

NATIONAL PARKS COMMISSION

THE sixteenth annual report of the National Parks Commission* covers the year ended September 30, 1965, and is the first to be presented to the Minister of Land and Natural Resources, instead of the Minister of Housing and Local Government. The note of concern sounded in the previous report is even more pronounced, partly on account of the continued delay in legislative provision to rectify the weaknesses in the existing Act, and this year on account also of the restrictions imposed on public expenditure. This last, for example, has delayed the establishment of a supporting technical group for Mr. R. J. S. Hookway, the Commission's Principal Planning Officer. This has meant that the Commission's hope that, with its own professional staff, it would be able to undertake special studies of the coast and surveys of the National Parks, in concert with the Park planning authorities, to determine how best to provide for future needs, has been disappointed. Other plans, particularly for increasing information work, for speeding the creation of long-distance paths, and for completing within 4 or 5 years the Commission's full programme of areas of outstanding beauty, have also been overtaken by the Government's staff economies and have had to be curtailed or deferred. Practically the whole of the positive creative side of the work of the planning authorities for the National Parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty has had to be slowed down for the time being.

It seemed to the Commission that it was important to agree on a programme of starting dates for projects already approved in principle. However, while it is discussing this and other aspects of the restrictions with the Ministries concerned, confidence here can scarcely be increased by the division of responsibilities for the Commission's work between various Ministries described by the Commission in the third paragraph of its report. The new arrangements have no logical foundation, but although the responsibilities for forestry have also been distributed, the Minister of Land and Natural Resources has assured the Commission that the new arrangements will not disturb the satisfactory relations established between the Commission and the Forestry Commission in regard to landscape policy.

It is against this background and the reiterated warning from the fifteenth report of the Commission that whatever progress is recorded in the present report should be considered. The Commission reaffirms its hope that in the present Parliament the necessary measures, framed on imaginative and forward-looking lines, will receive a high priority in the legislative programme of the Government. These should be such as to ensure the protection and proper use of National Parks and of the countryside generally, including the coast-line, in face of growing demands. Such legislation is indeed overdue, but the Ministry of Land and Natural Resources did not encourage optimism in his unrealistic statement to the "Countryside in 1970" conference last November. Beyond this, the Commission finds the continued delays in meeting its staff requirements frustrating and disproportionate to the expenditure involved. Time is also precious, as planning the best use of Britain's natural resources, including the coast, is increasingly urgent because of the mounting pressures. Such minor achievements as the Commission records in this report are no substitute for the Government's omission to take the conservation of the countryside comprehensively in hand.

The Commission again expresses its concern over the continuing difficulties associated with the enclosure and ploughing of open land in National Parks, pending the amendment of the existing law. During the year the Minister of Housing and Local Government confirmed the order designating the Solway Coast as an area of outstanding beauty. A tourist survey of the Peak District National Park by the British Travel Association showed that more than 4 million people, spending £1.8 million, visited that Park for pleasure in the summer of 1963. All but 75,000 were day visitors, and more than 1.5 million pleasure day trips by all forms of transport were made by people living within about 40 miles of Buxton. The 75,000 staying visitors were, however, responsible for 28 per cent of the total expenditure by visitors. The Commission gave general support to the views submitted to Ministers on the damage caused by military training in the Dartmoor National Park from the Councils for the Preservation of Rural England and Wales. It advised the Minister of Land and Natural Resources that it remained the Commission's view that the use by the Services of training areas in the Dartmoor National Park, and particularly their use for live firing, should be terminated as soon as possible. The Minister was unwilling to make representations to the Ministry of Defence for the early cessation of all military training on Dartmoor but said that his Department was in touch with the Ministry about the possibility of restricting the use of Dartmoor to a minimum.

The ten approved long-distance footpaths totalled more than 1,250 miles, but public right of way throughout the whole length of an approved path has been secured only for the Pennine Way; for the other nine paths some 150 miles of new rights of way have still to be secured. The Commission regards the creation of these long-distance paths as important and plans to add to them as soon as it can make minor additions to its staff. It has, meanwhile, to limit severely the rate at which it can expand the system. Some 504 proposals for development affecting landscape beauty in National Parks, in areas of outstanding natural beauty or elsewhere in the countryside were referred to the Commission by Government departments, by National Park or local planning authorities or by amenity organizations. They include the proposed 11 kV overhead lines at East Moors Helmsley, the routing of the 400 kV overhead line between Cowley and Fleet crossing the Berkshire Downs, the proposed reservoir at Meldon in the Dartmoor National Park, the proposed holiday village at Llanina, New Quay, Cardiganshire, to which, after enquiry, the Minister refused permission, the proposed extension of china clay workings at Wigford Down and some ten afforestation proposals, affecting 3,600 acres of land, on which the Forestry Commission consulted the Commission. Concern is again expressed regarding the drafting of regulations to control motoring rallies, and also over the encroachment on open moorland by car. The use of Chichester Harbour by 'Hovercraft' is also being watched. Appended to the report is a fresh appraisal by the Commission of its functions and responsibility in relation to leisure and amenity in the countryside, and in its conclusion to the annual report the Commission urges strongly that a positive solution to the growing problems now facing the countryside and the people who live and work there, as well as its visitors, must now be sought.

On this positive side, the Commission gives prominence to the initiative taken by the Minister of Housing and Local Government, in consultation with the Minister of

* National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949. Sixteenth Report of the National Parks Commission for the year ended September 30, 1965. Pp. ix + 97 + 8 plates. (London: H.M.S.O., 1965.) 10s. net.

Land and Natural Resources, in requiring maritime local planning authorities to report forthwith on their progress in facilitating an immediate review of development control of the coast. It also welcomes the initiative for a longer term and continuing assessment of existing and potential recreational, industrial and other pressures on the coast to form a basis for future control policy and the review of development plans. The National Parks Commission now hopes to start a series of conferences with the maritime planning authorities in the spring of 1966 when the additional staff needed should be available. Appended to the report are extracts from the address of the Minister of Land and Natural Resources, Mr. F. Willey, to the Conference of National Park Authorities at Harrogate in May 1965, and also from the closing address of Lord Strang, chairman of the Commission.

The Commission records the concurrence of the Water Resources Board in the Commission's general policy of

water conservation, that National Parks should be immune from any incursion until every other alternative has been thoroughly explored. It adds, moreover, that its own view is that no new large reservoirs should be constructed in the Lake District, and that if it is really necessary for water to be obtained from the Lake District it should be taken from rivers at or near their tidal limits. In this context it records its interest in the results of preliminary investigations of the projects for barrages across Morecambe Bay, the Solway Firth and the River Dee, in which the Minister of Land and Natural Resources should be taking a much more determined part. The Commission remains strongly opposed to the draft Manchester Order, 1965, proposing to abstract water from Ullswater, and extracts from the evidence given at the enquiry which the Minister of Housing and Local Government held at Kendal in June and July 1965 are appended.

WATER RESOURCES IN BRITAIN

THE second annual report of the Water Resources Board* covers the year ended September 30, 1965, in which major changes in ministerial responsibility for water questions under the Water Resources Act, 1963, were made. Under an Order which came into operation on April 1, 1965, the Minister of Land and Natural Resources shares with the Minister of Housing and Local Government and the Secretary of State for Wales the duties imposed by Section 1 of the 1963 Act and became responsible for the Board and for functions relating to investigations and research into conserving and augmenting water resources and to hydrometric schemes. When the Board was given the opportunity of commenting on the detailed provisions of the Order before it was finally made, it took the view that while the overall apportionment of Ministerial responsibility was essentially a matter for the Government, it was highly desirable that any transfer of functions should not prejudice either the unified management of water resources by river authorities in their respective areas, or the national planning of the development of those resources for which the Board and the Minister of Housing and Local Government had been made responsible by the 1963 Act. The Board considers that the new Order avoids such prejudice.

The staff of the Board are civil servants and the Board accepted the initial staff complement prepared for the purposes of the Financial Memorandum to the Bill for the 1963 Act. Following a Civil Service Commission competition in November–December 1964, fifteen of the twenty engineering posts were filled; most of the new staff took up their appointments by May 1965 and the Board hoped to fill vacancies in some grades by the autumn of 1965. In discussions with the Treasury, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, the Department of Education and Science and the Geological Survey regarding the future of the Water Department of the Survey, it was generally accepted that it would be desirable for one body to handle both the surface and ground-water aspects of water resources management and that the sensible course was to transfer responsibility for advising on ground-water for the Survey to the Board, leaving responsibility for basic research with the Survey. Accordingly, part of the complement of the Water Department of the Survey was transferred to the Board, these twelve posts bringing the Board's staff complement to seventy-two, of which ten posts are at present vacant. The five main Divisions are geology, hydrometry, liaison and promotion, planning, and research.

Rainfall during the year was 35.7 in., compared with an average of 35.59 in. during 1916–50. The Board is concerned particularly with two aspects of the Gas Act, 1965, namely, the procedure whereby the Gas Council will be authorized to store gas underground, and the provisions for redressing any injury subsequently sustained by statutory water undertakers or other abstractors as a result of the storage. The Board was satisfied that the Bill adequately protected the interests of water users and hopes to agree with the Gas Council on a procedure for receiving early warning of any proposals.

After discussing the existing liaison with river authorities and other bodies, the Board attempts an interim assessment of the water situation in England and Wales before describing the actual methods of assessing water resources. It dismisses rather too lightly the practicability of desalting sea-water, except for small plants to meet peak demands, for example, at holiday resorts, and discount the possibility of any large plant operating before about 1980. The possibility of storage in estuaries is recognized, but the cost of distribution and the problems of silting, navigation and fish migration, land drainage and ecology, and of effluent treatment and disposal are emphasized, the outlook being essentially negative rather than positive or constructive. Unless the cost of water from barrage schemes and from desalting processes becomes comparable to the cost of water produced by conventional means and the costs of distribution are no greater, the Board believes that between 1975 and 2000 most of Britain's requirements over and above those met by ground-water developments will be met by the further development of upland storage sites in the north and west, coupled with the transfer of water in river channels.

The Board seems to be quite unaware of the Nature Conservancy's view that upland storage is an inappropriate and obsolete method or of the social costs of upland storage, and their chapter on augmenting water resources is unsatisfactory and disturbing. It is lacking in understanding and puts no urgency behind the enquiries into the feasibility of the Morecambe Bay and Solway Barrage Schemes, though it is critical of some of the Manchester Corporation's proposals regarding the Longdendale Valley reservoirs. Meanwhile, two *ad hoc* technical committees have been convened, one dealing with the Thames Catchment area north of the Thames and the other with the part south of the river.

The chapter on research is more satisfactory. The Board's broad approach is to identify needs and then consider whether one or other of the existing research bodies in this field could carry out any necessary work, only undertaking research itself when this is the best and

* Water Resources Act, 1963. Second Annual Report of the Water Resources Board for the year ending 30th September, 1965. Pp. v+40. (London: H.M.S.O., 1965.) 3s. 6d. net.