

‘In good hands’.

The preservation of the New Forest and the long journey towards National Park designation*

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Abstract

The New Forest, once the hunting preserve of English monarchs, owes its distinctive landscape to stock-keeping and timber production. It avoided enclosure in the eighteenth century and again in the 1870s, benefiting from the new public perception of the need to conserve open spaces. Although subsequently treasured as ‘a national park’, it was not until the 1920s that an outcry over the felling of ‘ancient and ornamental woodland’ triggered calls for it to be given legal protection and spurred government to consider the case for national parks generally. In the 1940s, however, it was accepted that the Forest was ‘in good hands’ so it was not among the candidates for national park designation recommended by the Hobhouse Committee (1947). Plans drawn up in the 1950s for giving it status as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty were abandoned. It was not until the late 1980s that calls for national park status began to be debated seriously but in 1994 these too were dropped. Designation of the New Forest National Park was finally confirmed in 2004.

Although the aspiration to create national parks to protect the landscape can be traced back into the nineteenth century, in England and Wales they were first created under the provisions of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. Between 1951 and 1957 ten parks were designated, three in Wales and the remainder either in the northern uplands of England or the south-west peninsula. The New Forest in Hampshire had been talked about as a national park (although with varying meanings of the phrase) from at least the 1870s. It was one of the areas of landscape beauty included in various lists of potential national parks compiled in 1930s and early 1940s. But despite its claim to have national park status conferred on it, it was not included in the Hobhouse Committee’s list and failed to be included amongst the parks created in the 1950s. It had to wait until 2004 before designation was confirmed. Why did it take so long to achieve

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what had been widely anticipated in the 1940s and earlier? This paper uses the New Forest as a unique case study to explore the evolution of the idea of the national park and the changing attitudes of both government and public towards the protection of open spaces over 150 years.

For many, the New Forest was a national park *avant la lettre*. A search of *The Times* digital archive up to 1949 revealed a total of 159 mentions of the phrase ‘national park’ in a primarily British context, and a further 47 mentions of national parks overseas.¹ Of the former, 17 (11 per cent) were references to the New Forest. The only two areas mentioned more frequently were the Lake District and the Forest of Dean. Putting this into perspective, 27 other areas were mentioned, ten of which were selected in 1949 as potential national parks: 11 per cent therefore seems disproportionate for an area that did not make the final top ten.²

I

The New Forest is in Hampshire, but in a part of the county almost cut off from the remainder, a roughly triangular area between the River Avon and Southampton Water (Map 1). Geologically, ‘the Bagshot Beds ... are deposited over a great trough of chalk that dips from Badbury and Pentridge to the Island, and from Purbeck to the Hampshire South Downs’.³ The soils are thin and poor, with little agricultural potential apart from the ‘small intake fields and common grazings, unchanged in fundamentals from ... the Bronze Age’.⁴ It is a commonplace that the New Forest is neither new nor completely forested in the modern sense of ‘wooded’. The *Nova Foresta* was mentioned in Domesday Book but the concept of a ‘forest’ had already existed in Normandy and appears to have referred to its fiscal status: revenue being collected in the New Forest from honey, pasturage, and timber for building.⁵ By the time of Henry II, the ‘forest’ had become a legal entity based on royal hunting rights, with a system of ‘Forest Law’, under which the people of the area continued to exercise customary rights of common: pasture (for cattle and ponies), mast (‘pannage’ for pigs), marl (for soil improvement), turbarry (cutting of ‘turves’ for fuel) and estovers (fuel wood). Pasture, mast and estovers are still exercised today. Since 1877 the guardian of the commoners’ rights has been the Court of Verderers. The Official Verderer is a crown appointment; five other verderers are elected by holders of common rights and four appointed by various bodies to represent forestry, agriculture, planning, and amenity interests (Figure 1).⁶

Ecologically, the Forest is of international importance: it is ‘the largest area of wild, or “unsown” vegetation in lowland Britain’, including ‘large tracts’ of ‘heathland, valley mire and ancient pasture woodland’, habitats which are now rare and fragmented elsewhere in

¹ *The Times Digital Archive, 1785–2010*: only ‘opinion and editorial’ items were included, as a sample of the ‘national conversation’ on the subject. The first use of ‘national park’ in *The Times* was on 8 Aug. 1859 when it was used to describe Hyde Park.

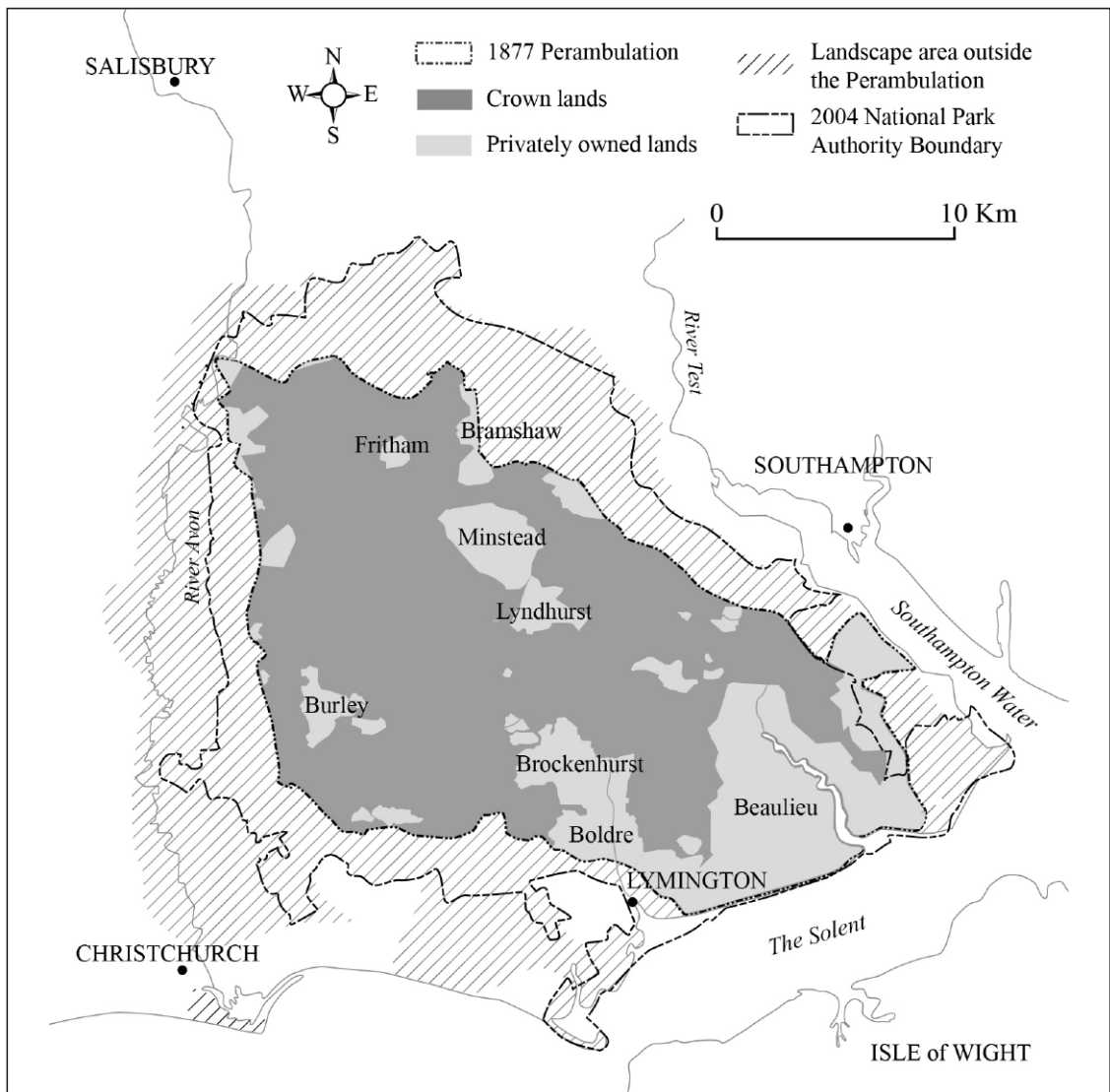
² Arthur Hobhouse, *Report of the National Parks Committee (England and Wales)* (Cmd. 7121, 1947), Appendix A, suggested 12.

³ Heywood Sumner, *Cuckoo Hill: the Book of Gorley* (c.1904–09, repr. 1987), p. 86.

⁴ F. E. Kenchington, *The commoners’ New Forest* (1944), p. 10.

⁵ Dolly Jørgensen, ‘The roots of the English royal forest’, *Anglo-Norman Studies* 32 (2010), pp. 114–28, esp. p. 127.

⁶ Sarah Nield, *Forest Law and the Verderers of the New Forest* (2005); Anthony Pasmore, *New Forest Commoners* (1969), p. 7; Statute 12–13 and 14 Geo. VI, c.69, New Forest Act, 1949.



MAP 1. The New Forest area, showing the crown and privately owned lands within the perambulation; the wider landscape of mixed grazing and woodland beyond it; and the National Park Authority boundary as finally designated in 2004. Drawing: Author.

Europe.⁷ There are said to be about 1000 ancient trees; 63 per cent of our 24,000 types of insects, 75 per cent of all dragonfly species are found here, and all six species of our native reptiles, including adders and sand lizards; for ground-nesting birds such as the rare Dartford warbler it provides essential habitat; and the mires are home to the aromatic bog myrtle, the bog orchid, and pale green sphagnum moss.⁸

⁷ Colin R. Tubbs, *The New Forest* (1986, sec. edn, 2001), p. 18.

⁸ Ian Gambles (ed.), *British forests: the Forestry Commission, 1919–2019* (2019), p. 243.



FIGURE 1. Common rights being exercised in the New Forest, early 2000s. Photo: Author.

The Forest is best understood as a large lowland common over which adjacent townships had commoning rights. In this respect it is similar to Dartmoor.⁹ The owner of the soil, in effect the manorial lord, was the crown, and since 1919 the crown's interest has been exercised by the Forestry Commission. The Deputy Surveyor was, both before and after 1919, the title given to the official in charge of forestry in the New Forest.¹⁰ As for extent, in 1870, local landowner G. E. Briscoe Eyre wrote that the 'total area [of the Crown lands] measures about 63,000 acres, of which 2,089 are the demesne lands of the Crown ['crown freeholds']; about 27,000 acres are more or less covered with wood, natural or planted; the remainder is moorland'. But the crown did not own all the land inside the traditional boundary (known as the 'perambulation'): some manors, such as Beaulieu and Minstead, had been alienated and were in private ownership. These lands extended to about 28,000 acres, some of which was woodland, and although they included most of the land suitable for agriculture within the perambulation, increasingly they offered opportunities for residential building. The crown, like all manorial lords, sought to enclose the common but for forestry rather than arable cultivation. This established a tension between the crown and the commoners from the late seventeenth century if not before.¹¹

⁹ Matthew Kelly, *Quartz and feldspar – Dartmoor: A British landscape in modern times* (2015).

¹⁰ Statute 13 and 14 Geo. V, c.21, Forestry (Transfer of Woods) Act, 1923.

¹¹ Richard Hoyle and Catherine Glover, 'The failure of land reform in the New Forest', paper given at Rural History 2019.

The holdings to which common rights are attached are situated on the fringes of the Forest, outside the perambulation, while the rights are exercised inside. In 1964 the perambulation, which had persisted more or less unchanged since 1217–18, was amended to include the adjacent commons and exclude areas of industrial development along the Solent.¹² For the most part the crown forbade residential and industrial development in the areas it controlled (except for the development of private houses, some of considerable size, in small enclaves of crown freehold). Residential development was only able to take place on the privately owned lands, such as Brockenhurst (where it was boosted by the presence of a railway station). Lyndhurst – the administrative centre of the Forest – was a royal manor whose copyholds were enfranchised from the 1830s, allowing the village to grow into a small town. As a landscape, though, the New Forest covers a wider area than the perambulation, outside which neither the Verderers nor the Forestry Commission have any jurisdiction or control.

The use of the Forest for both hunting and stock-keeping preserved two-thirds of the 90,000 acres in an unenclosed state into the nineteenth century. Initially trees and underwood were preserved as shelter and fodder for the deer, but silviculture was recognized as an important use of the Forest from the fifteenth century onwards, with small enclosures being made to protect the saplings. From this time, at least, the Forest has been a space contested by rival interests. Even in the medieval period when the crown leased out enclosures for silviculture, there was conflict between stock-keeping and timber conservation with both commoners and minor crown officials being presented to the courts for removing hedges, felling timber, clearing underwood and using the coppices as paddocks.¹³ In 1698, to respond to the demand for timber for the navy and for building materials, the crown sought to put timber production on a more systematic footing, and by statute assumed the power to make enclosures for the purpose of silviculture over a 20-year period. The legislation allowed for the enclosures to be thrown open once the trees were established and for the enclosure of further areas of equal size, the area enclosed at one time never to exceed 6000 acres.¹⁴ The Commoners petitioned against these ‘rolling powers’ and crown officials seemed loath to implement them. After the surrender of revenues from the Crown Estates to parliament (on the accession of George III), the government became more interested in the productivity of the Forest and in 1787 commissioned a survey. Further legislation followed and the full 6000 acres was enclosed by 1811.¹⁵

By the 1840s the Forest was thought to contain an excessive number of deer, about 3–4000. Most of the 100 or so bucks killed each year were given to neighbouring landowners in compensation for the damage caused to crops or to office-holders with little or no current connection to the Forest. One buck cost 8 to 10 times as much as a sheep to keep (taking into consideration the number of years they had to be kept) and there must also have been

¹² Statute, 1964 c.83, New Forest Act, 1964.

¹³ C. R. Tubbs, ‘The development of the smallholding and cottage stock-keeping economy of the New Forest’, *AgHR* 13 (1965), pp. 27–8.

¹⁴ Statute 9 and 10 Will. 3, c.36, An act for the increase and preservation of timber in the New Forest,

1698.

¹⁵ D. J. Stagg, ‘Silvicultural inclosure in the New Forest from 1780 to 1850’, *Proc. Hampshire Field Club* 46 (1990), p. 135; Hoyle and Glover, ‘Failure of land reform’.

the cost of transporting the carcasses. They were a temptation to deer-stealers.¹⁶ In addition they were a threat to young trees. The government therefore proposed to eliminate the deer and to ramp up timber production further.¹⁷ They persuaded the commoners to accept this with the argument that removing the deer would be to their mutual advantage, but, by way of *compensation* for giving up the right to keep the Forest for deer, the crown demanded the right to enclose a further 10,000 acres, bringing the total to 16,000. The so-called Deer Removal Act was passed in 1851 and it was to have profound ramifications, to which we will return in Section II.¹⁸

Into the contest between the crown (which wished to enclose) and the commoners (who wanted to maintain their rights to graze), a third element entered in the nineteenth century: the public seeking recreation, whether as residents or as day-trippers. The writings of William Gilpin (1724–1804), vicar of Boldre in the southern New Forest, had done much to stimulate aesthetic awareness of ‘wild’ landscapes. His book, *Remarks on forest scenery and other woodland views, relative chiefly to picturesque beauty, illustrated by the scenes of New Forest in Hampshire*, appeared in 1791.¹⁹ The opening of the Southampton and Dorchester Railway in 1847 made the Forest more accessible to those who would appreciate its beauty, and over the next 50 years it became fashionable to have a house there and come down at the weekend for riding, hunting or other country pursuits. Day excursions were also laid on by the railway company.²⁰

The result was that the Forest developed a multitude of stakeholders with overlapping – and frequently conflicting – interests. In 1960 it could be said that:

The New Forest ... is planned, ruled, maintained and managed by a host of organizations and individuals. Apart from the Forestry Commission ... we have the Court of Verderers, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, the planning authorities, the Ministry of Transport; parish, urban and district councils; bodies like the New Forest Pony Breeding and Cattle Society, the Commoners’ Defence Association, the National Farmers’ Union; Nature Conservancy, traditional hunting and sporting interests, those requiring the preservation of archaeological relics, the local fire services and the police.²¹

But even then this list was not exhaustive. To it must be added important players such as the New Forest Association, the National Trust (who acquired some of the adjacent commons), and private landowners such as Lord Montagu of Beaulieu. It may already be gathered that

¹⁶ Peter Roberts, *Saving the New Forest: New Forest Association – the first 150 years* (2017), p. 4; BPP, 1848, 538, Report from the Select Committee on the Woods, Forests, and Land Revenues of the Crown, pp. 89, 94, 100, 102.

¹⁷ Gerald Lascelles, *Thirty-five years in the New Forest* (1915).

¹⁸ Heywood Sumner, ‘The New Forest Deer Removal Act, 1851, and afterwards’, ed. G. F. Le Pard, *Hampshire Stud.* 54 (1999), p. 76.

¹⁹ W. Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery, and Other Woodland Views ...* (3 vols, 1791).

²⁰ C. E. M. Glover, ‘A country house or a house in the country? A study of country houses in the New Forest and their residents, c.1851 to c.1923’ (unpubl. MA dissertation, University of Winchester, 2012); *The Times*, 2 Aug. 1877.

²¹ ‘Agriculture: Amenity and production in the New Forest’, from A Correspondent, *The Times*, 26 Sept. 1960; the New Forest was legally transferred under the Forestry (Transfer of Woods) Act, 1923 to the Forestry Commission, which in turn was transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under the Forestry Act, 1945.

the story of why the New Forest missed out of becoming a national park in the 1950s and had to wait a further fifty years is a tangled one. As Arthur Cadman, Deputy Surveyor of the New Forest 1959–68 wrote, ‘All men who have anything to do with administration know that there are two sides to every question. But in the New Forest one is fortunate if there are less than six sides to any problem that arises.’²²

II

We pick up the story with the Deer Removal Act of 1851. Though the commoners had consented to it, over the succeeding decade they came to realize that they had been double-crossed. The Office of Woods deliberately chose to enclose the best pasture areas for the new timber plantations because its policy was, according to Lawrence Cumberbatch, Deputy Surveyor 1849–80:

that the Crown should, as soon as possible, exercise its right of enclosing the 16,000 acres, because, exclusive of other advantages, by so doing all the best pasture would be taken from the commoners and the value of their rights of pasture would then be materially diminished, which would be of importance to the Crown in the event of any such rights being commuted.²³

Ancient trees were being felled too: in 1851, ‘more than three hundred ancient yews were swept away, and a sea of Scotch fir now conceals even the configuration of the soil’.²⁴ Far from removing the restrictions imposed under the Forest Laws for the purpose of protecting the deer, the Office of Woods tightened up on them.²⁵ Now that the deer were not browsing the undergrowth and depositing their dung, the quality of the unenclosed pasture deteriorated. The crown proposed to lease sporting rights rather than issuing licences.²⁶ This last, together with the realization that the loss of common pasture would affect the rents that their tenants were able to pay, galvanized local landowners. There was a storm of letters to *The Times* and other papers, and a group of landowners formed the New Forest Association (NFA) in 1867.²⁷ Petitioning parliament only seemed to make matters worse, though, and in 1871 the Treasury brought forward a bill to disafforest the New Forest.²⁸ This was countered by Henry Fawcett, MP for Brighton, who moved a resolution:

²² New Forest Heritage Centre (hereafter, NFHC), CTL2019.1.20.25, W. A. Cadman, ‘The New Forest: The work of the Forestry Commission’ (unpubl. typescript, n.d.).

²³ BPP 1854, 377, Report from the Select Committee on Crown Forests, 1854, pp. 121–3, at p. 123: Letter from Cumberbatch to Thomas Kennedy, Commissioner of Woods etc, 31 Dec. 1853; p. 154 (q. 2032); p. 155 (qq. 2047–9).

²⁴ G. E. Briscoe Eyre, ‘The New Forest: a sketch’, *Fortnightly Rev.*, April 1870 (repr. in *Briscoe Eyre’s New Forest*, 2006), p. 13. This is also mentioned in Parliamentary Debates, Commons, Third ser. 207, c.330: ‘the

Poet Laureate [Alfred Tennyson] ... had gone down to the New Forest to search there for an ancient wood of yews, which had existed since the time of William the Conqueror; but all trace of them was gone. ... it had been sold to a merchant at Lyndhurst for £60’.

²⁵ Heywood Sumner, ‘Presidential Address: New Forest and old woods’, *Proc. Bournemouth Natural Science Soc.* 18 (1925–6), p. 52.

²⁶ 1866, 98, Crown Lands. A bill to amend Law relating to Woods, Forests and Land Revenues of Crown.

²⁷ Roberts, *Saving the New Forest*, p. 17.

²⁸ 1871, Bills and Acts, 81, A bill to disafforest the New Forest.



FIGURE 2. Invitation to the New Forest Exhibition, Summer 1875.

Source: NFRL, James O'Donald May's Collection.

That, in the opinion of this House, pending legislation on the New Forest, no felling of ornamental timber and no fresh inclosures should be permitted in the New Forest; and that no timber whatever should be cut, except for the purposes of thinning the young plantations, executing necessary repairs in the Forest, and satisfying the fuel rights of the Commoners.²⁹

Funds were raised for the New Forest's cause by holding an art exhibition in London (Figure 2). A Select Committee of the House of Commons was appointed in 1875, out of which emerged the New Forest Act of 1877, which banned the enclosure of what were now termed 'Ancient and Ornamental' woods (mostly thought to be ancient pasture-woodland³⁰), ended the crown's rolling powers of enclosure, and re-established the ancient Court of Verderers, changing its role from acting on behalf of the crown to protecting the interests of the commoners. Arguably the New Forest was the site of the first successful battle for landscape preservation in Britain,

²⁹ Parliamentary Debates, Commons, Third ser. 207, cc.328–343.

³⁰ Tubbs, *New Forest*, p. 162.

predating the (unsuccessful) protest against the Thirlmere reservoir by a few years.³¹ But the Office of Woods' policy of rigorously exploiting the crown lands of the New Forest at the expense of commoners' rights left a legacy of mistrust and antagonism that has continued to the present day.

III

'The best idea we ever had' began in America in 1865 when Frederick Law Olmsted set out the philosophic basis for national parks: the preservation of areas of unique natural beauty for the benefit of the public.³² In Britain, the silver lining to the cloud that hung over the Forest in the 1870s was perhaps that it brought the public at large to realize that:

the New Forest ... was ... to be considered as a national property; and that, inasmuch as the interests of the commoners who claimed the full and free enjoyment of their Common rights, and of the public who desired the preservation of the Forest as a National Park of unrivalled beauty, were identical and not antagonistic, such interests ought not to be deemed subservient to any present advantage which would accrue to the crown.³³

In 1871 an editorial in *The Times* pointed out that:

the [New Forest] Bill materially affects the interests of a third party, whose very existence is ignored in it ... The nation at large is the real owner of the New Forest ... What parliament has, above all, to consider is whether this unique National Park, so rich in scenery of a kind which is fast disappearing from the Old World, is not worth keeping up even, if need be, at some pecuniary sacrifice.³⁴

It was not only for recreation that the unenclosed Forest was valued: it was 'the only district in England available for the training and manoeuvring of troops in large masses'.³⁵ In 1882, John Wise referred to the New Forest as 'the park of the nation' and in 1891 Briscoe Eyre described it as 'a National Park of unique beauty ... and the home of a prosperous population of small freeholders and cottage farmers unrivalled elsewhere'.³⁶ In 1902, C. J. Cornish, the natural historian who founded *Country Life*, referred to it as the 'national forest', which, together with the River Thames, the 'national stream', ought to be 'controlled by trustees of such standing and position that their decision on matters of taste and expediency in managing and maintaining the[ir] natural amenities would be beyond question'.³⁷ In 1909, the Verderers,

³¹ Ian O. Brodie, *Why National Parks?* (2013), p. 14; Harriet Ritvo, *The dawn of green: Manchester, Thirlmere, and modern environmentalism* (2015).

³² Wallace Stegner, 'The Best Idea We Ever Had', *Wilderness* 46 (1983), p. 4; Frederick Law Olmsted, *Yosemite and the Mariposa Grove: A Preliminary Report, 1865* (repr. 2009).

³³ Henry T. J. Jenkinson, *The New Forest: the preservation of the old timber, the open commons and common rights in the New Forest, a matter of national interest* (1871), p. 4.

³⁴ *The Times*, 17 Apr. 1871.

³⁵ Jenkinson, *New Forest*, pp. 3–4.

³⁶ NFHC, CTL2016.1.82, Mortimer Collection, Draft letter by G. E. Briscoe Eyre, 16 Jan. 1891.

³⁷ J. R. Wise, *The New Forest: its history and scenery* (1862, artist's edition, 1882), Preface to the artist's edition, p. x; C. J. Cornish, *The naturalist on the Thames* (1902), pp. 254–5; id., *The New Forest* (1894); Andrew Goudie, 'Vaughan Cornish: Geographer', *Trans. Institute of British Geographers* 55 (1972) pp. 1–16.

engaged in a long-running dispute with the Office of Woods over use of the Forest for military manoeuvres, complained that the Office was ‘ignoring ... the policy of treating the New Forest as a National Park ... The [Office of Woods] indifference to the overgrowth of the open Forest by heath, gorse and rubbish, and more obviously by seedling Scotch fir ... is a standing menace to ... its enjoyment by the public.’³⁸

It was one thing to apply the term ‘national park’ to a cherished part of the landscape and quite another to envisage how the American idea of national parks like Yellowstone, established in 1872 could be realized in densely populated, intensively farmed Britain. In 1910 a feature article pointed out that, although the Swiss had recently created a national park in which ‘all the characteristic species of wild animals, birds, and plants which it is desired to safeguard’ could be preserved, ‘we cannot in this country set aside a single area for the preservation of all our rarest and most beautiful species’. But, the writer concluded, ‘there is no reason to prevent us extending to them equally full protection on a more widely distributed basis.’³⁹ Thus the idea of multiple nature reserves took hold.

In 1924 the recently established Forestry Commission took over the management of the Forest.⁴⁰ In January 1926 its chairman, Lord Lovat, made a speech outlining the policy for restocking the decaying old woods (towards which they had no obligation), which would involve keeping out grazing animals so that the woods would be able to regenerate naturally.⁴¹ An argument about how to treat the ‘old woods’ had been rumbling on since the 1880s when Auberon Herbert had started the New Forest Old Woods Protection Society, which ‘advocated [a policy of] “Leave Well alone”’. But the Commission’s policy, endorsed in 1925 by Heywood Sumner in his Presidential Address to the Bournemouth Natural Science Society, was that there was no justification for ‘leaving ill alone’: for woods with no protective undergrowth, it was necessary to ‘re-stock (by inclosure)’, so “that the ancient ornamental woods and trees shall be carefully preserved, and the character of the scenery shall be maintained”’.⁴²

The new policy was guaranteed to cause resentment locally, and in 1927, Barbara, Lady Stephen, who had a country house at Hale, drew the nation’s attention to:

a fine old wood of beech and oak, known as Burley Old ... The passer-by is now distressed to see that at one end of this wood a large space has been cleared and that the ground is strewn with the trunks of tall old trees. If rural England is to be saved, surely there is nothing more worth preserving than these splendid woods in the national forest. In answer to inquiries, I am told that this destruction is part of a scheme of profit-producing forestry.⁴³

The Commission pleaded that the said felling was just business as usual and that the mature trees they had felled would immediately be replaced.⁴⁴ But this particular wood was one that, 45 years previously, the Commissioner of Woods, Sir Henry Loch, had pledged to preserve

³⁸ CTL2016.1.91.2, Mortimer Collection, Typescript headed ‘New Forest’, n.d. but late 1909 or early 1910.

³⁹ *The Times*, 11 Apr. 1910.

⁴⁰ George Ryle, *Forest Service: the first forty-five years of the Forestry Commission of Great Britain* (1969), p. 152.

⁴¹ Sumner, ‘New Forest and old woods’, p. 52.

⁴² NFHC, CTL2016.1.48, Mortimer Collection, *The New Forest*, unpubl. booklet containing correspondence between Mr Gerard [sic] Lascelles and Mr Auberon Herbert (n.d. but c.1888); Sumner, ‘New Forest and old woods’, pp. 52–3, 58.

⁴³ *The Times*, 21 Feb. 1927.

⁴⁴ *The Times*, 22 Feb. 1927.

‘in its original state and character’, a letter reminded readers of *The Times*, adding, ‘does the nation wish its splendid national park to be administered on the lines laid down in 1882 or on the economic principles of 1927?’⁴⁵ In the face of this public relations disaster, in March 1927 the Commission invited the NFA, in consultation with the Verderers, to nominate six people to sit on a New Forest Advisory Committee. To reflect the national importance of the area, the Commons and Footpaths Preservation Society (CFPS) and the National Trust were also represented on the Committee.⁴⁶ Speaking on behalf of the Commission, Lord Lovat stated that ‘there were certain areas which he regarded as of national importance ... These areas should be treated from the point of view of the maintenance of their beauty ... They [the Commission] were prepared, within limits, to spend money in order to keep up the present standard of beauty.’⁴⁷ The Commission assured the New Forest Advisory Committee that the ‘public have free access to the open forest and all inclosures ... Numerous free permissions to camp are issued annually’. In addition hunting and shooting were allowed, there were ‘3 golf courses on the waste and cricket and football grounds’, and the Forest was still used for military training.⁴⁸ In this way, the Forestry Commission recognized, perhaps belatedly, that the New Forest was not simply a part of its estate, but a part of the national imagination.

The NFA had been more or less moribund since the turn of the century, but on 30 April 1927 it held a meeting in Brockenhurst attended by over 400 people. The CFPS lent its support to the Association, describing the New Forest as ‘the largest and most valuable common in the country and above all ... a national park of unique interest and beauty’.⁴⁹ The NFA pledged itself to ‘oppose by every legitimate means any policy or system of forestry dictated by commercial or economic consideration which is calculated to lead to the destruction or diminution of the natural beauty or amenities of the Forest’. At a meeting of the new Advisory Committee in May 1927, two resolutions were passed: one to submit to the Verderers, ‘deprecating the locking of enclosure gates and deploring the disfigurement caused by the opening of gravel pits for repairing highways’, and the other to the Commission, ‘expressing the opinion that the New Forest ought to be primarily regarded as a national park and reserve for flora and fauna’.⁵⁰ A memo dated June 1927 by two members of the Committee, Lord Montagu, President of the NFA, and Miss Penelope Eyre (sister of G. E. Briscoe Eyre, founder member of the NFA), stresses ‘how the present policy of the Forestry Commission, if persisted in, will ruin the beauty of the New Forest ... the replacement of hard wood trees by conifers is ... detrimental to the fauna and flora, and will eventually diminish, if not destroy, the charm of the New Forest’. They

⁴⁵ *The Times*, 1 Mar. 1927, letter signed by Frank Willan, Arthur Hugh Clough, Arthur W. E. Prothero and Lord Manners.

⁴⁶ Hampshire Record Office (hereafter, HRO), 49M98W/84/9, NFA, *Annual Report*, 1928, pp. 7–8. The Committee was still meeting in 1947 (Forestry Commission, *Report of the New Forest Committee* (1947), p. 75).

⁴⁷ *The Times*, 3 Mar. 1927. Anthony Pasmore, *Verderers of the New Forest: a history of the Forest, 1877–1977*

(1977), p. 153.

⁴⁸ NFHC, LYHNF2016.693, L. C. Southern, ‘New Forest Papers: The Forestry Commission’s Statement to the New Forest Advisory Committee’ (unpubl. typescript, c.1927), p. 6. Underlining as in original.

⁴⁹ HRO, 49M98W/84/9, NFA, *Annual Report*, 1928; Roberts, *Saving the New Forest*, p. 70; *The Times*, 2 May 1927.

⁵⁰ HRO, 49M98W/84/9, NFA, *Annual Report*, 1928, p. 4.

went on to say that ‘the oak plantations of William III ... are now threatened with destruction and replacement with firs, & with treatment by the scientific Forester’. In Broomy Inclosure, they wrote, ‘Among the trees cut are about 20 yews – magnificent old trees. This is the result of the present drastic policy of cutting out squares regardless of whatever ornamental, rare or old timber exists here.’⁵¹ They suggested that ‘the Forest could be taken over by the Office of Works ... [so] that beauty will not continue to be sacrificed to economic considerations, and that modern Forestry, scientific or otherwise, will be practiced [sic] elsewhere’.⁵² In *The Times*, Lord Montagu criticized the policies of the new management, and contrasted it with what he believed ‘the New Forest Association and ... the vast majority of the public, as well as the important national bodies who share our views’ wanted: ‘the New Forest to be treated primarily as a great national park, in which the preservation of beauty and the enjoyment of the public shall be the paramount, not the secondary, consideration’. The Commission, he said ‘has 300,000 acres to develop elsewhere. Let it alter its present policy or leave the New Forest to be administered by those really sympathetic to its national character’.⁵³

In response, Mr F. C. Osmaston asked ‘who will be willing to pay for this luxury?’⁵⁴ The answer thrown back at him was: ‘those same people who are at present made to pay for the uncontrolled vagaries of the commercial forester in these islands’, many of whom are prepared to contribute towards purchasing open spaces ‘for the enjoyment of the community’.⁵⁵ Indeed, the crown’s ownership of the Forest was held up by Penelope Eyre as ‘one of the great arguments for [its] preservation as a national park, which is generally ignored, namely, the considerable amount of capital which has to be annually expended in “saving”, that is to say, in purchasing beauty spots for public recreation’. She continued, ‘Surely, ... in the knowledge of the rapidity with which London spreads its tentacles over the countryside, to preserve the beautiful New Forest, which is only 80 miles from London, when not one penny of capital need be sunk, is the only sane policy to pursue’.⁵⁶ In the House of Lords, Montagu spoke eloquently about the need to make the New Forest a national park [under] the Office of Works: ‘I believe that when England knows [about the policy of felling the old trees] it will protest in far stronger terms than I have done to-day against what is a national calamity’.⁵⁷ In reply Lord Clinton, who had recently replaced Lord Lovat as chairman of the Forestry Commission, protested that ‘there are some 45,000 acres altogether in the Forest that are already ... a national park. The only care that we are allowed to take of that area of open woods is to take out from time to time sufficient dead wood to supply the Commoners with fuel’.⁵⁸

In January 1928, after another two meetings, the ‘commissioners accepted the recommendations for special treatment in a number of cases, involving altogether 1181 acres. In certain other cases they undertook to treat the woods in question with special regard for amenity and in other cases again they undertook that no felling should be done for ten years’.⁵⁹ Further

⁵¹ NFHC, LYHNF2016.692, New Forest Papers: Notes on enclosures and some recent cuttings by Lord Montagu and Miss Eyre (unpubl. typescript, c.1927).

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ *The Times*, 22 June 1927.

⁵⁴ *The Times*, 24 June 1927. He appears to have been the son of L. S. Osmaston, Deputy Surveyor, 1925–31.

⁵⁵ *The Times*, 6 July 1927.

⁵⁶ *The Times*, 8 July 1927.

⁵⁷ Parliamentary Debates, Lords, Fifth ser. 68, cols. 194, 196.

⁵⁸ Ibid., cols. 205–6.

⁵⁹ HRO, 49M98W/84/9, NFA, *Annual Report*, 1928, p. 11.

evidence that the Commission was aware of the importance of keeping the public on side, was shown by David W. Young, then Deputy Surveyor of the Forest of Dean, who wrote in 1928 that 'it would be a mistake to attempt to exclude the public from the Commission's forest areas', even though extra fire patrols were needed on bank holidays and local early-closing days, evidence of frequent recreational use by an eager public.⁶⁰ One wonders how long it took for the importance of amenity value to percolate down through the organization: in 1925, an article in the *Journal of the Forestry Commission* called 'Sixty years hence: a plea for a truer perspective' had made no mention of 'amenity' whatsoever.⁶¹

IV

The controversy over preserving the amenity of the New Forest brought the notion of national parks in Britain back into the public conversation. In 1925 Lord Bledisloe had put forward a national park scheme for the Forest of Dean, provoking the Forestry Commission into discussing the idea of forest parks.⁶² Five days after Labour was returned to power in June 1929, Bledisloe wrote again of the 'urgent need for the establishment of a National Park for Britain (not merely as a sanctuary for wild fauna and flora, but also as a healthy and peaceful summer resort for the brain-weary workers in our crowded towns)'. As a result a National Parks Committee was appointed, with Christopher Addison as chairman, which met for the first time on 10 October 1929.⁶³ But despite having 'unanimously and with great enthusiasm' passed a resolution at the meeting in April 1927 that 'the New Forest owing to its unique character and natural features ought to be maintained as a National Park and not developed as a commercial forest', and again in 1928 'that the only objects of its administration should be the preservation of its beauty and interest and the maintenance of all its amenities for the use and enjoyment of the nation', the NFA failed to give evidence to the Addison Committee, perhaps because of disagreements among the membership. In 1927 the NFA's Treasurer, Colonel Mansel-Jones, had felt it 'desirable that as a National Park, the ... sole aim should be the preservation of the amenities of the forest and the gradual elimination of those alien trees which had been introduced for purely commercial motives', and Athena Clough (daughter of Arthur Hugh Clough), thought that, because the 'Forestry Commissioners are not free, they are ... held in close check by the Treasury. The New Forest should be managed by a body that is free to follow a different policy'. But there were also members who were loyal to the Commission, such as Heywood Sumner, who claimed to have resigned from the Association because he was 'a humble supporter of the Forestry Commissioners as the Crown Authority in the N.F.'⁶⁴ There were other dissenting voices on the issue of how to preserve forests. Lord Montagu argued in

⁶⁰ Quoted in John Sheail, *An environmental history of twentieth-century Britain* (2002), p. 94.

⁶¹ A. D. Hopkinson, 'Sixty years hence: a plea for a truer perspective', *J. Forestry Commission* 4 (1925), pp. 27–9. Neither does 'amenity' appear in the index to the Commission's own centenary history: Gambles (ed.), *British forests*.

⁶² TNA, F 19/9, clipping from *Dean Forest Guardian*,

27 Nov. 1925.

⁶³ *The Times*, 10 June 1929; TNA, HLG 52/717; C. Addison, *Report of the National Park Committee* (Cmnd 3851, 1931) (hereafter, Addison Report).

⁶⁴ HRO, 49M98W/84/9, NFA, *Annual Report*, 1928; Roberts, *Saving the New Forest*, pp. 74, 75 and 78; HRO, 49M98W/B4/9, letter to Frank Warren from Heywood Sumner, 24 Oct. 1929.

a pamphlet that it was impossible to 'save the old woods', as it was natural for them to contain 'trees in all stages of growth and decay', and he suggested that natural regeneration could be achieved without human assistance: 'hardly, if ever, do you see ... saplings without nature's barbed wire defences close by, the bramble, the thorn, the furze bush or the holly, warding off the bite of animals', implying that enclosure was unnecessary.⁶⁵ H. H. Haines, retired from the Indian Forestry Service, stressed that it 'is important for Nature-lovers to take note that the recent trend ... is NOT CALCULATED TO PRESERVE [THE NEW FOREST] AS A NATURAL FOREST, but as a cattle and pony preserve, tending to the destruction of all its amenities as we view them'.⁶⁶

In 1930, Vaughan Cornish, a member of the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) included the New Forest in a list of 14 possible national parks.⁶⁷ It was also suggested as a possible national park by a number of witnesses to the Addison committee. Patrick Abercrombie supported its inclusion and the Lord Provost of Edinburgh cited it, together with the Black Forest, as 'illustrations of the ideal form of development'; the Central Committee on Camping Legislation suggested that 'the regulations made by the Forestry Commission governing camping in the New Forest might be taken as model which could be varied' to meet 'the requirements of solitary campers'; and the British Correlating Committee for the Protection of Nature suggested 'smaller enclosures such as those in the New Forest ... as sanctuaries for breeding and preservation ... in the case of both animals and plants'. But in a memorandum published in Addison's Report, the Forestry Commission expressed the view that the New Forest, together with the forests of Dean and Delamere, 'are in a true sense already national playgrounds, and any attempt to exploit them further in that direction would tend to defeat its own purpose besides creating difficulties ... where the commoners have statutory rights'.⁶⁸ Cornish, as chairman of the National Parks Committee of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, again advocated national park status for the New Forest in 1932.⁶⁹ In 1934, at the CPRE's national conference in Southampton, the chairman of the Forestry Commission, Sir Roy Robinson, claimed that 'the New Forest was the nearest thing in this country to a national park', and the following year, David Young, now Deputy Surveyor of the New Forest, called it 'the first in all but name of Britain's national parks. Its woods and plantations are a definite part of its amenities and have to be managed with due regard to that fact.' Forest Aesthetics, he added 'is a branch of the science or art of forestry which is of vital importance to state forestry in this country'.⁷⁰ The Addison Report fell victim to the economic crisis and was shelved,⁷¹ but it provided the impetus for the Joint Standing Conference on National Parks (SCNP) to be established in 1936.⁷²

⁶⁵ Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, *The New Forest and its old woods: a history of certain woods and the story of natural regeneration* (1926) (copy in HRO, 46M70.E12).

⁶⁶ NFHC, LYHNF2016.694, H. H. Haines, Letter dated 2 Dec. 1928, small capitals as in original.

⁶⁷ Vaughan Cornish, *National parks and the heritage of scenery* (1930), map facing p. 5.

⁶⁸ Addison Report, pp. 66, 67, 92, 105, 112.

⁶⁹ *The Times*, 11 Nov. 1932.

⁷⁰ *The Times*, 29 Oct. 1934; David W. Young, 'The

New Forest', *J. Soc. Foresters of Great Britain* 9 (1935), pp. 1–16.

⁷¹ Clare V. J. Griffiths, *Labour and the countryside: the politics of rural Britain, 1918–1939* (2007), p. 312. It has also been argued that the 'burdens of compensation on planning authorities' in the 1932 T&CP Act rendered it 'a dead letter' (Ann MacEwen and Malcolm MacEwen, *National Parks: conservation or cosmetics?* (1982), p. 7).

⁷² MacEwen and MacEwen, *National Parks*, p. 7.

In 1935, however, the Forestry Commission acknowledged the demand for outdoor recreation by establishing a committee to investigate 'how surplus and unplanted land in the Forests ... may be put to use of a public character'.⁷³ As a result, by the start of the Second World War it had established three National Forest Parks: in Argyll, the Forest of Dean and Snowdonia.⁷⁴ In 1942 the Commission, when asked whether the New Forest had been designated a National Forest Park, or afforded similar protection, answered that it 'has in effect been used as a national forest park for so many years that it would be unnecessary now to designate it as such'.⁷⁵ Later the same year, the National Forest Parks (Great Britain) Committee had the New Forest on a list of possible parks but decided to suppress the list.⁷⁶ It was still in the running as a post-war Forest Park in 1944: though it never actually became one, it was treated alongside the others as a Forest Park in all but name.⁷⁷

It may therefore be claimed that by 1939 the Forestry Commission had partially absorbed the agenda of the Addison Report and had implemented some of its recommendations. It was only as part of wartime 'post-war reconstruction planning' that national parks began to be taken seriously by other government departments. In 1942, following the publication of the Scott report on Rural Land Use, which was favourable to national parks and nature reserves, the government appointed John Dower to work on a 'Preliminary Report on National Parks', and in June 1943, he produced a first draft, in which he defined a national park as:

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, including particularly cross-country and field-path walking, are amply provided (c) wild life and places and buildings of scientific, historic or architectural interest are suitably protected, while (d) established farming use is effectively maintained.⁷⁸

In this draft Dower proposed twelve areas in 'Group A – Proposed national parks'. This list included the New Forest, which, together with the Forest of Dean and Kielder Forest, were 'proposed as National Parks of a special type to be established in consultation and collaboration with the Forestry Commission'. (Map 2) In August all three were still 'in', but they were to disappear from Group A before publication.⁷⁹ They were moved to Group C, Regional Reserves, 'areas likely to be suggested ... but in my view, not likely to be found suitable to be selected as, or reserved for [national parks]'. They were the two and a half special parks that would have needed the *cooperation* of the Commission.⁸⁰ In a covering letter with his revisions, Dower explained that he had overhauled his 'area recommendations with the effect (1) of making the National Park claim a bit more modest & (2) avoiding any treading on the

⁷³ TNA, F 1/6, Preliminary Draft of Post War Reconstruction Report, 1942, p. 1. In the 1920s large areas of 'high or peaty hill land' were considered unplanted: Ryle, *Forest Service*, p. 47.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁷⁵ TNA, F 18/592, Correspondence, Feb. 1942, with Arnold Whittick, architectural historian, who published two articles, 'National Forest Parks', and 'National

Parks', both in *Wood* 7 (1942), pp. 77–9 and 140–2.

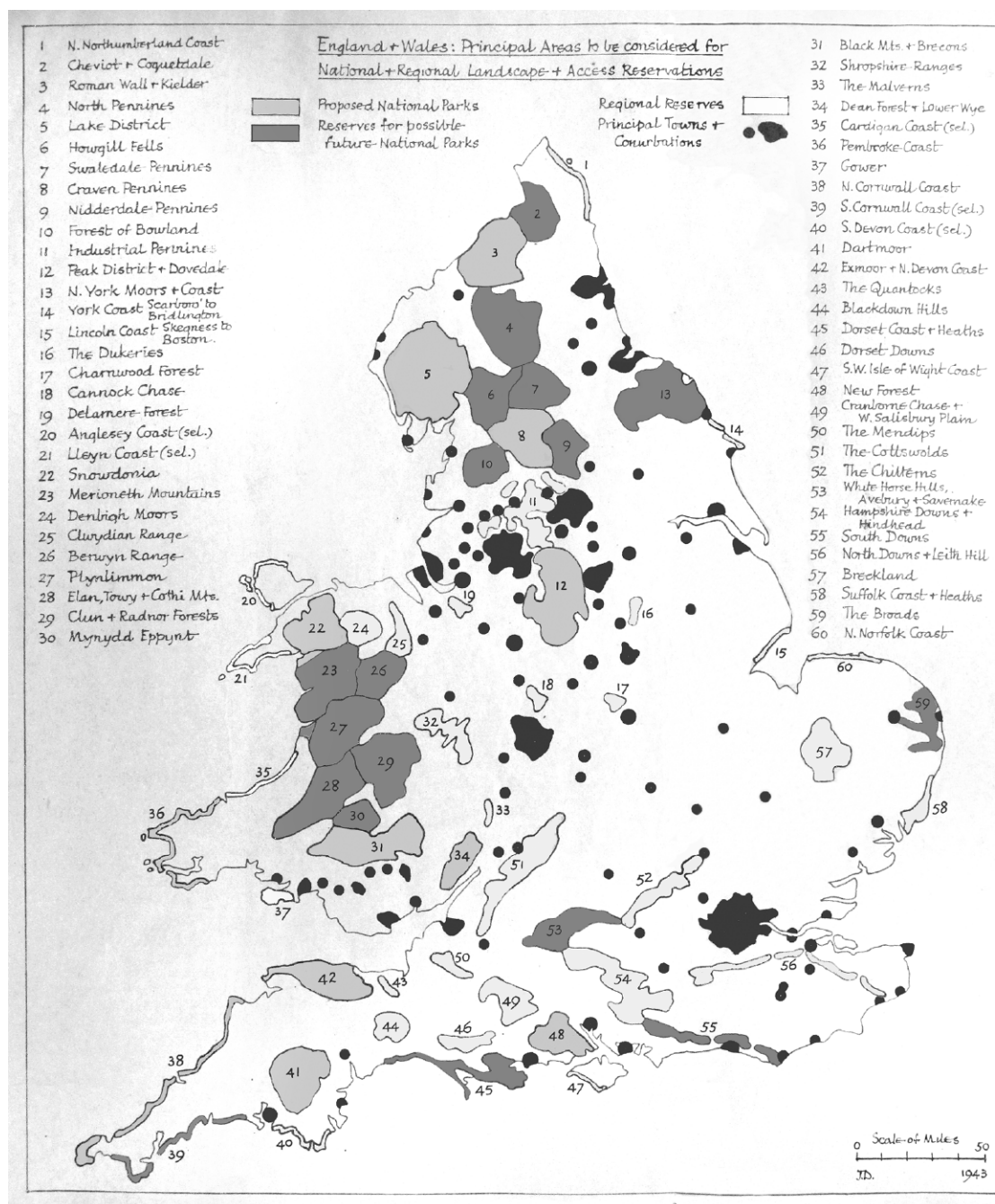
⁷⁶ TNA, F 18/592, Draft Report on National Forest Parks and Minutes of Meeting, 20 Oct. 1942.

⁷⁷ F 18/592, Memo from A.C. (E.&W.), 10 June 1944; Forestry Commission, *National Forest Parks* (1961).

⁷⁸ TNA, HLG 93/55, Paper NP/1, June 1943, p. 2.

⁷⁹ TNA, HLG 93/55, Marked-up NP/1, Nov. 1943, p. 4.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3. Author's italics.



MAP 2. England and Wales principal areas to be considered for national and regional landscape and access reservations.

Source: TNA, HLG 93/55 John Dower, Draft Preliminary Report on National Parks and Associated Matters, June 1943.

Commission's toes'.⁸¹ He also wrote that he 'should have included several southern or eastern areas in Groups A or B, if [he] had not been *reasonably sure that they are likely to be dealt with satisfactorily by other agencies*, notably the South Downs (by the county and local authorities) and the New Forest (by the Forestry Commission)'.⁸² But he also made the point that the 'Forestry Commission, both as potentially rival claimant to National Parks Commission over wide areas of upland country, and as valuable supporter of National Park objectives in its "National Forest Parks", is a special case'. In a second draft of his report he had stated that "a mutually beneficial relation can be established and any rival claims satisfactorily solved, if there is sufficiently early, frank and close consultation" between F.C. and N.P.C., assisted by M.T.C.P. and M.A.F. This is an important and urgent, but not necessarily "problem", issue.⁸³

The Dower Report was eventually published in May 1945, but without the status of a Departmental report, as the Government did not want to be bound by its proposals.⁸⁴ Later that year, however, under the Labour government, Lewis Silkin, the Minister for Town and Country Planning appointed a new National Parks Committee under the chairmanship of Arthur Hobhouse, with John Dower as a member. In August 1945, at its first meeting, there was a discussion of possible areas that should be considered as additions to the list of possible national parks, and the opinion was expressed that:

the Forestry Commission with the advice of a local Planning Committee were doing their best to give recreation in the New Forest suitable importance and not merely to make it subservient to economic forestry. It was agreed that *it was in good hands, and that* its consideration as a National Park should be deferred until a later stage; in any case the Forestry Commission would probably raise strong opposition to its investigation by the Committee.⁸⁵

At the following meeting, Dower offered the following *corrigendum*: 'delete "it was in good hands and that"', and he added in parentheses that he did 'not think the Committee was – or should be – *at all satisfied with the state of affairs in the New Forest*, although [he] agreed that any intervention would probably be unwise and useless'.⁸⁶

So what was 'the state of affairs in the New Forest'? Efforts to give protection to the area had not been completely absent. In 1938–39 an informal committee of local planning officers had held a series of meetings, producing a report entitled the 'Protection of the New Forest', which was revised in 1945.⁸⁷ It was acknowledged that the problem was *not* protection of an open space – that had been taken care of in 1877 – but that, of various threats to the landscape and ecology of the Forest, the most serious was 'People': population growth having been 'during the

⁸¹ TNA, HLG 93/55, Covering letter, 21 Oct. 1943.

⁸² TNA, HLG 93/55, Marked-up NP/1, Nov. 1943, p. 4. Author's italics.

⁸³ TNA, HLG 93/55, Paper NP/2, Aug. 1943, p. 8. Underlining as in original. In the final report, the section on the Forestry Commission is much expanded and these words do not appear.

⁸⁴ Gordon E. Cherry, *Environmental planning, 1939–1969*, II, *National Parks and recreation in the countryside* (1975), p. 48.

⁸⁵ TNA, HLG 93/3, National Parks Committee, Minutes of 1st Meeting, 1 Aug. 1945. Author's italics.

⁸⁶ TNA, HLG 93/38, John Dower, Proposed Corrigenda to Minutes of 1st Meeting of the National Parks Preparatory Committee (1 Aug. 1945), 30 Sept. 1945. Author's italics.

⁸⁷ TNA, MAF 141/171, Committee of Planning Officers, 'The Protection of the New Forest: Report of the Planning Officers, 1938–1939'; *The Times*, 13 May 1939.

past two or three decades three or four times the average in the rest of the country'. Therefore both reports were very much concerned with limiting the development of residential housing within the Forest and controlling industrial development to the east, in the area between the Forest and Southampton Water. They were also concerned about 'overhead wires and petrol stations ... [and] advertisements'. Mineral extraction was also a threat: 'mainly gravel, sand, and brick-earth ... china-clay'. They recommended 'the planting of inclosures where semi-urban areas abut on to the Forest'.⁸⁸ Lastly there were roads: 'the new road [across the Forest] to Bournemouth ... must be made safer, speedier and more attractive'. The 1945 report ends:

We honestly believe that, provided the difficult question of compensation can be surmounted, none of our recommendations will harm anyone unless, possibly, the speculator. Even with speculative building, per se, we have no quarrel. It can perform a useful function but in rural areas, in its most ruthless and wholesale form, generally known as 'Estate' development, can be very mischievous. There is a real danger that this kind of development—whether in the Forest itself or in the surround which we have included in our survey—may destroy the Forest as we know it almost in a night and we may wake up to find it gone—

England has lost much in this absent-minded way. She shall not lose the New Forest for the want of warning. After all, the fact that a man has an estate on which he wishes to realise profit, is not a relevant reason for covering the countryside with houses.⁸⁹

The Forest, as an open space, was protected by the New Forest Act 1877, and the local planning authorities were – at least on paper – keen to protect it from population pressure and urban development. But was that enough? In April 1946 the Baker Committee was appointed by the Forestry Commissioners to continue the work of the Planning Officers and consider the problem of 'adjusting the Forest to modern requirements'.⁹⁰ It sat at the same time as the Hobhouse Committee and both reported in 1947, but whether or not it was a response to the Dower Report and a parallel committee to Hobhouse is not clear. Peter Roberts, in his history of the NFA, has suggested that the Commission had instigated the Baker Committee 'to forestall any risk of the New Forest being thought suitable for a national park' by the Hobhouse Committee.⁹¹ The 'amenities of the Open Forest ... represent the various interests of the general public', the Baker Report said, and:

nothing should be permitted which would change the wild heaths into a Park or would lead to the disappearance of any plant or creature whose natural habitat is in the Forest. ... Everyone wishes to preserve the Forest as he knows it but usually with insistence on some particular interest. We find nothing irreconcilable in the competing claims made on behalf of nature lovers and holiday-makers. We do however put in the first place the preservation of the Open Forest as a place of natural beauty and the maintenance of the habitats which it provides for an exceptional fauna and certain rare plants. Having made all the provision

⁸⁸ Noted by Pasmore as being 'taken up and developed for political and financial purposes ... to take shape eventually in the controversial "Verderers' Inclosures"' (Pasmore, *Verderers*, p. 161).

⁸⁹ New Forest Advisory Planning Committee,

Protection of the New Forest: Planning Officers' Report - Technical Committee's Revision (1945).

⁹⁰ Harold Baker, *Report of the New Forest Committee* (1947) (hereafter Baker Report), p. 1.

⁹¹ Roberts, *Saving the New Forest*, p. 133.

possible for this we shall then come to consider how far the requirements of those who wish to use it as a playing ground can be met.⁹²

The report recommended that the whole Forest be made a nature reserve ‘under the strictest By-laws’ – game excepted, as hunting and shooting were still practised in the Forest albeit under licence.⁹³ For visitors, ‘road-houses’, permanent holiday camps and bathing facilities were rejected in favour of campsites because:

The intention [of those who suggested road-houses etc] was to provide for all classes of holiday-makers in the Forest, and that we strongly deprecate. There are, fortunately, many classes for whom the Forest can provide enjoyment, but the kind here contemplated is one which would destroy peace and quiet and be injurious to the wild life of the Forest.⁹⁴

This is an example of what David Matless has called ‘an ecology of pleasures’ and ‘the assumption of unbridgeable cultures’, in which different pleasures are allocated to different habitats, and some pleasures – and, by implication, the people who enjoy them – are superior to others.⁹⁵ The report did not confine itself to the perambulation but carried forward the Planning Officers’ approach to safeguarding the area to the east, expressing dismay at the recent proposal for a five-fold increase in quantity of oil to be processed at the Fawley refinery, and a corresponding expansion of the works. Extended wharfage and land reclamation were also felt to be threats to the Forest. As a result of the Baker Report, and despite petitions against it, the New Forest Act 1949 came into law. The number of verderers was increased and one of them would be nominated by ‘a body “specially concerned with the preservation of the amenity of the countryside”’.⁹⁶ But contrary to Baker’s recommendation, the Court of Verderers ‘was not given responsibility for nature conservation within the Forest’.⁹⁷ For the Verderers, the 1949 Act included a Faustian pact. By 1939 the Court’s financial position had been perilous: it had £37 in the bank. But the War had come to the rescue, with both the Air Ministry and the War Office having to pay compensation for their use of the Forest for bombing ranges, airfields and other military purposes. All of these emergency uses overrode the New Forest Act 1877, but the Verderers had had no choice but to consent, tacitly, to them and receive compensation; their minutes from that time are ‘increasingly incomplete and difficult to interpret’ and so there is no record, either, of a meeting with the Commission where permission for further timber enclosures in return for cash payment as a means of financing the Court must have been discussed.⁹⁸

⁹² Baker Report, pp. 56–7.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 64–5. We will never know what the ‘road-house ... half-way between Cadnam and Ringwood on the Trunk Road’ might have been like, but David W. Guzke, in ‘Improved pubs and road houses: Rivals for public affection in interwar England’, *Brewery Hist.* 119 (2005), pp. 2–9, describes ‘the Thatched Barn [Herts.], a roadhouse of unmatched splendour offering “deluxe social and sporting facilities on the grand scale”. To woo adventurous motorists, the Barn offered a diverse range of unorthodox entertainment – gymnasium, shooting gallery, sports field, squash courts,

and games rooms ... Risqué, pioneering novel types of leisure activities and class specific, the roadhouse evoked slightly wicked leisure outings by the propertied classes which through drinking, dining and dancing defied the reality of the dismal 1930s’.

⁹⁵ David Matless, ‘Moral geographies of English landscape’, *Landscape Res.* 22 (1997), pp. 152–3.

⁹⁶ Initially the CPRE, later replaced by the Countryside Commission: Tubbs, *New Forest*, p. 92, quoting from and referring to New Forest Act, 1949.

⁹⁷ Pasmore, *Verderers*, p. 181.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 163–4

The Verderers' authority to grant timber, as well as agricultural, enclosures, was embodied in the 1949 Act. Berkeley Pigott, later a verderer himself, wrote that because it allowed 'a further 8,000 acres [to] be inclosed for forestry and agriculture', this New Forest Act would *not* 'safeguard a national heritage but further ... despoil it'.⁹⁹ Despite the Baker Report having devoted about one tenth of its pages to 'amenities', in 1954 Major Henry Jervoise of Herriard Park wrote to Katharine Kenyon of CPRE, that the 'Forestry Commission really have not much interest in amenities: in fact very little indeed ... The function of the Forestry Commission is to grow timber trees and to provide for present and future needs'.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the omission of the New Forest from the Hobhouse recommendations kept its protection off the national agenda for most of the 1950s.

V

In 1959 the Forestry Commission and the Nature Conservancy signed an agreement recognizing the Forest's 'important nature reserve status'.¹⁰¹ In the same year, the National Parks Commission (NPC) put forward a proposal to designate the New Forest and Solent Coast – including the north-west coast of the Isle of Wight – as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The proposal fitted well with the Development Plan for Hampshire, which included making the coastal area a green belt, and the county council informally agreed to it. When approached by the NPC, however, the Official Verderer, Colonel J. B. Scott, wrote, 'I very much doubt ... that the National Parks Commission have any jurisdiction over the New Forest. As you will know, this is Crown land, and therefore I think, stands on its own'. Scott was disabused of this view but once the Court had met he wrote back to say that AONB designation (even with the associated 75% grant towards 'certain beautifying exercises'), 'would be no practical benefit to the Forest, since the whole of [our] activities are directed towards the maintenance of [it] as a place of beauty'. Lord Radnor, Chairman of the Forestry Commission 'heartily concurred' with the Verderers. The implications of designating 'an area consisting largely of Crown Land' were queried on the grounds that 'the crown is not subject to normal planning control'.¹⁰² The attempt at creating an AONB was therefore dropped in 1962, even though the proposal had a wider scope than the area under the protection of the Verderers and the Forestry Commission. They could not prevent development in the surrounding fringes nor on the privately owned lands that accounted for one third of the area *within* the perambulation and where much housing was being developed, resulting in parts of the Forest becoming suburbanised. An opportunity to manage the larger landscape (Map 1) was therefore missed.

⁹⁹ *The Times*, 21 Feb. 1949.

¹⁰⁰ HRO, 38M74/2/8, copy of letter, written on 13 Aug. 1954 by Jervoise, sent by Kenyon to the Official Verderer, 15 Nov. 1968. Underlining as in original.

¹⁰¹ Tubbs, *New Forest*, pp. 97.

¹⁰² See the papers in TNA, COU 1/1446, Public local inquiry on June 24th 1959: Proposals for alterations or additions to the Development Plan for Hampshire. Statement on behalf of the National Parks Commission;

Letter from G. B. Wheatley, Clerk of the County Council to the National Parks Commission, 13 Mar. 1961; 'Hampshire Plan For Green Belt Along Whole Coast', cutting from *The Times*, 17 Nov. 1958; Letter from Col. J. B. Scott to J. R. B. Ferguson, 6 Nov. 1961; Letter from J. R. B. Ferguson to Col. J. B. Scott, 13 Nov. 1961; Letter from Col. J. B. Scott to J. R. B. Ferguson, 22 Jan. 1962; Letter from Lord Radnor to Lord Strang, 24 Jan. 1962; Memo from P. W. Cashell to HMM, 14 Feb. 1962.



FIGURE 3. Ocknell Plain in the 1960s. Driving, parking, and camping were allowed everywhere on the Open Forest (i.e. outside the Forestry Commission enclosures).

Source: Leaflet entitled *The New Forest: Can it Survive?* (n.d.) (copy in NFHC).

By the mid-1960s it was recognized that ‘more money, more leisure, and above all more cars’ – nine million of them in 1966, expected to rise to 26 million by 1980 – were posing a threat to national parks and other designated areas (Figures 3, 4, 5).¹⁰³ The New Forest Act 1964 widened the Deputy Surveyor’s scope for amenity management by enabling him to do more to maintain the Ancient and Ornamental Woods, to make enclosures for amenity purposes such as screening against the ‘growing mass of ugly industrial developments’ to the east, and to provide recreational campsites on the open forest.¹⁰⁴ The Act specified that they and the Verderers should ‘have regard to the desirability of conserving flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features of special interest’, putting limitations on commercial forestry.¹⁰⁵ The New Forest Act 1970 ensured that the Verderers would be consulted over any recreational facilities proposed by the Commission under the Countryside Act 1968, which further authorised it not only to provide such facilities on its land but also to ‘plant, care for and manage trees in the interests of amenity’.¹⁰⁶ But the New Forest was suffering: the ‘soil under trees [was] becoming so impacted by vehicular traffic that even mature specimens are dying’.¹⁰⁷ In 1966 the Buchanan Report on South Hampshire recommended ‘the setting up of a New Forest Authority [representing] all the major authorities and organisations who have a real interest in, and concern for, this unique area’, which would not be limited to the perambulation.¹⁰⁸ As with the AONB idea, the Verderers were affronted by Buchanan’s suggestion that the ‘question of recreation is so considerable that it could not be covered locally’ but they knew that, to look like a credible body, they had to respond, and they drew up a memorandum regarding ‘public

¹⁰³ *Leisure in the Countryside: England and Wales*, Cmnd 2928 (1966), pp. 4, 6.

¹⁰⁴ Ryle, *Forest Service*, p. 152.

¹⁰⁵ New Forest Act, 1964.

¹⁰⁶ Tubbs, *New Forest*, pp. 94–7; Countryside Act 1968.

¹⁰⁷ Colin Buchanan and Partners, *South Hampshire Study: Supplementary Volume 2* (1966), p. 130.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 148.



FIGURE 4. Damage done by vehicles on the Open Forest in the 1960s.

Source: as for Figure 3.

pressure'.¹⁰⁹ In it they stressed the interdependence of forestry, commoners and public, but pointed out that the latter was 'the only one of the three interests (except campers) who do not contribute materially to the maintenance of the Forest'. Moreover, commoners' grazings were being damaged by public pressure, putting commoning – which itself was essential to maintain the character of the landscape which the public came to enjoy – in peril.¹¹⁰ Close cooperation with the Forestry Commission was essential to keeping the Forest in its present condition, and a 'New Forest Authority' as recommended by the Buchanan Report 'would be neither in the interests of the New Forest nor the Nation'.¹¹¹ On the basis that only 11 per cent of visitors move away from their cars, the exclusion of vehicles from large areas was to be given top priority, complemented by the provision of car parks and picnic areas, 'as in Canada', speed restrictions, 'clearways' on some roads, organized campsites, lavatories, wildlife reservations and education, litter control, wardens, view points, and control of visitor numbers in certain areas and at peak periods ("New Forest Full" notices might have to be used); funded by a 'capitation grant'. They acknowledged the risk that the Forestry Commission might want to withdraw from the administration of the Forest altogether.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ HRO, 38M74/1/2, annotated clipping from *Lymington Times*, 18 Feb. 1967, 'Buchanan v. Verderers: Professor is still unrepentant'; Memorandum submitted by the Court of Verderers to the Minister of Land and Natural Resources: Public Pressure on the New Forest, 1967 (copy in NFHC, N.410).

¹¹⁰ Memorandum submitted by the Court of Verderers, pp. 3–4.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, pp. 5, 6.

¹¹² HRO, 38M74/1/11, Notes for the Memorandum, jointly made by the Deputy Surveyor and the Verderers' Clerk, 13 Oct. 1966.



FIGURE 5. Public pressure on the New Forest in the 1960s.

Source: as for Figure 3

Sir Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre (grandson of G. E. Briscoe Eyre), MP and elected verderer, thought that the Forest should be 'run on the same lines as the Canadian National Parks, where the charges made to the public were used for the benefit of the Forest'. Maldwin Drummond (a local landowner and elected verderer) wrote that 'the Verderers had insufficient knowledge to deal with the problems which might arise in the next 20 years' and that they should look at 'such things as the methods used in America for the control of the American National Parks'.¹¹³ In a newspaper article Drummond wrote:

the people who live [here] realise it is no longer good enough just to hope that time will pass them by, leaving one of the last havens of peace undisturbed ... It is as if the place has lost its heart and has died a death by overuse, undercare and, beyond anything, lack of foresight!¹¹⁴

The 'land of many uses' concept of US National Forests – where land could be used for more than one purpose, including livestock grazing, recreation and timber production – mentioned in a talk given in 1968 by the Hampshire County Land Agent, C. C. Bonsey, based on his visit to America, must have resonated with the Verderers. In their précis of the talk, they noted other ideas, including the value of interpretation in '[getting] the visitor on the side of the management' and of entrance fees in generating 'respect for the ... area' as well as controlling demand for 'over-used facilities'. They recognized that investment in 'attractive facilities in the right place acts

¹¹³ HRO, 38M74/2/3, Minutes of Verderers Court, 13 Nov. 1967.

Echo, 27 Apr. 1968, 'Changes In The New Forest – With More Visitors', 13 Nov. 1967.

¹¹⁴ HRO, 38M74/2/5, clipping from *Southern Evening*

as a magnet and will draw public use to these areas, relieving the pressure on other places'.¹¹⁵ Their interest in drawing upon the North American experience shows their commitment to finding solutions, but there was nothing the Verderers could do, as their funding came almost entirely from 'marking fees' paid by commoners: should the commoners be expected to fund measures to alleviate public pressure, even though they might in turn benefit? Or should the public fund the commoners, who did, after all, provide the ponies and cattle, the 'mowing machine' that maintained the lawns the public found so attractive? 'The only people who can take action in regard to the open forest are the Forestry Commission', wrote the Verderers' Clerk:

they are the people who will have access to whatever funds are available. On the other hand they cannot act without the agreement of the Verderers ... The County Council have virtually no standing so far as the open forest is concerned, but they are very much concerned with the villages, the fringe of the Forest and the relieving of pressure by appropriate action taken outside the perambulation.¹¹⁶

No New Forest Authority would appear, but in December 1966 a Joint Steering Committee – with members representing the Verderers, County Council, Forestry Commission, Nature Conservancy, and two rural district councils – was appointed, to achieve the objective articulated by Buchanan, that 'the uniqueness of the New Forest should be preserved, ... finding the balance between the conservation necessary to preserve this uniqueness ... and ... the exploitation for recreational purposes which such spaces in this country must shortly face'.¹¹⁷

But while concern about public pressure was building in the 1960s, another threat – this time from within – was coming to the boil. Early in 1970 there was another public outcry about the policies of the Forestry Commission towards the broadleaved woodlands when they began to 'thin' Rushpole Wood, and 'a duplicated extract' of the 1963 Working Plan was leaked.¹¹⁸ This exposed the Commission's policy of virtually eliminating broadleaved trees from the enclosures, and exploiting the unenclosed woods commercially. Anthony Pasmore, an elected verderer, described this as 'an unprecedented orgy of hardwood clearance and conifer planting which ... hit Burley Old [the wood at the centre of the 1927 controversy] particularly hard'.¹¹⁹ As a result of the furore, Jim Prior, Minister of Agriculture,¹²⁰ banned the felling of hardwoods and, as it had in 1927, the Commission set up a committee – this time named the New Forest Consultative Panel – which, according to Colin Tubbs, senior officer of the Nature Conservancy Council in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and leading eco-historian of the New Forest, was successful in killing off 'many potentially damaging ideas before germination'.¹²¹

¹¹⁵ HRO, 38M74/2/5, 'The part played by American parks in outdoor recreation', précis of talk given by County Land Agent to the Verderers of the New Forest, 25 Mar. 1968.

¹¹⁶ HRO, 38M74/2/6, Letter from Verderers' Clerk to Official Verderer, 3 July 1968.

¹¹⁷ Working Party of the Joint Steering Committee, 'Conservation of the New Forest: Draft', 1970 (copy in NFHC, N.503).

¹¹⁸ *The Times*, 20 Jan. 1970, 3 Mar. 1970, 12 Sept. 1970.

¹¹⁹ Anthony Pasmore, Monthly opinion column, 'New Forest Notes', *Lymington Times* (hereafter, Pasmore, 'Notes'), Dec. 1996; and see his photographs in Tubbs, *New Forest*, pp. 205–6.

¹²⁰ The Forestry Commission had been transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries under the Forestry Act, 1945.

¹²¹ *The Times*, 24 Nov. 1970; Tubbs, *New Forest*, pp. 102–3. The Consultative Panel still meets.

¹²² HRO, 38M74/4/1, Handwritten note, n.d.

In early 1971 Crosthwaite-Eyre suggested to his fellow verderers that 'commercial forestry should be abandoned. Because N[ew] F[orest] of insufficient size to cope with all interests'.¹²² The Minister of Agriculture's Mandate presented to the Verderers' Court in May did not go quite so far: 'the balance between commercial timber production and conservation and amenity needs to be considered afresh in the light of the current state of public opinion towards the conservation of amenity'.¹²³ The Forestry Commission accepted the challenge, but they placed the blame on 'the public who swarm into the Forest in their millions each year and who, while enjoying its amenities, threaten to turn it in to a cheerless memorial, a sombre reminder of man's capacity to destroy'.¹²⁴ They also recognized 'the importance of the Forest as a national heritage and laid down that its traditional character must be conserved'.¹²⁵ In the same year, the Joint Steering Committee, on which the Commission was represented, published its final recommendations. Having considered two strategies, 'concentration' and 'dispersal', they decided in favour of the latter because it would provide for the type of recreation which people had 'been used to enjoying ... but on a controlled footing' and required less financial investment. The result was the end of free access across the Forest to cars and campers: from 1976 car-free zones restricted the former while official campsites confined the latter.¹²⁶

Despite the focus on conserving the Forest itself, by the end of the 1970s 'large-scale housing estates of high density' had been authorised by the County Council 'in Lyndhurst, Brockenhurst and Sway, and Ashurst (bordering on the Forest)'.¹²⁷ In 1979 a Brockenhurst resident concerned about the South West Hampshire Structure Plan asked the Department of the Environment 'why, along with the Lake District, the Yorkshire Dales, etc., the New Forest Perambulation was not designated a "National Park", since its character seems to fit so exactly the description of areas qualifying for designation ... given in the ... Act of 1949'. By way of reply he was told about the attempt to designate the New Forest as an AONB, shelved, as we saw on p. 270, because of opposition by the Verderers and Forestry Commission. By now (1979), the official pointed out, a small area on the edge of the New Forest had been designated as part of the South Hampshire AONB.¹²⁸ There is no evidence in their reports that either Buchanan or the Joint Steering Committee ever considered a national park framework for the New Forest, neither do the Verderers appear to have thought that a national park could be the answer to their funding problem, possibly because over this period central government aid for existing national parks was diminishing.¹²⁹

¹²³ Minutes of Verderers Court, 20 May 1971; NFHC, CTL2019.1.20.27, 'The future management of the New Forest', 3 May 1971.

¹²⁴ Forestry Commission, *The New Forest: can it survive?* (leaflet, n.d., c.1970).

¹²⁵ NFHC, CTL2019.1.20.29, Forestry Commission, 'Conservation of the New Forest: Recommendations accepted', press release, 16 Oct. 1972.

¹²⁶ New Forest Joint Steering Group, *Conservation of the New Forest* (1970), p. 13; Tubbs, *New Forest*,

pp. 99–100; Forestry Commission, *New Forest Management Plan, 1972–1981: Inclosed and Open Forest* (rev. 1973); *The Times*, 6 July 1972.

¹²⁷ Tubbs, *New Forest*, p. 103.

¹²⁸ TNA, COU 1/1446, Letter from Ian Mackenzie to Dept of the Environment, 31 Dec. 1979; R. G. Woolmore, Landscape Adviser, to Mackenzie, 21 Feb. 19[80].

¹²⁹ John Blunden and Nigel Curry (eds), *A People's Charter? Forty years of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949* (1989), p. 104.

VI

Awareness of the need to conserve the wider landscape area was growing and in 1984, to safeguard against future adverse development, New Forest District Council identified the New Forest Heritage Area, and adopted special planning policies to protect it. Like the area proposed by the planning officers in 1938 and 1945, this included fringe areas outside the Forest as well as the non-crown lands within it and extended the definition of 'New Forest' into the Test Valley and even across the county boundary into Wiltshire. This move was welcomed by the NFA as it designated 'some 200 square miles of Forest and its countryside runback surrounding the perambulation as a protected green belt area in which the strictest conservation policies should apply'.¹³⁰ In 1986 the Countryside Commission's guidelines on landscape assessment 'make it quite clear that natural beauty is not simply about the visual qualities of the landscape such as form and colour, but that it is very much influenced by human associations and national sentiment'. This particularly applied to lowland landscapes whose characters owed more to differences in historical development than to topographical features.¹³¹ The national – indeed, international – importance of the New Forest landscape and its ecology was now acknowledged and it had become obvious to organizations both inside and outside the Forest that something needed to be done to afford it greater protection. In 1986 the Forestry Commission set up yet another body, the New Forest Review Group, whose most important finding was that commoning – essential to maintaining the landscape character – was on the decline, both because it was uneconomic and because of the high cost of property: 'it is the grazing of stock which is the one essential element sustaining the character of the Forest ... support for the existing commoning system is not only the cheapest way of doing that but also the most effective'.¹³² The Report, published in 1988 after a public consultation, recommended that the Heritage Area defined by New Forest District Council 'should be accorded statutory status comparable in planning terms with a National Park', with an advisory committee of the six local planning authorities rather than a single National Park Authority, which they considered 'inappropriate and over-bureaucratic'.¹³³ Defending the Review Group, its chairman, David Perry (Deputy Surveyor 1985–1992), said, 'National Park is a bit of a naughty word, and a concept which is a bit dated'.¹³⁴ But Peter Frost, then Director of the local branch of CPRE, felt that an opportunity to provide 'management aimed specifically at conservation, [with] resources and teeth', had been missed. The CPRE acknowledged that the legislation protecting the Forest was superior to National Parks legislation, because of the Verderers' unique power of veto over development, and suggested that the Verderers' veto be

¹³⁰ Roberts, *Saving the New Forest*, p. 130; NFA, *Annual Report, 1984*, p. 4 (copy in NFHC, N.281).

¹³¹ Land Use Consultants, *New Forest Heritage Area: Proposed boundary, draft report, June 1991*, p. 5 (copy in NFHC, N.228).

¹³² *Report of the New Forest Review Group* (1988), p. 13 (copy in NFHC, N.227).

¹³³ Tubbs, *New Forest*, p. 103; *The Times*, 21 Mar. 1990. *Report of the New Forest Review Group*.

¹³⁴ NFHC, CTL2019.1.21.12, Justin Strong, 'Forest groups angry at park call', clipping from unknown newspaper, 6 Nov. 1989; NFHC, CTL2019.1.21.11, clipping from *The Reporter* (Forest edn), 9 Nov. 1989.

¹³⁵ NFHC, CTL2019.1.21.27, clipping from unknown newspaper, n.d.; CTL.1.24.24, clipping from *New Forest Post*, 26 Jan. 1989; CTL2019.1.24.98, extract from CPRE New Forest Branch Resolution, 11 Sept. 1989.

extended to the whole Heritage Area.¹³⁵ The Ramblers Association, too, criticized the proposed committee as having ‘no powers, no staff and no finance worth speaking of’, and called for the Forest to be made a national park, which would ‘give the land European status, with European protection and funding’, to guard it against privatization as had happened in other parts of the country. The Ramblers suggested a national park administered by a planning board similar to that of the Peak District National Park, with 50 per cent of the members appointed by local authorities and 50 per cent by the Secretary of State for the Environment, to represent a range of interests. This would avoid the ‘fundamental mistake’ made in the 1950s with eight of the ten original Parks (including the Yorkshire Dales) where local authorities retained planning responsibilities, and Park committees were only advisory.¹³⁶ Colin Tubbs, on behalf of the Nature Conservancy Council, was worried that governance by an unelected authority would give less, not more, ecological protection and jeopardize the future of commoning.

When it came, in March 1990, the government’s response to the Review, a glossy publication entitled *The future for the New Forest*, was a disappointment. Stronger financial support for commoning was not forthcoming, the government merely promising to give ‘further consideration’ to this. It rejected the call for the Forest to be considered for nomination as a World Heritage Site.¹³⁷ Although it endorsed the establishment of a Heritage Area Committee, as the NFA’s president, Belinda Lady Montagu, wrote to *The Times*, ‘the minister was unable to accept what he acknowledged to be the Review Group’s most important single recommendation, that of obtaining a recognised national status for the New Forest heritage area. ... What remained scarcely merited publication’.¹³⁸ That the Minister for Agriculture ‘could not accept that all the land within the area could be described as being of the highest national and international importance’ was ‘completely unexpected’. This had never been claimed: the idea of the wider Heritage Area was that it was an ‘integral part of the Forest’ and that its inclusion would protect the Forest from development pressure.¹³⁹ The secretary of the Council for National Parks (CNP) described the government’s report as ‘very timid and unimaginative’, and Marion Shoard, in an article entitled ‘Now the call of the tame demands to be heard’, suggested that National Park designation was needed for not only the New Forest but also ‘the Hardy country of Dorset, the Chilterns, the Somerset Levels, East Anglia’s Breckland and the Lower Wye Valley with the Vale of Herefordshire’.¹⁴⁰ Lady Montagu pointed out that ‘[we] may well be apprehensive as to whether the New Forest has a future. The Forest faces the same pressures identified in a *Times* report over 50 years ago (May 13, 1939). These have since intensified but are apparently no nearer a solution’.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ NFHC, CTL2019.1.24.48, ‘The New Forest: the case for a national park’, based on a talk given by Alan Mattingly, Director of the Ramblers’ Association to the New Forest Consultative Panel, 13 July 1989; NFHC, CTL2019.1.24.54, ‘Twelve good reasons to designate the New Forest as Britain’s twelfth National Park’, 3 Nov. 1989; R. W. Hoyle, ‘Opposition to the creation of national parks: the case of the Yorkshire Dales’, below, pp. 283–314.

¹³⁷ Forestry Commission, *The future for the New Forest* (1990), pp. 15, 31. (The claim to World Heritage

status was ‘on the grounds of its unique ecology, landscape and recreational significance’: *Report of the New Forest Review Group*, p. 18.)

¹³⁸ *The Times*, 9 Apr. 1990.

¹³⁹ David Stagg in NFA, *Annual Report, 1989* [Mar. 1990] (copy in NFHC, N.281); Forestry Commission, *Future for the New Forest*, p. 7.

¹⁴⁰ *The Times*, 21 Mar., 28 Apr. 1990.

¹⁴¹ *The Times*, 9 Apr. 1990, referring to the article in *The Times* about ‘The Protection of the New Forest: Report of the Planning Officers, 1938–1939’: see p. 268.

The Heritage Area Committee was set up in June 1990, with the primary purpose of promoting and coordinating measures to ensure the conservation of a redefined Heritage Area, 'a revised boundary, to incorporate essential grazing land as well as the best of the landscape around the Forest's perambulation'. It soon changed its name to 'New Forest Committee'.¹⁴² David Stagg, NFA Council member, amenity verderer and historian of the New Forest, saw the Committee as 'the embryo of a Broads type authority' and the Heritage Area as 'a significant first step toward breaking the power and influence of the Commission. Never again will they be able to instigate their own "review", write and edit the report, doctor the recommendations, and write the response.'¹⁴³ The Ramblers' Association continued to lobby for National Park designation, as voluntary special interest groups were excluded from the New Forest Committee.¹⁴⁴ David Coleman, representing the Countryside Commission on the Committee, conceded that the New Forest satisfied the two criteria for national park status: it had 'natural beauty of outstanding national importance and afford[ed] nationally important, very unusual (particularly in the lowlands of Britain) opportunities for outdoor recreation'. But Coleman felt that the Committee did not have the 'purpose, powers and resources' to play the role of "trenchant defender" that was needed to protect the Forest against 'outside, national level or regional level pressures', seeing its role as mediator between conflicting local interests. He acknowledged that the Forestry Commission 'since the 1970s with the conservation review ... has of course done an enormous amount to provide enjoyment and to manage enjoyment of the Forest'. But, he added, 'as a matter of policy, that can be changed by Ministers'. He also identified the issue of lack of national funding for the Verderers 'in the present framework'.¹⁴⁵

Meanwhile, on the fortieth anniversary of the national parks legislation, the Countryside Commission established a National Parks Review Panel, under the chairmanship of Professor Ron Edwards.¹⁴⁶ Although the establishment of new parks was not in its remit, those who opposed National Park designation felt that redefining the Heritage Area would keep the Panel off the New Forest's back. Ted Johnson, Chief Planning Officer of New Forest District Council and member of the Review Group wrote, 'what [we had] argued strongly against was the imposition of a new administrative structure. Like Dower we were satisfied that the Forest is in good hands'.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, in their manifesto for the April 1992 general election, the Conservative Party promised that National Park authorities would become independent boards and the 'New Forest will be given a statutory status which will give it as great a level of protection as any National Park'.¹⁴⁸ After being returned to power, later in the year the Conservative government accepted Edwards's recommendation to give statutory recognition

¹⁴² Land Use Consultants, *New Forest Heritage Area*, p. 1.

¹⁴³ NFHC, CTL2019.1.24.99, Letter from David Stagg to Fiona Reynolds, CPRE, 18 Apr. 1990.

¹⁴⁴ 'The New Forest: an agenda for the 1990s'. A response by the Ramblers' Association to the Forestry Commission's report, *The Future for the New Forest*, July 1990 (copy in NFHC, N.284), p. 4.

¹⁴⁵ NFHC, CTL2019.1.21.19, David Coleman, 'Should the New Forest be a National Park?', paper given at a

seminar at Lyndhurst Park Hotel, 26 Nov. 1990.

¹⁴⁶ NFHC, CTL2019.1.24.60, Countryside Commission press release, 'Are National Parks fit to face the future?', 13 Dec. 1989.

¹⁴⁷ NFA, *Annual Report, 1989* [Mar. 1990] (copy in NFHC, N.281). As we saw on p. 267, Dower himself had had his doubts about this.

¹⁴⁸ 1992 Conservative Party General Election Manifesto [www.conservativemanifesto.com/1992/1992-conservative-manifesto.shtml]

to a ‘body ... broadly based on the New Forest committee’. The committee would have no executive functions, but like other national parks, 75 per cent of its funding would come from the Department of the Environment, and some of this would be used to put ‘the funding of the Verderers’ activities on a firmer footing’. It was also understood that ‘[o]ne of the principal uses for the money [would] probably be help for the 250 commoners’. With the exception of a section of the Avon Valley south of Fordingbridge, the revised boundary took in more land than the original 1988 boundary. A logo was unveiled. Publicity leaflets proclaimed that legislation was proposed that would make the ‘New Forest an Area of National Significance, providing the same protection as a National Park but with special administrative arrangements tailored to the local situation’.¹⁴⁹ This was a complete U-turn: it was not to be the last.

The New Forest was to be a ‘tailor-made Park *like* that of the Norfolk Broads’, whose Broads Authority had received statutory recognition in 1988. The New Forest Association was keen to point out the difference between the two areas:

[the Forest] has miraculously survived for nine centuries with its Crown lands protected over at least the last century or so by special legislation in the form of the various New Forest Acts, whereas a high percentage of the Broads area is in private ownership and the real *raison d’être* for its actual existence is for recreation and tourist activities.¹⁵⁰

CPRE was one of the organisations that had recommended national park status for the New Forest to Edwards. They welcomed the government’s proposals, but were disappointed by the limited powers and responsibilities proposed.¹⁵¹ Others were worried that ‘statutory recognition’ would make the Committee too powerful for their liking. Councillor Ann Drake of New Forest District Council found herself defending the Committee, which ‘had [previously] been accused of being toothless, “but now we’re accused of being power hungry”’.¹⁵² In November 1992, the Commoners’ Defence Association voted by 187 to 68 in favour of a motion tabled by Anthony Pasmore to oppose statutory powers for the Committee.¹⁵³ The composition of the new Committee was a concern: double the number of local authority appointees, plus new ministerial appointees, but the Verderers’ representation halved. The commoners felt unrepresented, even though ‘acknowledged by all parties as crucial to the forest’s survival’.¹⁵⁴ David Stagg disagreed: in an open letter to the *New Forest Post* he pointed out that ‘now government has accepted the part played by commoning in preserving the Forest’. Stagg was concerned that, far from being ‘adequately protected and safe in the hands of the Verderers and the Forestry Commission’, the Forest’s traditional character was threatened by development pressure on the areas *outside* the lands over which they had control. He argued that statutory

¹⁴⁹ Dept of the Environment, *The New Forest: the government’s proposals – a consultation paper* (Sept. 1992) (copy in NFHC, N.274); Michael McCarthy in *The Times*, 20 Jan. 1992; Countryside Commission, *National Parks in England and Wales* (rev. edn, 1992); NFHC, CTL2019.1.21.71, clipping from *Lymington Times*, 3 Oct. 1992; NFHC, CTL2019.1.21.80, clipping from *New Forest Post*, 14 May 1992.

¹⁵⁰ NFA, *Annual Report, 1991* [Mar. 1992] (copy in

NFHC, N.281), pp. 12–13.

¹⁵¹ ‘The future of the New Forest’: CPRE’s response to the Government’s consultation paper, Dec. 1992 (copy in NFHC, N.282), p. 3.

¹⁵² NFHC, CTL2019.1.21.73, clipping from *Lymington Times*, 12 Dec. 1992.

¹⁵³ NFHC, CTL2019.1.21.14, clipping from *New Forest Post*, 26 Nov. 1992.

¹⁵⁴ Pasmore, ‘Notes’, Oct. 1992.

recognition for the Heritage Area was essential to protect the Forest against development and especially to preserve the backup grazing land necessary to support commoning. Moreover, he wrote, statutory recognition for the Committee was necessary to allow it to 'prevent the type of conflict so frequent in the past when organisations have been forced to compromise between a balance of interests'. He accused the other side of making 'empty, misleading and scaremongering prophecies' and suggested that lessons could be learnt from history:

Some 40 years ago the Forest faced the same decision, whether it was better to rely upon its own protection or to accept national recognition. It was decided ... that the Forest was sufficiently protected by the powers of the verderers and the Forestry Commission. [But] in 1964, when it became necessary to fence the Forest ... national funding was not available and [it] was done on a shoe-string and [many] commons ... were lost.¹⁵⁵

In January 1993 the Verderers, by a vote of seven to two¹⁵⁶, officially welcomed the principle of the Heritage Area and also the proposed Committee, 'as a liaison body between the various statutory authorities' on the understanding that its 'statutory powers [would] not in any way infringe upon the responsibilities and duties of the existing statutory bodies'.¹⁵⁷ Pasmore favoured a doughnut-shaped park, in which the Committee would only have authority *outside* the area the Verderers themselves controlled.¹⁵⁸ Both the Commoners' Defence Association and the Pony and Cattle Breeding Society came out against statutory recognition for the Committee, but the New Forest Association, because it reflected a wider range of interests, found it difficult to come to a consensus. In March 1993, its Council unanimously disagreed with the proposed new composition of the Committee; they were split, however, on whether it should have statutory recognition, but by a narrow majority finally agreed to support it. At the subsequent AGM, Lord Manners, the recently retired Official Verderer, was one of those who proposed a motion that overturned this decision.¹⁵⁹ As the meeting had been 'relatively poorly attended', the President, Lady Montagu, felt that she had to ballot the members by post: the result was '3 to 1 in favour ... "[of supporting] in principle the Government's Proposals for the New Forest"'. David Stagg wrote in the *Lymington Post* that the issue of statutory recognition for the Committee might be:

a ploy to divert attention from the main Government proposal to establish a New Forest Heritage Area, an area of approximately double the size of the present Forest, this to enjoy the strongest measure of planning protection. This is the real issue upon which the Forest societies have been prevented from expressing an opinion.¹⁶⁰

It appeared, though, that the tide had turned, and over the course of 1993–94 'the opinion of the Forest people seems to have increasingly hardened against the granting of statutory powers to the N. F. Committee', possibly, it was thought, because of uncertainty caused by the impending

¹⁵⁵ NFHC, CTL2019.1.21.13, clipping from *New Forest Post*, 26 Nov. 1992.

¹⁵⁶ NFHC, CTL2019.1.21.72, clipping from *Lymington Times*, 19 June 1993; Colin Tubbs, 'The New Forest: one step backwards', *ECOS* 15(3/4) (1994), p. 4, has '9:1'.

¹⁵⁷ NFA, *Annual Report*, 1992 [Mar. 1993] (copy in

NFHC, N.281), p. 3.

¹⁵⁸ Pasmore, 'Notes', Jan. 1993.

¹⁵⁹ Pasmore, 'Notes', June 1993.

¹⁶⁰ NFHC, CTL2019.1.21.72, clipping from *Lymington Times*, 19 June 1993.

reorganization of local government.¹⁶¹ A more sinister cause was suggested by Colin Tubbs: the Forestry Commission and the Verderers had become ‘increasingly nervous and unenthusiastic about the prospect of [the Committee] evolving into a statutory authority with an overview of their management of the crown lands’; the local MP, Patrick McNair-Wilson, ‘gripped by a similar condition’, recruited the local branch of the Conservative Association to his cause; as the Early Day Motion proposed by John Denham, Labour MP for Southampton Itchen, on 19 April 1994 put it: of ‘223 letters of objection received since September 1992, 198 were submitted since 1 January 1994; and that, of these, 181 were pro-forma objections recommending an enhanced role for the verderers ... distributed to members of the ... Conservative Association’.¹⁶² Statutory and voluntary conservation bodies, as well as the New Forest Association and CPRE kept up pressure on government throughout this period, with ‘unassailable’ arguments but these were outweighed by ‘erroneous statements about the extent to which local people did not wish to have a new bureaucracy imposed upon them’, questions about the cost of the Committee, and a ‘smear campaign’ belittling its work to date.¹⁶³ McNair-Wilson argued that the proposed boundary left out ‘some highly vulnerable areas, i.e. those blighted by gravel extraction [in the Avon Valley]’ and made the ‘surprise’ suggestion of replacing it with the boundary of New Forest District Council. This would have been unlikely to achieve parliamentary recognition and so would have failed to give additional protection to the Forest. Finally, on 14 July 1994, in answer to a written Parliamentary Question from McNair-Wilson, the Environment Minister Robert Atkins upheld the government’s decision to extend ‘the scope of development control as applies in national parks to [the Heritage Area]’, but dropped the idea of statutory recognition for either the Committee or the Heritage Area.¹⁶⁴ In a second U-turn the government had rejected its own consultation paper, and reneged on its own manifesto.¹⁶⁵ Without a nationally recognized coordinating body, and central government funding, yet again the New Forest had failed to become even a quasi-national park.

It was not until Labour came to power in 1997 that the plan to create a national park was revived. Clearly, Labour wanted to do that ‘green thing’ that the Conservatives had failed at. On 20 September 1999, John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister, announced the New Forest National Park as ‘a hundredth birthday present from Labour to the nation’. In the *Lymington Times*, Pasmore observed:

that he should be in a position to give this generous present in the first place necessarily implies that the previous owners must first of all be deprived of something. Those “owners” are, of course, the Forest community, its commoners, and all who value its tranquillity and traditional way of life, whether they live in Brockenhurst or Birmingham.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ NFA, *Annual Report, 1993* [Mar. 1994] (copy in NFHC, N.281), pp. 3, 11; nationally, there were fears that local government reorganization would ‘undermine the very existence’ of national parks as local councils effectively ran them: *The Times*, 4 Feb. 1993.

¹⁶² Tubbs, ‘One step backwards’, pp. 4–5.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6; NFHC, CTL2019.1.21.69, clipping from *Lymington Times* (letters by David Stagg, Peter

Frost, chairman, NFA, and Peter Roberts, chairman, New Forest District Branch of the CPRE), 19 Mar. 1994.

¹⁶⁴ NFHC, CTL2019.1.21.83, clipping from *Lymington Times*, 17 May 1994; NFHC, CTL2019.1.21.2, Dept of Environment Press Release: ‘Decision announced on New Forest proposals’, 14 July 1994.

¹⁶⁵ See p. 278.

¹⁶⁶ Pasmore, ‘Notes’, Nov. 1999.

In the Forest, many of the arguments from the start of the decade were rehearsed. Nevertheless, in June 2004, after a public enquiry to determine the boundary and administration arrangements, National Park designation was confirmed, not ‘tailor-made’, but following the pattern of the other national parks. The mainstream view prevailed: that park status would enhance the provision of tourist facilities and hence the local economy.

VII

The New Forest embodies a unique set of historical circumstances that have kept it unenclosed throughout the past millennium. It has always been a contested space where conflicting demands have been made on its resources. We have reviewed 150 years of its history, starting in 1851 with the Deer Removal Act, which led to the 1870s movement that ‘saved’ it from total enclosure as a timber plantation, and ending in 1999 with the decision to give it National Park status. We have seen that it was frequently referred to as ‘a national park’ and, ironically, as state-owned land, it was the best candidate to become *the* National Park as envisaged in the 1930s. But when national parks began to be taken seriously, in the mid-1940s, it quietly dropped out of the race. Was this simply because – in an era when access to open space was the primary concern – it was considered that the Forest as an open space was already ‘in good hands’? Or did its guardians, the Forestry Commission and the Verderers – both of whom had, quite legitimately, other priorities, forestry and commoning – present too many difficulties? No direct evidence for the latter has been found, but as we have seen (p. 267 above), John Dower was not convinced.

It was not just the statutory authorities in the Forest who held back from demanding national park status. The Ramblers were silent on the case for the New Forest in the 1930s and ‘40s, although in the 1980s they turned their attention to it. The NFA could have done more: as an organization representing all shades of opinion, it showed a lack of decision at crucial moments such as 1930 and 1994. Even the commoners were split, some believing that national park status would ensure that their way of life would continue,¹⁶⁷ while others argued that ‘grazing livestock and intensive recreation simply do not mix’.¹⁶⁸

What did the New Forest miss by not becoming a *de facto* national park in the 1950s? It missed out on a source of funding, which could have been used in the 1960s to mitigate public pressure on the Forest; some might argue that national park status would have attracted more visitors sooner, with the accompanying economic benefits. But more importantly, national park status could have applied to the whole landscape area (Map 1) and minimized the effects of development on the core Forest, on the practice of commoning, and on the unique ecology it supports. A more holistic approach to managing the unique ecosystem for the benefit of nature, commoning, forestry and recreation could have prevented some of the ecological disasters of the post-war decades. But this is easy to say with hindsight: other national parks have not been immune to potentially harmful developments. At some moments it might reasonably be said that the New Forest was a national park without the name; at other times it fell well short of this.

¹⁶⁷ NFHC, CTL2019.1.21.10, clipping from *The Guardian*, 22 Jan. 1992.

¹⁶⁸ Pasmore, ‘Notes’, Jan. 2002.