

NEW FOREST NOTES – DECEMBER 2001

Richardson, King and Driver's New Forest Map

I suppose the most valued treasure in those local private libraries lucky enough to possess a copy is Richardson, King and Driver's remarkable survey of the New Forest, dated 1787. Its huge scale, nearly four inches to one mile, make it an unbelievably vivid and detailed record of the Forest as it was over two hundred years ago. It shows every path, stream and clump of trees – sometimes with forgotten names and all at a scale which is nearly twice that of the current best walkers' map – the Ordnance Survey's Outdoor Leisure Map. To open up Driver's Map is like entering a lost world which existed before railways, before many of the present main roads and even before most of the great timber plantations were made. The principal villages such as Lyndhurst and Brockenhurst were, of course there, but with tiny populations and little housing compared to today. Housing of a different calibre did then exist, but has completely disappeared. The great lodges occupied by the Master Keepers of the Forest, with their surrounding estates, can be traced scattered throughout the woods and heaths. Sometimes, as in the case of Bolderwood, the term "housing" is hardly appropriate, because there then existed a small palace where today all that remains is a comfortable Forest worker's smallholding. The map shows the palace's surrounding parkland with sweeping views over the nearby Forest, its landscaped gardens, ornamental lakes, woods, orchards and farm buildings – all now lost beneath a Douglas fir plantation. At the other extreme, the tiny encroachment plots of cottagers on the Forest's margins are meticulously plotted, coloured red and marked with the letter "i". Land occupation and status was of particular concern to the surveyors, because the map was prepared concurrently with an enquiry into the New Forest which reported in 1789 (the Fifth Report of the Land Revenue Commissioners). At the time, the establishment of the Ordnance Survey was still a little in the future and the first published small-scale Ordnance maps of the Forest did not appear until the first decade of the 19th Century. Driver's Map on the other hand, quickly became the authoritative survey of the Forest and was to remain so for nearly sixty years. Exactly how many editions there were, I do not know. The British Museum map, of which I have a very dog-eared photocopy, is dated 1814, but the original even larger scale drawings on which the map was based survive for most of the walks (sub-divisions of the Forest) and are preserved in the Public Record Office. The New Forest Museum at Lyndhurst holds photographs of these. The last edition accompanied Select Committee Reports on the Forest of 1848-9 and was updated with the early 19th Century plantations.

Original copies of the map in private hands are few and far between. I imagine they must be worth hundreds of pounds each. Most of the great estates have at least one copy in their archives and I know of a dozen or so in other hands. Many more must have been lost or destroyed over the centuries. Unfortunately even photocopies of so large a map are prohibitively expensive, so that most private researchers have, until now, had to rely on the few Driver's Maps held by museums and libraries. That is about to change thanks to the New Forest Association and one of its supporters who are re-issuing the map on CD at the

remarkably modest price of £8.00 including postage (in aid of the charity's funds). A black and white copy of the 1814 edition has been copied, complete with the necessary viewing and printing programmes and comprehensive instructions for use. I have been sent a proof copy to test on my computer and after years of struggling with uncontrollable rolls of ancient photographic paper, it is certainly a great blessing and remarkably clear and easy to use. Moreover, unlimited free copies in the form of crisp A4 prints means that the map can be taken into the field and subjected to all sorts of abuse without worry. The disk comes in an attractive labelled box and should comprise an intriguing Christmas present, although I am warned that if demand is very great it may not be possible to meet all orders before the holiday! Copies are available through the Association's Hon. Secretary, Roger Richmond, Abbot's Well, Frogham, Fordingbridge, Hants. SP6 2JD.

Blocked trackways

The great storm of 1987 felled hundreds of trees and branches across the paths and trackways of the Open Forest. It took a long time to get them cleared. Exactly when the work was carried out, I cannot remember, but it certainly took more than four years of badgering the Forestry Commission before more or less free movement around the Forest was restored. Then, Richard Stride and his team did a remarkable job throughout the Ancient Ornamental Woods, opening up long inaccessible routes and restoring for walkers and riders something of the character of the Forest which existed in the early 20th Century, when such matters were regarded as important by management. Unfortunately the improvement was short-lived. So far as I can see, very little has been done since. Essential routes are now choked with overgrowing vegetation and blocked by innumerable fallen trees – trees which local people are no longer permitted to buy because of conservation restrictions. Meanwhile, money is poured into politically correct recreation projects like the provision of cycle routes and picnic sites. The more essential and basic maintenance of the Forest's infrastructure is ignored. The users of such paths are largely commoners, hunting people, and those who walk or ride quietly to enjoy the Forest for its beauty and solitude. They are evidently very low priority users in the government's eyes – if not actually to be discouraged. If you come to the New Forest seeking high profile recreation, it seems that nothing is too much trouble or cost to meet your demands, but no recreation manager has yet built his career on unobtrusively meeting the needs of quiet local users.

Pony condition

Reports to the Verderers and to the recent Commoners' Defence local meetings have presented an encouraging and confident picture of pony condition this autumn, if laced with the inevitable words of caution about the worst of the winter lying ahead. It is certainly a pleasure to see the vast majority of mares looking in such good order after the considerable problems experienced last spring. Some mares have been removed in poor condition, but they are almost entirely and inevitably confined to those with foals at foot. Such ponies are under particular stress during the winter months, feeding themselves, suckling the foal and

growing a new embryo inside them. It takes an exceptional mare to support such a burden in a difficult season.

This autumn the weather has, for once, been kind to the Forest's animals. During the corresponding period of 2000, the ponies were subjected to almost constant debilitating rain, while 2001 has included the warmest October for 350 years and some unusually dry periods. In the fields, grass has continued to put on some growth for almost a month beyond the average growing season and even on the Forest, feed has continued plentiful. The annual inspection by welfare group officers will take place in early December, but this year the Verderers are not expecting any problems to arise from it. A good start has been made, but the low point – May – is still six months away.

National park announcement

On about the 12th December, rather earlier than they had originally predicted, the Countryside Agency is to give its "advice" to the government on making the New Forest into a national park. Perhaps there may somewhere exist the odd trusting soul who believes that they might have listened to the views of the Forest and abandoned their plans. If so, I have not succeeded in finding him. The almost universal view in the Forest community seems to be that the so-called consultative process was completely meaningless. Since Mr.Prescott had told the Agency that he wanted them to deliver a standard national park, that is exactly what they will do if they can manage it.

After a great deal of discussion, there now seems to be a remarkable degree of unanimity within the Forest organisations. A "standard" national park of the type which the Countryside Agency is trying to impose is regarded as at best unsuitable or, from those of a more forthright manner, downright damaging. It is the view of the main Forest societies – Commoners' Defence, Pony Breeders and New Forest Association, together with many smaller groups and some parish councils. It is also the view of the Verderers, New Forest District and County Councils. Even the New Forest Consultative Panel is of much the same opinion after an eloquent address from the vice-chairman of the Commoners Defence. I doubt if the Countryside Agency will be very interested, preferring to emphasise its support outside the Forest and among recreational groups who would be the principal beneficiaries of a park. As for possible alternatives, almost everyone has different ideas, with a majority favouring the rather ill defined concept of a "tailor-made solution". If the Norfolk Broads were worthy of such consideration, why does the Countryside Agency now regard the New Forest as so inferior as not to be entitled to its own legislation ?

The Countryside Agency states that once the government has the advice (rubber stamp might be a more appropriate term), the designation order will be published and advertisements will appear. The order will be on deposit for 28 days. It is at this stage that objections must be submitted to DEFRA. Twenty-eight days would encompass the holiday period which would neatly obscure the deadline and make things difficult for objectors. I understand that for this reason it is possible that the designation may be slightly delayed. The exact timing for making objections is therefore not entirely clear, but it is obviously important

that as wide a range of objections as possible should be put in, because upon them may depend the right of the objector to appear or be represented at the public enquiry. Planning for that is already advancing well. Anyone needing further information and/or assistance in preparing objections (once the designation order is published) should contact the Commoners' Defence or other opposing groups who will be pleased to help.

Anthony Pasmore.