

# New Forest Fact File

## TOURISM AND RECREATION RECREATION AND ITS MANAGEMENT

### Background

The extension of the London to Southampton railway to Dorchester in 1847 made the New Forest much more accessible and marked the beginning of modern tourism in the area. The numbers were small and their impact was negligible. It wasn't until after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War that tourism and recreation really developed with most families being wealthier and having more leisure time to enjoy it. Car ownership increased and this allowed families to travel further for recreation.

There was a rapid increase in recreation in the 1960's and 1970's during which camping and car parking was relatively uncontrolled with cars sometimes venturing as far as they could off the roads. The rise in the numbers of tourists meant that these activities began to cause unwanted environmental impacts on the New Forest.

“ The New Forest cannot continue to act as an infinite base for sport and recreational use...measures must be taken to minimise the impact of recreational users”

*The New Forest Sports and Recreational Study - University of Portsmouth.*

Under the New Forest Acts of 1949 and 1970, the Forestry Commission was made responsible for recreational provisions subject to Verderers' approval.

A report published in 1970 “The Conservation of the New Forest” highlighted the increase in recreational use and the impacts of this on the fabric of the Forest. From the recommendations put forward by this report, a scheme to protect the Forest from recreational use was implemented. Most of the Forest was made a car-free area with ditches and banks made along all unfenced roads. Barriers were erected across all entrance points and 143 car parks were laid out. Wooden dragon's teeth were sunk into the ground around the new car parks to prevent the encroachment of cars into areas surrounding the car parks. The car parks range in size from those with just a few spaces to large ones at popular sites like Bolderwood. Great care was taken to choose locations that would be popular whilst at the same time making sure they blended in with the landscape and be durable.

Camping was restricted to 12 main sites (since reduced to 10) with a variety of facilities provided such as toilets, showers, waste disposal units and on some sites a shop. A number of way-marked forest walks were laid out in areas which were regarded as robust enough to cope with high visitor numbers. These are at Bolderwood, Blackwater, Ober Water and Wilverley Inclosure.

The whole scheme was finished by 1979, the 900th anniversary of the founding of the New Forest, when Her Majesty the Queen unveiled a plaque at Bolton's Bench, Lyndhurst.

Today the Forestry Commission's Recreation Team offers guided walks, provides a mobile information unit, runs a Volunteer Ranger Service to assist the full-time Rangers and Keepers, and employs summer rangers to patrol the cycle routes and communicate with Forest users. The aim of our work is to increase the understanding and awareness of the importance New Forest so that everyone takes responsibility for the way the Forest is used while having an enjoyable experience.

A range of strategies relating to recreation and tourism in the New Forest were produced in 1996. These include the New Forest Committee's "A Strategy for the New Forest", Hampshire County Council's "Transportation Strategy for the New Forest" and the New Forest District Council's "Tourism and Visitor Strategy".

In 1997, the Forestry Commission produced the Consultation Document "A Framework for Recreation" in which there is a *forest first* management objective. This document has since been preceded by 'Enjoying the Forest: Access and Recreation Plan. June 2001.

The following sections are extracts from the 2001 plan which correspond to transport, walking, cycling, camping and caravanning, other facilities and interpretation. Horse riding and cycling are covered in more detail in a separate section of the fact file.

## Transport Planning and Management

How people get to the New Forest to enjoy access and recreation creates one of the largest challenges we face. National traffic levels are predicted to increase considerably over the coming years, and this in turn threatens the wildlife, peace and tranquility that are the core of the nature of the Forest. The majority of the Forest visitors are from south east England. Thirty years ago there was a population of 8 million within a two and a half hour drive; today that figure is closer to 15 million within one and a half hours. It has been estimated that 95% of visitors travel to the New Forest by car. This includes 81% of local residents. This can generate a considerable traffic load moving within the forest.

The New Forest Transportation Strategy aims to achieve a sustainable future for the Forest, a cleaner environment and an improved quality of life for local people, by reducing the use of the car, but without undermining the economic prosperity of the area. There are real challenges ahead if significant change to the benefit the Forest is to result. Providing viable alternatives to the car for people's journey to the Forest is an essential first step. Together with Hampshire County Council and New Forest District Council, we will explore options which could be used to reduce car use.

Unfortunately the provision of alternatives to the car in isolation are not likely to resolve the transportation issues generated by today's dependence on the car. Measures to discourage motorists from bringing their car into the Forest will also be required if a significant change in culture is to the benefit of the Forest. Possible solutions include;

- Road closures to all but essential traffic. This could relieve significant areas of the Forest from traffic pressures. Closed roads could make ideal cycle or walking routes.
- Area pricing or charging for cars stopping, especially when linked to a revised pattern of car parking across the Forest area.
- Review of speed limits. Enable other forms of transport to share road space more easily and safely.
- Continue to maintain the existing roadside banks, ditches and dragons teeth to prevent unauthorised vehicle access onto vulnerable habitats.

## Open Access

The access situation on the Crown Lands of the New Forest is particularly good for walkers and riders. The Forestry Commission operates a policy of permissive free access on foot to its land, and our byelaws allow free access to the Crown Lands by horse. The Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 will secure a statutory right of access on foot to open countryside including heathland and registered commons, and it is possible the Forestry Commission may 'dedicate' the Forest's woodland area under the Act, securing a similar right of access.

At times detrimental impacts do occur as a result of recreational use. Dogs out of control can have a detrimental impact particularly on ground nesting birds, regular riding of horses along certain routes will contribute towards erosion, as will the sheer weight of use in certain locations. Dog loops or riding routes in inclosures are two options that could be used to reduce such impacts with the co-operation of users and user groups. Rangers and Keepers will be targeted towards sites especially prone to suffer adverse effects from recreational use. It may also be necessary to temporarily restrict access for safety, habitat restoration reasons and where rare ground nesting birds are breeding.

Access on foot provides an excellent alternative to the car in allowing people to get around the Forest and this should be encouraged. There are many publications available which recommend long distance walks across the Forest or circular walks within it. Opportunities are also available to link the public rights of way network in the Heritage Area into the Crown lands. This offers opportunities for people to make use of the Forest without using the car, and could be used to offer a network of walks close to people's homes. The Forestry Commission (2001) will;

- Continue to allow people year round access on foot to the Crown Lands,
- Continue to allow horse riders year round free access to the Crown Lands,
- Work with representatives of walkers and riders to prevent detrimental impacts resulting from their use arising over time, through the revision or introduction of codes of conduct, temporary access restrictions or creation of a network of preferred routes to enable habitat restoration.
- Review the impacts of dog walking on the Crown Lands, particularly in relation to ground nesting bird species, and use the information gathered to formulate a set of management actions.

## **Cycling and Management**

A comprehensive network of cycle routes based on the Forests gravel tracks and public highway is one way in which car free tourism may be encouraged, providing links between villages, pubs, toilets and other 'targets'. The existing cycle network developed in partnership with Hampshire County Council and the New Forest District Council is a start but as a network it is not complete. Currently, there is over 100 miles of waymarked routes. However, fundamental gaps exist around many of the Forest villages, and new routes must be found to link the forest itself to the surrounding towns, villages and cities. The Forestry Commission will;

- Continue to provide and promote a network of waymarked cycle tracks for people to enjoy and which contribute towards the New Forest Transportation Strategy.
- Continue to promote a cycling code of conduct and take steps to prevent unsustainable cycling.
- Work with Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council and others with an interest to identify under or over provision in the network and implement actions to complete the network.

## **Camping and Caravanning**

People who stay in the Forest while visiting make a considerably greater contribution to the local economy than day visitors, and enable further facilities or work to manage recreation to take place. By providing people with an opportunity to stay in the area we also increase their opportunities to learn more about the Forest, possibly by becoming involved with activities, and so raise their understanding and behaviour.

We operate ten campsites in the Forest, which contribute to these benefits, as well as providing a mechanism by which otherwise inappropriate camping can be managed. Appropriately located and equipped campsites continue to feature in our vision for the future of recreation in the Forest, but much work needs to be done to address the detrimental environmental impacts certain sites are having upon the Forest. Where visitors and place are not in harmony we may decide to reduce usage, close a site,

relocate a site or concentrate activities at sites that can cope with additional capacity. The Forestry Commission will;

- Review opportunities for increasing sustainable use of resources on our campsites, for example through recycling facilities and providing greater opportunities for campers to access the Forest without using their car.
- Develop opportunities for increasing the proportion of advanced campsite bookings through improved marketing to allow us to more match capacity with demand before people arrive in the Forest.
- Explore the possibility of re-locating campsites within the forest and restoring the vacated sites where this becomes necessary due to the decline of habitats within Scheduled Areas for Conservation (SAC). A full assessment of the potential effects will be undertaken using environmental impact assessment procedures.

## **Car Park Charging**

In June 1998 the Forestry Commission submitted proposals to the Court of Verderers for a public donation system in 7 of the more popular visitor car parks. The proposal was accepted and the donation scheme has been running since 1998. Donations made by visitors to the forest goes straight back into its management and in 2001, over £29,000 was raised.

## **Minister's Mandate**

The "Minister's Mandate" for the New Forest sets out general policy guidelines for the management of the New Forest, the first one being agreed in 1971. The most recent "Minister's Mandate" was presented to Donald Thompson the Deputy Surveyor of the New Forest, by Elliot Morley (Forestry Minister for England) at the New Forest Show in 1999. The Mandates states:

"This Mandate takes account of Britain's international commitments on the environment. It fully reflects the Commission's principal objectives in managing the Crown lands, i.e. the conservation of their natural and cultural heritage, and it places a high priority on maintaining the Forest's traditional character. It also underlines the Government's commitment to sustainable forestry and it recognises the importance of the New Forest as a place for appropriate public recreation"

With specific reference to "Public Enjoyment" the Mandate states:

"The Forestry Commission will plan and manage the provision for access and recreation for local people and visitors to the New Forest in ways consistent and compatible with conservation of nature and heritage"

*Minister's Mandate for The New Forest (1999-2008).*

## Public Facilities in the New Forest:

As part of the Forestry Commission's overall management of the New Forest, the facilities it provides for recreational users of the Forest include (2001):

Car park with toilet	10	Campsites	10
Car park	122	Arboreta	2
Waymarked walking trail	8	Public information points	8
Waymarked cycle network	>100 miles	Mobile Information Unit	1 (Bolderwood)
BBQ site	2	Fishing pond	4
Picnic site	33	Cricket pitch	12
Reptile centre	1	Golf course	3
Wildlife observation platform	1	Sports pitch	3

Some recreational activities do not require special permission to be carried out on the Forest. These are horse riding, cycling, back-packing and dog walking. People who undertake these activities are requested to follow the appropriate "codes" and obey Forest byelaws.

Activities involving more than 20 people, or commercial activities/events, may require permission. When planning your event/activity please ask us if a permission is required.

## Education and Interpretation

Interpretation is the process designed to increase understanding of our natural and cultural heritage to people through first hand experiences with objects, landscapes or sites. Interpretation is a key management tool in putting the Forest first. Interpretation can help people to understand the area once they arrive and can be used to deflect them away from locations that are becoming degraded. Interpretation is a valuable tool to help insure the long-term stewardship of the Forest.

The Forestry Commission ranger service runs an extensive programme of events ranging from storytelling to deer watching; provides a *New Forest Rotters* mobile display unit which gives an insight into the fascinating world of fungi and provides other forest information; give slide shows and lead guided walks for local groups; and work with schools.

There are also opportunities to involve local people in the hands on management of the forest through the volunteer ranger team. Set up in 1999, the Volunteer Ranger Service now boasts more than 50 committed members of the local community who provide essential support to the Forestry Commission.

Source: *Enjoying the Forest: Access and Recreation Plan. June 2001.*



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