPRE. A small number of these files (with CPRE filing numeration) relating to the SCNP have been transferred to the offices of the Council for National Parks. They mostly contain material dating to the 1970s. Other files relating to the Committee and to National Parks can be located amongst the CPRE files.

The Council for National Parks has created its own administrative and correspondence files. It has also started to produce an annual report and to retain other types of records including press cuttings, maps and publications relating to National Parks.

#### Archival note

The aim of this list is to provide a general guide to the records of the Standing Committee on National Parks which is in sufficient detail and explanation to indicate to researchers their content and potential. Therefore items have been described in a summary fashion.

The records of the Standing Committee and the Council for National Parks have not been listed separately (although an indication, where necessary, is given where the records of the Standing Committee end and those of the Council for National Parks begin). This is because no real distinction is made by the Council for National Parks. For example, the minute book in use by the SCNP up to 1977 was retained by the Council. The records have been listed, as far as possible, according to function. They have been given a running number (except for the CPRE files which are already numbered) for information purposes.



### Location and access

The surviving historical records of the SCNP are retained by the Council for National Parks at its offices, 4 Hobart Place, London SW1W 0HY. The Council is willing in principle to make the material available for academic research and applications for access should be made in writing to the Secretary.

The CPRE has deposited the majority of its files with the Institute of Agricultural History, University of Reading. Researchers wishing to consult this material should apply to the CPRE for permission.

## A ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS

### I Minute Books

The following Minute Books chiefly record minutes of the Standing Committee on National Parks which met four times a year, in March, June, September and December. Minutes of a number of other committees and subcommittees are also recorded.

In September 1977, the Standing Committee was reconstituted as the Council for National Parks. Thereafter, the Minute Books record minutes of the annual meeting of the Council, minutes of its Executive Committee and General Purposes Subcommittee.

- 1 Minute Book, May 1936-May 1947  
Formation Committee, Standing Committee on National Parks, Preparatory Subcommittee
- 2 Minute Book, Oct 1947-Dec 1956  
Standing Committee on National Parks, General Purposes Subcommittee, Parliamentary Subcommittee of the North Wales (Hydro Electricity) Protection Committee, Moveable Dwellings Subcommittee
- 3 Minute Book, Mar 1957-Dec 1966  
Standing Committee on National Parks, General Purposes Subcommittee
- 4 Minute Book, Mar 1967-Sep 1978  
Up to Aug 1977, Standing Committee on National Parks, General Purposes Subcommittee, Meetings on petrol filling stations with representatives of oil companies and others. From Sep 1977, Council for National Parks, Executive Committee, General Purposes Subcommittee
- 5 Minute Book, Sep ,1978-  
Council for National Parks, Executive Committee, General Purposes Subcommittee

### II Committee Papers

Committee papers including agenda, minutes and appendices, together with reports, papers, notes, memoranda, comments, etc on legislation, have been retained from Sep 1966

Committee papers of the Executive Committee, Finance and General Purposes Committee, Publicity Committee and Planning Subcommittee of the CPRE have been retained from 1968

### III Correspondence and Administrative Files

Because the Standing Committee on National Parks was set up and also financed and serviced by the CPRE the majority of the Standing Committee's files can be found amongst the CPRE's archive. Most of this has now been deposited with the Institute of Agricultural History, University of Reading. A small number of files, however, relating to the Standing Committee (and bearing CPRE numeration) have been retained by the Council for National Parks

- 232 File: Standing Committee on National Parks general correspondence, Feb 1972-Jan 1977

- 232(E) File: Standing Committee on National Parks travelling expenses, Mar 1963-Oct 1973
- 232(F) File: Standing Committee on National Parks appeal for funds, Jul 1963-Dec 1975
- 232(H) File: Regional Standing Committee on National Parks meetings, Feb 1974-Sep 1975
- 232/14 File: Scottish Council for National Parks, Dec 1941-Oct 1974
- 232/15 File: National Park Wardens, Mar 1942-Jun 1973
- 232/16 File: Public meetings about National Parks, Jan 1972
- 232/59/1 File: Standing Committee on National Parks publications etc, Apr 1965-Nov 1974
- File: National Parks and Access to the Countryside Bill (1949), including a memorandum on the Act submitted by the Standing Committee to the Minister of Town and Country Planning, 1949

The Council for National Parks, which is an independent body, has its own staff and administration. All its files are still in current use.

B LEGAL RECORDS

I Standing Orders of the Council for National Parks, Jul 1978

## C PUBLICATIONS

### I Standing Committee on National Parks publications

The Committee appears to have produced a very small number of publications, all of which were published by the CPRE. The following list, however, is probably not complete. The Council for National Parks has not retained copies of any of these, although it is likely that the CPRE possesses copies.

- 1 The Case for National Parks in Great Britain, 1938
- 2 The Case for Control of Open Land in National Parks. Presented by the Standing Committee on National Parks of the Councils for the Preservation of Rural England and Wales and the Joint Action Group for Protection of Dartmoor and Exmoor, 1961
- 3 Study No 1, Afforestation in National Parks, 1965
- 4 Study No 2, The Future of National Parks and the Countryside, 1965

### II Council for National Parks publications

- 1 Annual Reports, 1977/1978-

### III Other

The Council for National Parks has started to collect publications of a wide variety of other bodies and organisations and covering a wide number of topics. They include, for example, publications of the National Park Planning Boards, the Countryside Commission and the Commons Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society; and publications relating to such topics as roads, agriculture, long distance footpaths and access and management agreements. They date almost exclusively from the 1970s



D SOCIAL AND PERSONAL MATERIAL

I Press cuttings

The Council for National Parks has begun to preserve press and other cuttings relating to National Parks. These date from 1978.

E EPHEMERA

I Maps

- 1 Map of proposed National Parks (12) and Conservation Areas;  
and of urban populations, nd
- 2 Map of wild country from which National Parks should be  
chosen, nd