

New Forest Fact File

Impacts of Foot and Mouth Disease

Although the New Forest remained free of Foot and Mouth throughout 2001, the disease had a major impact on the area.

Foot and Mouth disease was diagnosed in the UK on the 20th February 2001 when pigs from Northumberland were sent for slaughter to an abattoir in Essex . On 23rd February a total ban on livestock movements nationally was introduced.

Managing the Situation in the New Forest

A Foot & Mouth Liaison Group was formed comprising the Verderers, Forestry Commission, National Trust, Hampshire County Council, English Nature, New Forest Tourism Association, Commoners Defence Association, New Forest District Council, New Forest Committee, National Farmer's Union, Mr David Coombes (local veterinary surgeon), New Forest Association of Town and Parish Councils and MAFF. This liaison Group met every week throughout the crisis.

The first policy was to try to limit contact between potential contaminating agents and susceptible livestock and deer on the Forest. Secondly, susceptible Forest livestock needed to be isolated from the deer population. Thirdly, there was a need to limit the risks arising from those who must work in the Forest, and lastly to prepare for the worst case scenario with a contingency plan on outbreaks of FMD actually in or adjacent to the Forest.

Any livestock or deer found lame or dead on the forest were to be examined by a veterinary surgeon.

The County Council placed disinfectant mats at all the entrances to the Forest and signs were placed on all roads instructing motorists to remain in their vehicles whilst travelling through the New Forest. The Forest was split into five different management zones by closing all underpasses. Plans for containment pounds were prepared for emergency use and potential burn and bury sites were identified and cleared by English Nature and the Environment Agency.

Impact on Access and Recreation

The Crown land of the New Forest was shut for public access on Wednesday 28th February.

All Forest car parks were closed, along with golf courses and campsites (Setthorns closed to new arrivals, but did not close completely until later). Cycle routes were also closed.

All car parks were physically closed with log barriers or red tape. Hundreds of signs were put up asking people to keep off the Forest. On the 9th of March, Hampshire County Council put disinfectant mats on the peripheral cattle grids of the Forest and closed their public rights of way.

The Forestry Commission Ranger service cancelled all school visits and guided walks until June when the forest animals were considered to be at a minimal risk to infection. Most of the Ranger and Keepers team's work until Easter was helping to keep the public informed by updating an information line daily, liaising with the press, answering a constant stream of phone calls, putting up information signs and patrolling. After the reopening of the forest, time was spent asking dog walkers to keep dogs

on leads. The refusal of one member of the public to do so, in a Dorset woodland, resulted in a successful byelaw prosecution.

Restrictions started to be eased on 12 April with limited car parks being reopened. The final car park was reopened on Wednesday 13 June. The differences in the reopening dates reflected the use of the management of that area. For example the inclosures were open earlier because there contained no cattle.

The last restriction which remained in force was that dogs should be kept on leads. This was on the advice of MAFF vets as uncontrolled dogs were seen as a possible way of transferring the disease if they came into contact with cattle or deer. In the New Forest particularly this restriction was a contentious issue.

'Although it seems obvious now, at the time I remember the shock of how far into the community the threat of F+M would extend. All recreational activity stopped immediately, only then did it really become apparent how important the Forest is for everyone, "where can I walk my dog?", "I *have* to exercise my horse," "where can I jog?" "Why can't I fly my model airplane?" Driving through the Forest during this time was an eerie experience, the Forest without people was a strange place.'

Andrew Norris Forestry Commission Head Ranger

Impact on Commoning

All cattle, ponies, donkeys, and pigs on the New Forest are owned by local commoners. Commoners have the right to graze their animals on the open forest. However because of the risk of infection this right was suspended and the cattle and pigs were ordered off the forest. As time went on some commoners were not able to access sufficient grazing land or feed for their animals, and some cattle were sent for slaughter under the MAFF welfare scheme.

The Agisters continued to monitor the condition of the ponies which remained on the open Forest throughout the crisis and remove any which were found to be in poor condition. It was considered unnecessary and logistically impossible to remove all 4000 ponies from the Forest.

Prior to Foot and Mouth some 3000 cattle had been depastured on the Forest. As of December 2001, 1600 cattle have been returned to the forest. Cattle started to return to the Forest on 30th April.

Impacts on Wildlife

The deer-culling programme was stopped to avoid moving the herds around the Forest. There has been considerable anecdotal evidence that the reduction in recreation pressure was of benefit to wildlife. The reduction in grazing pressure may prove to have some beneficial and some negative impacts on different species of wildlife.

'The Forest's wildlife was not slow in taking advantage of the serenity, although it has to be said that it is difficult to separate this reaction from behaviour which is seasonal and occurs every year at this time.'

'An additional advantage was that with all the cattle removed there was more grass for the ponies and deer than in a normal year.'

'Keepers reported unsurpassed numbers of ground nesting waders such as lapwing, successfully hatching off broods in places such as Balmer Lawn. In other years the presence of people and dogs usually drives the adults away, leaving the nests vulnerable, either to the dogs or to crows.'

Martin Noble Forestry Commission Chief Keeper

Economic Impacts

Nationally Foot and Mouth had a huge impact on the economy – principally farming and tourism. To date estimates on the total economic impact range from £1.6bn to £6.3bn (Countryside Recreation Network). The economic impact on tourism seems to have been higher than the economic impact on agriculture. This is likely to be the case in the New Forest. The largest loss of revenue reported by the local tourism industry was from the lucrative overseas market, and secondly from the domestic holiday market (Bournemouth University).

One of the first economic losses was that of the livestock and meat export market, valued at £427m in 2000 (Meat and Livestock Commission 2001).

Foot and Mouth is not usually a fatal disease – most animals do infact recover. The disease does not threaten human health. From a farmers point of view, the disease reduces productivity in animals e.g. milk yield. As of September 2001, 2026 cases had been confirmed and 3.9 million animals had been culled.

'The Foot and Mouth disease crisis is costing the tourism industry in Dorset and the New Forest £3 million per week'

Bournemouth University April 2001

Some of the traders in the village are suicidal – and that's no exaggeration

Cllr Anne Ward, Burley Daily Echo 24 March 2001

References

Countryside Recreation Winter 2001 – *Countryside Recreation Network*
Impact of FMD on the Dorset & New Forest Tourism Industry *Bournemouth University / Dorset Tourism Data Project April 2001*
Office of Verderers, Lyndhurst
Forestry Commission *Press Releases 2001*

For Further Information

www.defra.gov.uk/footandmouth/

www.devon.gov.uk

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

www.mlc.org.uk

www.forestry.gov.uk

www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/farming



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