

FILEX 1 looks at the origins and history of National Parks in England and Wales, gives brief details of each National Park and explains why they are needed and how they are managed.

## What is a National Park?

There is no real wilderness left in Britain but National Parks are large areas which remain relatively wild, open and unspoilt, offering opportunities for outdoor recreation. There are mountains and moors, heathland and woodland, sometimes lakes, but also farmland, towns and villages. They each have distinctive characters, making them different from other places. This is one of their 'special qualities', which include beauty and tranquillity. National Parks are not like country or theme parks, set up simply for recreation, neither are they nature reserves. Ordinary people live and work in them. Lots of people visit National Parks to walk and enjoy the scenery and take part in outdoor activities. The public do not have to pay to enter but most of the land is privately owned and so people can't wander just where they wish or do what they like. Each National Park is managed by a National Park Authority which works to balance the needs of those who live in the National Park, the visitors and the landscape itself.



Exmoor ponies on North Hill  
Photograph - Steve Guscott

## Why do we need National Parks?

The movement towards National Parks in Britain began in the early 19th century, when artists and writers of the Romantic Movement recognised the inspirational value of beautiful landscapes. Conservation and amenity societies saw that much of our heritage was being lost as Britain became more built up. City dwellers clamoured for access to open countryside for fresh air, exercise and relief from the stress of everyday life.

Recent surveys show that land in England is being developed at the rate of 11,000 ha (27,160 acres) each year. Soon 20% of the country will be built up, creating great demands on the remaining countryside. From 1932 onwards laws have been passed to allow for national planning to reserve areas for farming, forestry and recreation, making sure that the most useful countryside is not completely built over or spoilt. National Parks came from a law passed in 1949. This followed reports published during the Second World War. Many of the people who had fought or suffered in the war felt that they deserved a better way of life and part of this was that they should have better access to beautiful countryside.

Over 10% of England and Wales has been given special protection as National Parks and more is being added but this does not mean that the rest of the countryside is unimportant.

## Where are the National Parks?

There are many places in the United Kingdom that are protected but some large areas of countryside have been chosen for special protection as the finest landscapes in these countries. Ten (seven in England and three in Wales) were made National Parks in the 1950s while the Broads were given similar protection in 1988. The New Forest was designated in 2004. The South Downs are following and National Parks have been created in Scotland. There is a great variety abroad, ranging from ones which are completely wild with nobody living in them and where all wildlife is protected to ones which are lived in and just protected for their cultural interest. Britain's National Parks come somewhere in the middle in terms of how strongly they are protected.



## How are the National Parks run?

Each National Park is managed by an Authority whose members are appointed from the County, District and Parish Councils that lie within the Park boundaries, and also by the Government.

Much of the money comes from the Government. The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs provides an annual grant, which is different for each National Park. The National Park Authority can also spend any money it raises for itself, through such things as sales at visitor centres, fees for planning applications and letting land. Extra money comes as grants for special projects with which the Authority is involved. It works with other organisations on these projects and they all contribute money.

Each National Park Authority appoints a National Park Officer who is in charge of staff made up of specialists in environmental, recreational and educational matters, professional planners, rangers and field staff as well as clerical staff to run the office and other supporting services. Many volunteers also help to maintain the National Parks and look after visitors. By law each Authority has to prepare a National Park Management Plan, showing its objectives and policies for the next five years and a Local Plan, which sets out the strategy for development within the National Park.

## What are the aims of National Park Authorities?

National Park Authorities are there to further the purposes of National Parks. These are:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Parks (Conservation)
- To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Parks by the public (Recreation)

They can do this in any way they like, and this often involves encouraging others to support National Park purposes. Whilst doing this they have certain duties to remember. One is seeking to foster the social and economic well-being of the communities living within the National Park.

## Challenges facing the National Parks

National Park Authorities have made great advances in balancing the demands on land in their care, but although they have powers to control development and special government funding to help them fulfil their aims there are still many problems which are beyond their control.

- Since the 1950s, 28% of Britain's internationally important moorland, much of it in National Parks, has been lost to agricultural improvement and forestry.
- Broad-leaved woodlands and hedgerows have also been lost, often through neglect.
- Military use prevents public access to large areas in some National Parks.
- Developments such as reservoirs, telecommunications masts, wind turbines, road improvements, mining, quarrying and tourist facilities can be unsightly.
- Visitors spend at least 118 million days each year in National Parks in England and Wales, bringing traffic congestion and erosion to popular beauty spots.
- Unemployment and high housing costs cause country people to move away and the regional culture and skills which helped create our distinctive landscapes are being lost.
- Following the Kyoto Protocol, the UN set targets to ensure that global warming is combated with reductions in greenhouse gases worldwide. Britain's target by 2020 is to achieve a 26% per cent reduction from its 1990 CO<sub>2</sub> emissions level. National Park Authorities are embracing this challenge through sustainable development and efficiency of operation.

## Key dates in the History of National Parks

- 1810 The Romantic poet, William Wordsworth, published his 'Guide to the Lakes'. He said the area was 'a sort of national property in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy'.
- 1872 The world's first National Park was created in Yellowstone, Wyoming, as a 'pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people'.



The world's first National Park was created in Yellowstone

- 1895 The National Trust was established. Other conservation organisations followed.
- 1931 The Addison Committee, set up as a result of growing public concern and pressure, supported the idea of National Parks in Britain, including Exmoor. A year later a law was passed allowing local authorities to set up parks and reserves but in the difficult economic climate of the 1930s they could not afford to do this.
- 1932 The Kinder Scout mass trespass focussed public attention on access to open country. Thousands of hikers went for a walk near Edale in the Peak District to highlight the issue. Five men were arrested in clashes with gamekeepers trying to keep them off private land.
- 1935 Voluntary organisations, lobbying for National Parks to be set up and campaigning for the right of access to the countryside, got together and formed a Standing Committee for National Parks to present their case to the government. This later became the Council for National Parks.
- 1942 During the war people hoped for a better Britain in the future. The Scott Report on rural land looked ahead to a thriving countryside and restated the case for National Parks.
- 1945 John Dower, civil servant and architect, set out what he thought National Parks in England and Wales should be like.....'extensive tracts of beautiful and wild countryside which would provide scope for open-air recreation'.
- 1947 These ideas were taken up by the Hobhouse Committee which proposed twelve National Parks, including Exmoor, each with its own administration, and a National Parks Commission to frame national policy.
- 1949 The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act made National Parks a reality and set up the National Parks Commission, succeeded by the Countryside Commission and the Countryside Agency. It also enabled the creation of National Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
- 1950s Ten National Parks were designated. Exmoor was confirmed as the eighth National Park in 1954.
- 1974 The Local Government Act gave new responsibilities and resources to National Park Authorities and Exmoor National Park Authority became a single organisation under Somerset County Council with its own staff and offices at Dulverton.
- 1981 The Wildlife and Countryside Act gave National Park Authorities new responsibilities and encouraged voluntary land management agreements with farmers.
- 1989 The Broads became, in effect, the eleventh National Park.
- 1991 The Edwards panel, set up by the Countryside Commission, published its report 'Fit for the Future' on the future of National Parks.
- 1995 The Environment Act made law of some of the recommendations of the Edwards Report, strengthening the purposes of National Parks and making their Authorities independent from April 1997.
- 2000 The Countryside and Rights of Way Act allowed for greater public access to open countryside and gave better protection to Sites of special Scientific Interest.
- 2002 Loch Lomond and the Trossachs became Scotland's first National Park.
- 2003 Cairngorms designated - Britain's largest National Park.
- 2004 Government gives go-ahead for New Forest to become a National Park.
- 2005 New Forest designated a National Park.
- 2007 Policy statement for the National Parks in Wales. First use of the terms 'Sustainable Development' and 'Climate Change'
- 2010 South Downs designated a National Park.

KEY DATES IN THE HISTORY OF EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK

Name	Confirmation year/order	Size in hectares/rank	Highest point in metres/rank	Population 2001 census/rank	Visitor days per year - estimate/rank	Address of National Park Authority
Peak District	1951 1st	143,833ha 7th largest of 15	Kinder Scout 637m 8th highest of 15	37,937 - 5th most densely populated of 15	12.4 million 4th most visited of 15	Aldern House, Baslow road, BAKEWELL, Derbyshire, DE45 1AE Tel: 01629 816200 e-mail: <a href="mailto:aldern@peakdistrict-npa.gov.uk">aldern@peakdistrict-npa.gov.uk</a> web: <a href="http://www.peakdistrict.org">www.peakdistrict.org</a>
Lake District	1951 2nd	229,198ha 2nd largest of 15	Scafell Pike 987m 4th highest of 15	41,831 - 8th most densely populated of 15	14 million 2nd most visited of 15	Murley Moss, Oxenholme road, KENDAL, Cumbria, LA9 7RL Tel: 01539 724555 e-mail: <a href="mailto:hq@lake-district.gov.uk">hq@lake-district.gov.uk</a> web: <a href="http://www.lake-district.gov.uk">www.lake-district.gov.uk</a>
Snowdonia	1951 3rd	214,159ha 3rd largest of 15	Snowdon 1085 3rd highest of 15	25,482 - 11th most densely populated of 15	6.6 million 7th most visited of 15	National Park Office, PENRHYNDEUDRAETH, Gwynedd, LL48 6LF Tel: 01766 770274 e-mail: <a href="mailto:parc@snowdonia-npa.gov.uk">parc@snowdonia-npa.gov.uk</a> web: <a href="http://www.Eryri-npa.co.uk">www.Eryri-npa.co.uk</a>
Dartmoor	1951 4th	95,338ha 11th largest of 15	High Willhays 621m 9th highest of 15	33,552 - 4th most densely populated of 15	3.8 million 11th most visited of 15	Parke, BOVEY TRACEY, Devon, TQ13 9JQ Tel: 01626 832093 e-mail: <a href="mailto:hq@dartmoor-npa.gov.uk">hq@dartmoor-npa.gov.uk</a> web: <a href="http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk">www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk</a>
Pembrokeshire Coast	1952 5th	58,431ha 13th largest of 15	Foel Cym Cerwyn 536m 10th highest of 15	22,542 - 3rd most densely populated of 15	4.6 million 9th most visited of 15	Llanyon Park, PEMBROKE DOCK, Pembrokeshire, SA72 6DY Tel: 0845 345 7275 e-mail: <a href="mailto:pcnp@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk">pcnp@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk</a> web: <a href="http://www.pembrokeshirecoast.org">www.pembrokeshirecoast.org</a>
North York Moors	1952 6th	143,603ha 8th largest of 15	Urra Moor 454m 12th highest of 15	23,939 - 9th most densely populated of 15	7.8 million 6th most visited of 15	The Old Vicarage, Bondgate, HELMSLEY, North Yorkshire, YO62 5BP Tel: 01439 770657 e-mail: <a href="mailto:info@northyorkmoors-npa.gov.uk">info@northyorkmoors-npa.gov.uk</a> web: <a href="http://www.northyorkmoors-npa.gov.uk">www.northyorkmoors-npa.gov.uk</a>
Yorkshire Dales	1954 7th	176,869ha 5th largest of 15	Whernside 736m 7th highest of 15	19,654 - 12th most densely populated of 15	8.3 million 5th most visited of 15	Yorebridge House, Bainbridge, LEYBURN, North Yorkshire, DL8 3BP Tel: 01969 650456 e-mail: <a href="mailto:info@yorkshiredales.org.uk">info@yorkshiredales.org.uk</a> web: <a href="http://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk">www.yorkshiredales.org.uk</a>
Exmoor	1954 8th	69,280ha 12th largest of 15	Dunkery Beacon 519m 11th highest of 15	10,873 - 10th most densely populated of 15	1.4 million least visited of 15	Exmoor House, DULVERTON, Somerset, TA22 9HL Tel: 01398 323665 e-mail: <a href="mailto:info@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk">info@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk</a> web: <a href="http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk">www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk</a>
Northumberland	1956 9th	104,947ha 10th largest of 15	The Cheviot 815m 6th highest of 15	1,936 - least densely populated of 15	1.4 million 13th most visited of 15	Eastburn, South Park, HEXHAM, Northumberland, NE46 1BS Tel: 01434 605555 e-mail: <a href="mailto:admin@nnpa.org.uk">admin@nnpa.org.uk</a> web: <a href="http://www.northumberland-national-park.org.uk">www.northumberland-national-park.org.uk</a>
Brecon Beacons	1957 10th	135,144ha 9th largest of 15	Pen y Fan 886m 5th highest of 15	32,609 - 6th most densely populated of 15	3.6 million 12th most visited of 15	Plas y Ffynnon, Cambrian Way, BRECON, Powys, LD3 7HP Tel: 01874 624437 e-mail: <a href="mailto:enquiries@breconbeacons.org">enquiries@breconbeacons.org</a> web: <a href="http://www.breconbeacons.org">www.breconbeacons.org</a>
Broads	1989 11th	30,292ha smallest of 15	Bath Hills 25m lowest of 15	5,876 - 7th most densely populated of 15	5 million 8th most visited of 15	18 Colegate, NORWICH, Norfolk, NR3 1BQ Tel: 01603 610734 e-mail: <a href="mailto:webenquiries@broads-authority.gov.uk">webenquiries@broads-authority.gov.uk</a> web: <a href="http://www.broads-authority.gov.uk">www.broads-authority.gov.uk</a>
Loch Lomond and the Trossachs	2002 12th	186,500ha 4th largest of 15	Ben More 1171m 2nd highest of 15	15,600 - 13th most populated of 15	4 million 10th most visited of 15	National Park Headquarters, The Old Station, Balloch Road, BALLOCH, G28 8BF Tel: 01389 722600 e-mail: <a href="mailto:info@lochlomond-trossachs.org">info@lochlomond-trossachs.org</a> web: <a href="http://www.lochlomond-trossachs.org">www.lochlomond-trossachs.org</a>
Cairngorms	2003 13th	380,000ha largest of 15	Ben Macdui 1296m highest of 15	17,000 - 14th most populated of 15	1.4 million 14th most visited of 15	14 The Square, GRANTOWN-ON-SPEY, Moray, PH26 3HG Tel: 01479 873535 e-mail: <a href="mailto:enquiries@cairngorms.co.uk">enquiries@cairngorms.co.uk</a> web: <a href="http://www.Cairngorms.co.uk">www.Cairngorms.co.uk</a>
New Forest	2005 14th	56,651ha 14th largest of 15	Bramshaw 135m 14th highest of 15	34,000 - 2nd most densely populated of 15	13.5 million 3rd most visited of 15	South Efford House, Milford Road, Everton, LYMINGTON, SO41 0JD Tel: 01590 646600 e-mail: <a href="mailto:enquiries@newforestnpa.gov.uk">enquiries@newforestnpa.gov.uk</a> web: <a href="http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk">www.newforestnpa.gov.uk</a>
South Downs	2010 15th	164,800ha 6th largest of 15	Blackdown 280m 13th highest of 15	108,000 - most densely populated of 15	39 million most visited of 15	Hatton House, Bepton Road, MIDHURST, West Sussex, GU29 9LU Tel: 0300 303 1053 e-mail: <a href="mailto:info@southdowns.gov.uk">info@southdowns.gov.uk</a> web: <a href="http://www.southdowns.gov.uk">www.southdowns.gov.uk</a>