THE NATIONAL PARK DEBATE IN SCOTLAND

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1. Introduction

1.1 The concept of National Parks had its origins in the Rocky Mountains of North America. Following the establishment of the Yellowstone National Park in 1872 there followed a series of parks established in the United States and Canada along the Rockies. These parks were set aside in order to conserve the natural wildlife and scenery and to provide opportunities for outdoor recreation. The coming of the railways to the west of North America was central in the establishment of the parks and it is clear that attracting tourists to visit the parks and use the railways was as fundamental in the early thinking as the conservation of the natural resources. The three pronged justification for national parks - conservation, recreation and economic benefit remains the model for the establishment of parks all over the world in both developed and underdeveloped countries. The process of national park establishment continues today, yet Scotland has never had such areas and in December 1981 the remaining statutory reference to National Parks (the National Park Direction Areas which had been established in 1948) was dropped. The Scottish people and government have rejected the concept of National Parks and in this paper the possible explanation for this is explored.

2. Pre 1939 The Early Pressures

2.1 The story of the pressures for National Parks in Scotland begins in 1884 when James Bryce introduced his first Access to Mountains (Scotland) Bill to parliament. Safeguarding the public right to roam the mountains was a central issue leading up to the pressure for National Parks in Scotland. Bryce's bill was unsuccessful as was a later Bill on the same theme in 1891 and although a 1939 Access to the Mountains Act was passed by Parliament for England and Wales it was never enacted.

2.2 The growth in interest in the conservation of wildlife and the countryside in Scotland during the early 20th century is reflected in the formation of the Royal Society for the Preservation of Birds (RSPB) in 1889, the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves (SPNR) in 1912 and the Association for the Preservation of Rural Scotland (APRS) in 1927.

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2.3 In 1915-16 the SPNR identified 273 areas in the British Isles worthy of preservation for their wildlife and went as far as to suggest that one of these areas (Glen Clova in Angus) was so extensive that the Society recommended its designation as a National Park. As early as 1909 Stewart had claimed in a publication that it was desirable to establish parks on Jura and Rhum and that £50,000 would be required to purchase them for the nation.

2.4 The first mention of National Parks in Parliament was a question by a Mr. Macpherson in 1929 calling for attention "to the project of securing for the nation in perpetuity some area of the Cairngorm range or elsewhere in Scotland for the free and unfettered use of the public and as a sanctuary for birds and animals". In the same year the Council for 1929 the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) with support from the APRS called for an inquiry into the need for National Parks in the United Kingdom. This led to the formation of the National Park Committee under the Chairmanship of the then Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Mr. C. Addison.

2.5 The Addison Committee, established by Ramsay Macdonalds' second labour government, reported in 1931 and advocated the establishment of a series of parks with the following objectives:

- to safeguard areas of exceptional national interest against disorderly development and spoilation
- to improve the means of access for pedestrians to areas of natural beauty
- to promote measures for the protection of flora and faura.

2.6 The Addison Committee report brought the possibility of the establishment of National Parks to the public attention in Britain, provided a platform for pressure groups to form and inevitably initiated the debate about priorities within the National Parks as to whether their primary function was preservation or public access.

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2.7 The poor economic conditions prevailing in Britain in the 1930's did nothing to assist the case for National Parks and in an attempt to sustain interest in the subject the APRS set up a National Parks Committee in Scotland in 1934. The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) had been formed in 1931 some 46 years after its English counterpart, the National Trust, but nevertheless indicating the growing interest in the preservation of Scottish heritage both built and natural.

2.8 The early 1930's saw the height of the railways in Britain and the improvement of accessibility of the countryside through the beginnings of private car ownership. Recognising these changes and influenced by the discussions concerning National Parks, the Forestry Commission (which had been formed in 1919) established in 1934 its first National Forest Park in Argyll. These National Forest Parks were never likely to perform the functions considered necessary for National Parks, although they indicated that a National Agency was capable of providing for and managing outdoor recreation pressures whilst achieving an economic use of the land.

3. 1940-50 Progress Towards Parks in Scotland

3.1 During the Second World War considerable thought was given to how planning the use of land could contribute to post-war reconstruction. Support for the concept of National Parks in Britain came from the Scott Committee report of 1942 on land Utilisation in Rural Areas in which it was clearly stated that "the establishment of National Parks in Britain is long overdue". Meanwhile in Scotland the highly active APRS formed a new Scottish Council on National Parks and together with the CPRE made representations to government in 1942 that National Parks were a desirable aspect of postwar reconstruction.

3.2 All this pressure led eventually to the establishment in January 1944 of the Scottish National Parks Survey Committee, a small informal committee consisting of Dr. Frank Fraser Darling, Mr. D.G. Moir, Mr. P. Thomson and the chairman, Sir J. Douglas Ramsay. The Ramsay Committee were appointed by the Secretary of State for Scotland to "advise upon areas in Scotland which might be suitable for National

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Parks and with this end in view, to supervise an actual survey of potential areas...." During the course of the Ramsay committees work they consulted rumerous bodies, many of whom were represented on the APRS's Scottish Council for National Parks.

3.3 The Committee Reported in October 1944 and their report was presented to Parliament in 1945. A National Park in Scotland was defined as:

> "An extensive tract of country of outstanding natural beauty, preferably also of scientific, cultural or historic interest, owned or controlled by the Nation, accessible to all as a matter of right under suitable regulations, and administered by or on behalf of the Nation to the end that its distinctive values may be preserved unimpaired for the enjoyment and recreation of this and future generations."

The Report then stressed that agricultural and forestry uses of land were permissible in the Parks and that rural industries should be fostered. The report continued:

> "The view has been expressed that the creation of National Parks will tend to concentrate tourists in the Park area to the detriment of other parts of the country. With this view we cannot agree. We are of the opinion that the establishment of such Parks as areas in which natural beauty is freely and easily accessible will add to the general attractiveness of Scotland as a holiday resort and lead to an increase in the volume of tourist traffic throughout the country."

3.4 The Ramsay Committee report recommended the following areas as suitable for National parks and provided a map showing their approximate boundaries:

1. Loch Lomond - Trossachs	320 sq. miles
2. Glen Affric - Glen Cannich - Strath Farrar	260 sq. miles
3. Ben Nevis - Glen Coe - Black Mount	610 sq. miles
4. The Cairngorms	180 sq. miles
5. Loch Torridon - Loch Maree - Little Loch Broom	500 sq. miles
	1,870 sq. miles

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Reserve list:

6. Moidart - Morar - Knoydart	410 sq. miles
7. Glen Lyon - Ben Lawers - Schiehallion	140 sq. miles
8. St. Mary's Loch	180 sq. miles
	730 sq. miles

3.5 After comparing Scotland briefly with North America and England the Ramsay report concluded that the land suitable for National Parks in Scotland was far greater than in England and even if the acquisition of the land in the proposed National Parks was not immediately practicable, it could be achieved over a period of 10-20 years.

3.6 Following the first Ramsay Report an expanded committee with 12 members was appointed in January 1946 with the following terms of reference:

a) To consider and report on the administrative financial and other measures necessary for the provision, on the lines recommended in the Report of the Scottish National Parks Survey Committee, of National Parks in Scotland.

b) To consider and make recommendations on such matters relating to National Parks and on the conservation of wild life as may be referred to the Committee by the Secretary of State for Scotland.

3.7 The Committee made an early decision to appoint a Scottish Wildlife Conservation Committee to consider and advise on the conservation of wildlife. This is a significant indication of the impending split of nature conservation from landscape and recreation issues. These developments are dealt with later in this paper. The second Ramsay Committee reported in July 1947 and the published document contained a report by the Scottish Wildlife Conservation Committee. Little attempt was made to integrate the thinking on National Parks and nature conservation and the two parts of the report stand as a testimony to the widening split.

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3.8 The repot on National Parks is 29 pages plus a summary and deals with:

- the purpose of National Parks in Scotland
- how a National Parks Authority would be organised
- planning considerations in the proposed parks, management issues including access, accommodation, recreation, sporting rights, the maintenance of rural life and local industries
- designation of areas as National Parks
- Nature Conservation
- Staffing
- Finance

3.9 The Ramsay committee clearly saw the National Parks in Scotland being state owned or controlled:

> "In order that the fullest possible use may be made of the mountain areas for the enjoyment of the public and the needs of nature conservation, we recommend that the Commission should purchase, by agreement or compulsorily, as large a part of the uncultivated land within the designated areas as may be practicable."

3.10 It is probably this issue which presented the largest stumbling block to the implementation of the proposals. It is not so much the concept that land should be acquired by the proposed National Parks Commission for Scotland (as the principle of public authority land acquisition had been operating with the Forestry Commission and the Department of Agriculture for Scotland) but the blunt way in which it was introduced. The report went as far as estimating the cost of acquisition of the five proposed National Parks as £1,300,000 and the total capital costs of land acquisition, development, new facilities and buildings as £3,250,000 in 1947. The running costs of the Parks would be in the order of £150,000 per annum.

3.11 The report is strongly orientated towards the development of recreation and tourism and the strengthening of local industries in the Park areas. This was probably a response to the view that Parks would sterilise areas of the Highlands which were suffering already from depopulation and a poor economy.

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3.12 In order to safeguard unwanted development and change in the proposed park areas the Committee report recommended that the Parks should be "designated" within 10 years. This aspect of the report led in a modified form to the 'designation' of the five proposed National Parks as 'National Park Direction Areas' (NPDA) in 1948. The powers of the Town & Country Planning (General Development Order) (Scotland) was used for this purpose.

4. 1948-1967 The Issue Dies

4.1 In 1948 the issue of National Parks for Scotland was clearly not dead and the Department of Health for Scotland set up the Scottish National Parks Working Party to produce detailed surveys of the five NPDA's. They were completed between 1949 and 1952, the study of the Cairngorms area being offered to the Secretary of State in June 1951.

4.2 The report commences with the statement:

> "The report contains our recommendations for action which might be taken in the Cairngorms area <u>under existing statutory powers</u> and along the lines which the Scottish National Parks Committee had in mind." (my underlining)

4.3 Clearly by June 1951 it was felt that if any National Parks were to be established in Scotland it would be made using existing legislation. Earlier in July 1950 when the second of the report on the Glen Affic area was prepared, the introduction referred to 'pending the introduction of National Parks legislation'. It appears that at sometime between July 1950 and June 1951 the prospect of new legislation for National Parks in Scotland was stifled. The final report of the Scottish National Parks Working Party was offered to the new Secretary of State in February 1952.

4.4 The debate concerning National Parks in England and Wales had continued to progress under the Chairmanship of John Dower and culminated in 1949 with the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. It is, of course, necessary to mention the most significant developments in the planning of land use which resulted from the 1947 Town and Country

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Planning Act which brought development under the control of Local Planning Authorities. In Scotland, the areas with which we are particularly concerned as possible National Parks were little affected by these Acts. In fact they remain similarly unaffected today being largely wild land utilised by red-deer or under agricultural, forestry and sporting uses which are not generally controlled under the Planning Acts.

4.5 At this point it is necessary to review why between 1948 and 1952, what seemed to be a bandwagon for National Parks in Scotland was halted. In fact the issue completely faded from public debate until 1965.

4.6 It is not easy to trace the reasons why a decision was not taken to proceed on the lines of the Ramsay committees report, but it is reasonable to conclude that at least seven factors were responsible:

1. The change of Government from Labour to Conservative in 1951

2. Landowner opposition to the proposals, probably particularly those aspects relating to land acquisition

3. The splitting of the nature and landscape conservation lobbies

4. Insufficient public support and pressure from recreational interests

5. Oppostion to the concept that Parks would have an industrial promotion and rural rehabilitation function

6. A feeling that the new Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 was sufficient to control development throughout Scotland negating the need for specific areas with special protections

7. A consideration that the newly proposed Hydro-Electic power schemes proposed for areas in the Highlands may be blocked in National Parks

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4.7 An insight to the landowner viewpoints of the time can be gained from an article in the 'Scottish Landowner' of October 1948:

> "The Federation (Scottish Land and Property Federation) are not opposed to the general principle of setting up National Parks provided that the Government is assured that there is an adequate and sufficient demand to justify the large expenditure contemplated as well as the additional risks of damage to property which will have to be taken."

4.8 In the early 1950's the aggressive implementation of Nature Reserves by the Nature Conservancy in Scotland is in considerable contrast to the sluggish adoption and eventual rejection of the National parks concept in Scotland. It appears now to have been a classic case of government compromise in permitting the establishment of Nature Reserves and the prevention of National Parks reaching the statute books.

4.9 The Scottish Wildlife Conservation Committee Report of June 1947 set the background for the operation of the newly formed Nature Conservancy in 1949. They recommended that in order to safeguard the wildlife of Scotland there were four main requirements:

1 - The establishment of a Biological or Wildlife Service in Scotland

2 - The establishment of nature reserves

3 - The encouragement, through educational methods, of an active interest in Scottish wildlife

4 - The provision of effective legislation

4.10 As well as proposing National Park Reserves, National Nature Reserves and Local Nature Reserves the committee recommended that legislation to protect wildlife throughout the countryside was required. They based their recommendations heavily on the need for a scientific base to the management of the land and that the proposed Biological or Wildlife service in the U.K. should have a Scottish division in Edinburgh.

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