

## **NEW FOREST NOTES - AUGUST 1990**

### **The New Forest Show controversy**

The New Forest Show which gives enjoyment to so many visitors and Forest residents each July has become the rather surprising centre of a fierce internecine controversy. The problem arises out of a planning application by the show's governing body to erect an administrative building on the showground. This application, which at first sight appears to be innocuous, has been vigorously contested by a well-known commoner, Mr. Ralph Hayward, and he has also attacked the use of quiet Forest tracks for removing the vast flows of traffic which emerge from the show. Mr. Hayward secured the support of the New Forest Commoners' Defence Association in his opposition to the building and permission was eventually refused by the New Forest District Council. It is rumoured that the applicants will re-submit the application or appeal. Mr. Hayward's efforts are now concentrated on the use of the tracks and a close examination of his arguments on both aspects of the matter show that he has good reason to be worried.

Some years ago, the New Forest Show occupied one day and was a relatively local entertainment. In those days it was held on the outskirts of Lyndhurst. Over the years it has grown to become a massive three day event calling itself the New Forest and Hampshire County Show, located at New Park near Brockenhurst. Mr Hayward argues that if further major investment occurs, the show may expand again (the organisers deny this) and there is a grave danger of intensified activity by other users of the site. He further points out that the use of forest tracks for large volumes of recreational traffic, at present confined to three days, is a highly dangerous precedent. In future, other users of the showground might reasonably demand from the Forestry Commission similar facilities, leading to the ruin of a beautiful and quiet part of the Forest. The site is already used for a number of other events each year, although the Forestry Commission as landlord of New Park can control their nature, but not it appears, the number of such attractions.

Both the show committee and the Forestry Commission are prepared to give undertakings that the development proposed would not lead to intensified use of the site or the Forest tracks. No-one doubts the sincerity of these undertakings, but enforcing such guarantees in the distant future is likely to be very difficult. Anyone concerned with the protection of the countryside is familiar with the problem of the developer's foot in the door. He starts with a small inoffensive application and then keeps coming back for more. Gravel extraction, waste disposal and the Dorset oilfield are good, if large examples. It is this that has led to Mr. Hayward's campaign. Perhaps it is not impossible to find some formula which would bind the showground users, the farm tenant and the Forestry Commission in such a way as to prevent any possibility of future growth of the site, the show, its buildings and access

arrangements, but no solution of this sort has yet presented itself. Anything short of such a cast iron guarantee is unlikely to impress so experienced a campaigner as Ralph Hayward.

### **A31 Cadnam to Ringwood Road**

Last year the Government's intention of "improving" the A31 road through the New Forest was announced in its publication "Roads for Prosperity". The proposals produced remarkably little comment at the time as there appeared to be a fairly general assumption that nothing would be done for years ahead - if at all. Now, however, in a welcome departure from previous take it or leave it attitudes, the Department of Transport has been having early discussions with the Forestry Commission and Verderers. It seems that there is likely to be a far more rapid implementation of the scheme than anyone in the Forest had expected.

At this stage there are no fixed proposals beyond those in the published document and it is not until consultants have carried out a study during the next eighteen months that there will be anything on paper for public consultation. However, early indications are that any net land-take from the Forest would be small (if approved by the Verderers) as much of the work could be accommodated within the existing road reservation.

The Verderers have emphasised the importance of visual and sound screening, especially the use of shallow cuttings and earth embankments of the type used so successfully west of Stoney Cross some years ago. Any acquisition of Forest land for this road must be by presentment to the Verderers if it is for more than one acre. This will afford ample opportunity for public objection, but that stage is probably still several years away.

### **Campden House Burley**

The Commoners Defence Association, Verderers and other Forest bodies were distressed to learn of the sale by the County Council of land at Campden House last month. After joining with other bodies on the New Forest Review Group in calling for public agencies to make available surplus land in the Forest as "starter holdings" for commoners, the County Council has ignored all pleas to retain this property and has flouted the Review recommendations. This is yet another item in the long list of the County Council's disregard of Forest interests. Its policies are full of pious words about conserving this unique area, but its actions too often demonstrate a hostile or uncaring attitude. Vigorous protests have been made by local groups.

The sale also represents an early disappointment for the New Forest Heritage Area Committee (now calling itself the New Forest Committee). It was precisely this sort of action which it was hoped the committee would be able to prevent.

## **Drifts and Marking Fees**

Pony drifts or round-ups commence at the beginning August. The first is arranged for Turf Hill near Hale and the drifts will continue every few days until November, the final one being arranged for Ogdens. The drifts are probably the most spectacular, but least publicised events of Forest life. Crowds of sightseers would inevitably impede the efficiency of the drift and could give rise to safety problems. Accordingly, the dates and times of the drifts are not widely available, but many people who walk regularly in the Forest are likely to come across one in progress.

So what are the drifts for? Why risk life and limb (those of the participants and their horses) chasing ponies all over the Forest? They serve several important purposes. Firstly, they are a convenient means of catching foals and other stock required for sale — especially at those drifts later in the season which are just before Beaulieu Road sales. They afford an opportunity to check the health of captured ponies and to administer medicine as appropriate. Finally and perhaps most importantly, they are a means of ensuring that the making fees have been paid and of checking on the number of animals being turned out by individual commoners. In fact the latter checking is very approximate as only a percentage of any owner's stock is actually caught in any year.

Perhaps the subject of "marking fees" needs a little explanation, especially as I have received a mild rebuke from the vice-chairman of the Commoners' Defence for giving a loose layman's definition of these fees in some recent Notes. They are payments made in respect of each head of stock turned out - payments which are due under the Verderers' byelaws and which go towards the financing of the Court. They are often described as "payments for grazing" but this not strictly correct. The commoner turns out his animals by right and free of charge. In theory at least he paid for those rights by an enhanced purchase price or increased rent when he took over his holding. In fact, of course, common land farming is now so uneconomic that the rights themselves probably no longer represent any significant part of the purchase price, but the distinction remains of importance to the commoners. Until the last War there were small payments of a few pence made to the Crown in respect of some rights of common, but inflation long ago made it pointless for the Forestry Commission to continue collection.

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