



Summer 2006

This summer, I had the great good fortune to spend a holiday in the Canadian Rockies, mostly in the Jasper and Banff National Parks. The parks adjoin and are characterized by spectacular mountains, major glaciers, wonderful broad rivers, brilliant blue lakes, endless coniferous forests and wildlife which is potentially more aggressive than anything you find in Scotland. Canada now has more National Parks than any other country and Banff, Canada's first National Park was designated in 1885 - just think about it, 1885.

During our stay, we went on several guided walks accompanied by National Park staff whom we found to be friendly, knowledgeable, committed and in no doubt about the climate change which has occurred in the Rockies over the last 30 years or so.

Canadians are justifiably proud of their National Parks and of the fact that Canada was one of the first countries in the world to recognize the importance of having Protected Areas. Tourism is now one of their most important industries and they are making great efforts to handle it in a sustainable, environmentally sound manner. There are many aspects of their National Parks which are different from ours (State ownership, for example) but there are also many common problems where we could learn from their experience. For example, with a booming economy, they are having to cope with the pressure for holiday homes, people wishing to retire to the National Park, spiralling house prices, the need for affordable homes, aircraft and helicopter flights starting outside the Park but over-flying for sightseers and bringing unwelcome disturbance to the more usual peace and tranquility.

In a visitor interpretation centre, I noted two telling quotations from J. B. Harkin, the first Parks Commissioner, who said "**Negative or positive goodwill that does nothing is of little value. We need 'fierce loyalties' to back action.**" And again "**The battle to establish parks may be won, but the battle to keep them inviolate is never won.**"

Have you signed up any friends to SCNP recently?

Robert Maund
Chairman

Tom Weir 1914 – 2006.

Tom Weir, hill walker, mountaineer, writer, naturalist, broadcaster and inspirational supporter of National Parks, has died aged 91. Anyone who had the pleasure of attending one of his illustrated lectures saw a man totally committed to the quality of our landscapes and habitats, who spoke freely and naturally of his love for the countryside and its importance to all our futures.

When Tom, a man of modest height, gave a talk, he sometimes said "There's no one wee-er than Weir." It may have been partly true but, in every other sense, he was a big man who gave pleasure to thousands and helped us get our priorities right. He will be greatly missed and we extend our sympathies and best wishes to his wife Rhona, at a difficult time.

Council for National Parks 70th Anniversary Conference, Buxton, 30 June – 2 July.

SCNP was represented (Saturday only) at CNP's 70th Anniversary conference, the theme of which was '*Prosperity and Protection*.' The key speaker was Professor Adrian Phillips who is a Vice President of CNP. He drew attention to the phrase '*Jobs versus Beauty*' often used by the tabloids, politicians and others every time there is a clash where essential protection is thrown into conflict with proposed development.

Those in the Protected Areas movement often argue that protected areas create jobs and wealth. There was, however, little by way of co-ordinated research to show the extent to which this could be validated. Amongst other things, he cited the money generated to business through branding of the National Park image, economic activity through NPA land management, extra economic activity resulting from designation (eg tourism), and the boost to gateway towns and the Region (eg Wales is often advertised for investment etc using the image of Snowdon). In Kenya, National Parks represented 35% of GDP.

Professor Phillips paper made a thoughtful and reasoned case for more comprehensive research bringing together in an holistic way all that National Parks contribute to social, economic and health

activities as well as the more obvious environmental benefits.

Chris France, Head of Planning and Sustainable Development with the Dartmoor National Park Authority, also illustrated the positive elements that Planning brings to protected areas and the economy. After the most recent foot-and-mouth epidemic, research was commissioned to find out the impact on the economy of closing the public footpath system within Exmoor National Park. The outcome was a loss to the economy of £16.3 million.

Earlier in the morning a speaker from the Broads Authority outlined the case for a Private Bill seeking to change the name to the Broads National Park. The Bill also sought powers to control Water Skiing and Jet Skis.

The final speaker of the day was Barry Gardiner MP, Minister for Rural Affairs. He spoke of his vision for National Parks and his extensive use of outdoor recreation as an important part of his life and that of his family. His commitment to the long-term health of the National Park movement was very reassuring. As well as presenting his paper and answering questions, Mr Gardiner stayed on for the afternoon to go on one of the guided walks which had been arranged by the Peak Park Authority.

The reluctance in Scotland to learn from experience south of the border, seems a terrible waste.

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NP

The revisions proposed by Loch Lomond and the Trossachs Park Authority to their by-laws, following a public consultation process, are before Scottish Ministers for their consideration. A group calling themselves Fairplay Loch Lomond has decided to go through the Scottish Parliament's petitions process to object to the speed restrictions which the by-laws would impose on various parts of the loch. Fairplay Loch Lomond say they represent concerned residents, loch users and business owners and claim that the new by-law is unnecessary and unwarranted.

The petition has drawn a very detailed response from a member of the public taking issue with Fairplay Loch Lomond's claims and making many of the points with which SCNP has great sympathy. SCNP still hopes that the promised meeting with the Minister, Rhona Brankin, which Jackie Baillie MSP is trying to facilitate, will take place in the not-too-distant future.

Cairngorms National Park

On the 3 July, representatives of SCNP met with Jane Hope, Chief Executive of CNPA, to discuss the draft National Park Plan, consultation on which closed on the 30 June. SCNP had provided the Park with draft comments but wanted to have a discussion before finalising the Council's contribution.

The Park Plan is a concise document, is ambitious and covers the period up to 2030. It is acknowledged that some aspects of the plan will be a moveable feast because they are dependent on all parties who have a contribution to make, committing themselves to the plan's aims. There is a second document "*Priorities for Action 2007 – 2012*" to focus peoples minds on what needs to be achieved in the first 5 years. In addition as a context for the plan there is a "*State of the Park Report 2006*" and a "*Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report.*"

The Plan sets out a vision, which, if it can be achieved, would be very laudable. The main concerns, however, are the extent of dependence on others to achieve the aims, the adequacy of resources and the thorny issue of second homes, homes for commuters, affordable housing and local needs.

On the development control front, a major development in Boat of Garten for a mixture of housing, business park etc., has been refused, on appeal, by Scottish Ministers. The application, opposed by SCNP, had been recommended for approval by Highland Council planning officers but turned down by the Area Committee because of its sensitive location and imminence of the National Park Plans - a welcome indication that the Park Authority and its work are being taken ever more seriously by the constituent authorities – and now by Ministers.

Executive Committee

Since the Spring Newsletter, the Executive has met on 6 June and 11 July. There is no August meeting (even volunteers need a break!) and further meetings are scheduled for 21 September and 17 October 2006.

Since the Spring Newsletter we have responded to the following consultations:

Scottish Forestry Strategy: May 2006;
Draft National Park Plan for Cairngorms NP: July 2006.

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