

# NATURE

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## CONTENTS

	Page
National Parks in Britain . . . . .	631
Radar, Beacons and Navigation by Radio. By Dr. R. L. Smith-Rose . . . . .	633
Population Policy in Great Britain. By Prof. Walter Fitzgerald . . . . .	635
Herbs and Drugs. By Dr. W. O. James . . . . .	636
Development of Synthetic Rubber in the United States. By Dr. C. W. Long . . . . .	637
Process Heating in Industry. By M. R. Gavin . . . . .	637
Colour Vision . . . . .	639
Marine Fisheries of Great Britain. By Michael Graham . . . . .	641
Inbreeding and Hybrid Vigour in Crops and Livestock. By Prof. K. Mather . . . . .	642
The World Federation of Scientific Workers. By J. G. Crowther . . . . .	644
News and Views . . . . .	645
Letters to the Editors :	
Multiplication of Bacteriophage.—Dr. Ralph W. G. Wyckoff . . . . .	649
Ultra-Violet Microscopy of Living Malignant Cells.—Dr. R. J. Ludford, J. Smiles and F. V. Welch . . . . .	650
Cytochemistry of the Gonadotropic Hormones.—Anthony G. Everson Pearse . . . . .	651
Relative X-Ray Sensitivity of Metaphase and Interphase Chromosomes.—Dr. Arnold H. Sparrow . . . . .	651
Production of <i>i</i> -Erythritol by <i>Aspergillus niger</i> .—John L. Yuill . . . . .	652
Thixotropy, and the Mechanics of Burrowing in the Lugworm ( <i>Arenicola marina</i> L.).—G. P. Wells . . . . .	652
Some Geometrical Considerations Regarding Imbricate Aestivation.—Dr. K. J. Dorner . . . . .	653
Initiation of Explosions by Grit Particles.—Dr. F. P. Bowden, F.R.S., and O. A. Gurton . . . . .	654
Dielectric Properties of Mixed Barium and Strontium Titanates at 10,000 Mc./s.—Dr. J. G. Powles . . . . .	655
Dielectric Behaviour of Methyl Palmitate : Evidence of Resonance Absorption.—J. S. Dryden and Prof. Willis Jackson . . . . .	656
Velocity of Sound in Free Air.—J. M. A. Lenihan . . . . .	656
Studies in the Synthesis and Isolation of Threonine.—Dr. D. F. Elliott . . . . .	657
Conversion of DL-Serine into Inactive Cystine.—Dr. D. F. Elliott . . . . .	658
Synthesis of Derivatives of N-Methyl-2-Pyridone from Nicotinic Acid and Nicotinamide.—Chr. Wiegand and W. I. M. Holman . . . . .	659
Species Difference in the Biosynthesis of Vitamin C and Response to Diabetogenic Substances.—Prof. M. C. Nath, C. H. Chakraborty, V. G. Hatwalne and Miss Kusum S. Lal . . . . .	660
Use of Certain Growth-Inhibitors as Tools in Metabolic Investigations.—R. J. Pennington . . . . .	661
Retinene <sub>1</sub> and Indicator Yellow.—Alfred F. Bliss . . . . .	661
Partition Chromatography on Starch of Ribonucleosides.—Peter Reichard . . . . .	662
Eighteenth Session of the International Geological Congress . . . . .	663
School of Pharmacy, University of London . . . . .	663
British Empire Cancer Campaign. By Dr. D. A. G. Galton . . . . .	664
An Electron Microscope Study of Cellulose in the Wall of <i>Valonia ventricosa</i> . By Dr. R. D. Preston, Dr. E. Nicolai, Dr. R. Reed and A. Millard . . . . .	665
The Young Worker in Industry. By Sir Arthur Fleming, C.B.E. . . . .	667
Society for Applied Bacteriology . . . . .	669
Free Energy of Protein Solutions . . . . .	670

## NATIONAL PARKS IN BRITAIN

THE implications of the revolution in the British system of land tenure which occurred on July 1, 1948, when the Town and Country Planning Act, 1947, came into force, are even yet far from being generally appreciated, although the Act immediately affects millions of property owners. It represents, indeed, a great experiment in social control. Old individual liberties are put in trust for the common good; but few as yet understand the methods of community planning or the discipline which planning requires of them. Nor are the technical implications fully realized—the need for development planners of higher quality and better training, for a new tradition in which economics, sociology and geography are blended with the skill of the architect, the engineer and the surveyor into something at least approaching a science.

The success of the Act depends at all points on the readiness of local authorities to use in the public interest the opportunities it offers them. No longer need the fear of cost to themselves inhibit the use of their powers to prevent bad development. Only experience and the growth of the science of planning can ensure that those powers are used positively and constructively, not merely to prevent bad but also to encourage the best development. Moreover, there is real reason to fear that the Act does not put power in the hands of those best qualified to exercise it from a regional or national point of view. It seems that regional advisory committees are unlikely to maintain even their former persuasive influence, and that there is no intention of creating executive joint planning boards. Until the structure of local government has been organised on even bolder lines than those suggested by the Boundary Commission, the machinery for planning will scarcely match the power at its disposal.

There are two main reasons for uneasiness. The Minister of Town and Country Planning, Mr. Silkin, has always been reluctant to admit that there might be needs which the Act does not meet, and in a recent speech at Cambridge he misrepresented seriously the views of the national park movement in seeking to defend his resolve to reject even the compromise for a national park authority represented by the recommendation of the Hobhouse Report. While he refrained from making suitable provision for national park planning until it automatically became vested in the county councils, he now protests that it would be unreasonable to take away from them what they have so recently acquired.

It has long been plain that the county councils do not accept the essence of the national park thesis: Great Britain is a crowded island; but a few areas must be reserved in which the claims of natural beauty and its enjoyment shall stand supreme. The Southampton Borough Council's proposal to invade a public park in Southampton, against which hundreds of objections have been lodged, is only one recent example which demolishes Mr. Silkin's contention. Such examples could be multiplied indefinitely in London, Manchester and many other

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places, where although some encroachments might be justified, most are due to the authorities taking the line of least resistance. The natural beauty of Britain cannot long survive such a process of attrition, and a great merit of the pamphlet "National Parks or 'Local Authority' Parks", just issued by the Friends of the Lake District, is that it displays clearly the picture of attrition in one particular area over the last twenty years. On any wide and general view, the Lake District has lost not a little which it can never regain, and has not had the treatment proper to a kind of national property. During the last generation, the best areas of our landscape have suffered steady attrition, and both the pace and the field of injury are increasing.

Even if the local authorities could be expected and trusted to take a national view, it is also clear that, as 'local' authorities, they would be unable to avert the second main danger—that of encroachment from the Departments of State, and especially the Service Departments. Strong opposition has been manifest to the Army's proposed requisition of 1,870 acres of Cannock Chase; opposition which was supported indeed by the Staffordshire County Council. Already the Armed Forces have demanded a gun site near Holy Island, a bombing range at Selsey Bill and battle-training areas across Norfolk and Wiltshire villages, and cynically disregard promises or pledges given during the War. Retention of the areas held at Stamford and at Purbeck for battle-training areas is leading to widespread distrust of the Government's sincerity or even good faith.

Nor is it only the Service Departments that are responsible. Water supply and catchment area authorities, the Ministry of Transport, and the Forestry Commission all sponsor demands which despoil the countryside, and often encroach on areas recommended for preservation as national parks or Nature reserves. Seldom is there any indication of an attempt to consider alternative means of meeting a sectional or local need without detriment to the interests of the nation as a whole. The report of the Gathering Grounds Sub-Committee of the Central Advisory Water Committee on "Public Access to Gathering Grounds and Afforestation and Agriculture on Gathering Grounds" (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1948. 9d. net) constitutes an honourable exception, which deserves special mention. Under the chairmanship of Mr. A. P. Heneage, this committee has brought an admirable sense of national interest to bear on a special problem, and declined to allow unsupported sectional prejudice to prevail. Its recommendations relate to the conduct of the gathering grounds of upland reservoirs where adequate purification processes exist. Arrangements should be made, it urges, to dispose of the sewerage from human habitations, whether permanent or temporary, in a manner that will entirely preclude the possibility of its getting into the reservoirs. Farmyard manure should be prevented from draining directly into feeder streams or reaching the reservoir, and the public should be generally excluded from the banks of reservoirs and no bathing allowed. Fishing and boating may sometimes be allowed at the discretion of

the authority, but only under rigorous control. Feeder streams may sometimes require like restrictions; but subject to these safeguards, the land should be put to the utmost agricultural use, and land which is incapable of agricultural use should, if possible, be afforested, but with due regard to amenity and the requirements of adjacent agriculture. Subject to these recommendations, the committee sees no reason for excluding the public from gathering grounds as such. Indeed, the report is a well-deserved rebuke to certain authorities which have relied on such negative restriction rather than on the positive safeguards which are still required even if the public are excluded. Incidentally, the committee was satisfied that many gathering grounds could be put to much greater agricultural production than at present.

Despite the admirable spirit of this report, there can be little optimism at present that due effect will be given to its recommendations in the absence of adequate authority. Provision of the essential requirements for a system of national parks and for co-ordinating at the highest level the competing departmental requirements for land would, of course, meet this requirement incidentally; but even the requirements urged by the Friends of the Lake District will scarcely avail while the Government refuses to establish a more effective authority than an inter-departmental committee, and continues to allow demands for land to be presented piecemeal and without regard either to available resources or competitive national needs.

Whether or not it was the intention that the Minister of Town and Country Planning should act as the co-ordinator in this matter, events have demonstrated that he possesses neither the stature nor the vision to exercise such authority. Meanwhile, it is clear, in view of the probability that the Government's programme for the forthcoming session will include a Bill to secure freer public access to mountains and moorland, to control holiday facilities in national park areas and to conserve wild life, that the essential requirements for an effective system of control should be understood.

The two essential principles outlined by the Friends of the Lake District and in the earlier reports are essentially the same both for national parks and Nature reserves, differing only in the details of application for the two purposes. The first requirement is to concentrate in a specialized body, a national parks commission, the duty of elaborating and maintaining a special code for the parks and Nature reserves. This would provide the means for dealing directly and on more or less equal terms with Government departments and public corporations, and it would also avoid the anomalies which will arise if the control is left with the county councils, as Mr. Silkin suggests, a scheme under which the Lake District would be administered by three, North Wales by four, and the Peak district by four or five separate bodies.

Secondly, on the plane of local planning, the national interest must be introduced by establishing a special park or Nature reserve committee. This would provide a unified planning authority for

dealing with each park as a single whole, assessing the national need against local needs. Mr. Silkin himself and other participants in the recent controversy have misrepresented this function, in spite of overwhelming evidence that the local authorities cannot be relied upon to put national interests first, and indeed should not in fairness be expected to do so. In answering that criticism, moreover, the Friends of the Lake District in the pamphlet referred to also dispose of the suggestion that the parks committees, constituted as suggested in the Hobhouse Report, are undemocratic; and they quote pertinent instances in regard to roads, electricity and the National Assistance Board in support of the reasonableness of the Hobhouse compromise. Nor can it well be argued that from the purely administrative point of view the proposed system for national parks cannot be worked side by side with that laid down for other purposes in the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947.

What must be clearly understood at the present moment is that at no level is the necessary administrative machinery established or retained under the new Planning Act to enable a consistent planning policy to be applied either to national parks in general or throughout any one of the principal national park areas designated in the National Parks Committee's reports, or those of the Wild Life Conservation Committee. Even if the local authorities were really interested in national parks and there were not the difficulty of particular parks being the concern of three, four, or five county authorities with widely varying outlooks, populations and rateable values, the administration of such areas puts an unreasonable strain on the loyalties of the councils. County parks they might provide, but not national parks; and there would be no assurance that these parks would be secure against the intrusion of sectional interests, let alone of Departments of State.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that in little more than a year after the publication of the Hobhouse Report, not only has no action been taken to implement its proposals, but also in the interval further irreparable damage has been done to our dwindling reserves of natural beauty, amenity, flora and fauna; further, that the conception and prospect of both national parks and Nature reserves have become more seriously endangered than at any time since Mr. John Dower was asked to prepare his report, and that by Government action—and inaction. It is equally true that the new Planning Act, the Requisitioned Land and War Works Act and the White Paper on the Needs of the Armed Forces for Land for Training and Other Purposes, have done more on the whole to alarm than to reassure public opinion, and have to some extent tended to dissipate that considerable measure of goodwill on which the prospects of a general agreement and an effective safeguarding of Britain's heritage of natural beauty and wild life must be based. In this respect the Government seems to be bent on evading the responsibilities conferred on it, with widespread approval, by recent legislation.

## RADAR, BEACONS AND NAVIGATION BY RADIO

### (1) Radar Aids to Navigation

Edited by Assoc. Prof. John S. Hall. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Radiation Laboratory Series, Vol. 2.) Pp. xiii+389. (New York and London: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1947.) 30s.

### (2) Radar Beacons

Edited by Prof. Arthur Roberts. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology: Radiation Laboratory Series, Vol. 3.) Pp. xx+489. (New York and London: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1947.) 36s.

### (3) LORAN: Long Range Navigation

Edited by J. A. Pierce, A. A. McKenzie and R. H. Woodward. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology: Radiation Laboratory Series, Vol. 4.) Pp. xiv + 476. (New York and London: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1948.) 36s.

ALL those who have been in any way connected with the vast developments in radio and radar techniques during the past decade will be familiar with the extensive contributions made during the war years by the staff of the Radiation Laboratory of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Much of the basic scientific and engineering knowledge which resulted from these contributions has been collected together by an editorial staff working under the auspices of the United States National Defense Research Committee and is now being published in a series of volumes which has become familiarly known in the radio world as the 'five-foot shelf'. The general design and scope of this publication, and details of the introductory volume to the series, have already been described in *Nature* (June 5, p. 867). The present review is concerned with Vols. 2, 3 and 4 of the series, which together add another three inches to the shelf.

(1) As its name implies, the volume edited by Dr. John S. Hall describes the advantages and limitations of radar technique when applied to the problems of navigation and pilotage, whether the equipment is airborne, shipborne or ground-based. The book is divided into four parts, the first of which is of an introductory nature. An opening chapter on the principles of radar serves to make the book self-contained without reference to the first volume of the series. The second chapter has also been included to give the reader a more comprehensive picture of available techniques, and deals with what are termed non-radar navigational aids. These include various techniques for determining the direction of a sending station, and also the hyperbolic systems that measure range differences such as Decca, Gee and Loran: the latter is dealt with in considerable detail in volume 4 of this series (see below).

The real substance of the present volume begins in Part 2, entitled "Airborne Radar". The four chapters in this section are devoted almost exclusively to the characteristics, design and performance of the type of centimetre-wave radar equipment developed for precision blind-bombing purposes during the War, and now being applied to the navigation of civil aircraft. A series of excellent photographs illustrates the detailed display that can be obtained in this technique with systems of high resolving power used on a wave-length of 1.25 cm. Unfortunately, it has been found in practice that the presence of a water-vapour absorption band precludes the use of