

## New Forest Notes – January 1994

### **Access to the Inclosures**

THE New Forest suffers from a number of cyclical problems which emerge, from time to time as Forestry Commission staff or policies change. One of the most controversial of these is the locking Of Inclosure gates or even their complete removal. We seem now to be experiencing a revival of this old problem and the Commoners' Defence Association has sought the support of the Verderers in protecting the interests of its members and of the public generally. When one considers that the Inclosures (plantations made for the production of ship timber) comprise over one-third of the entire Crown lands of the Forest and that they contain by far the greater part of the Forests formal rides, grass paths and gravel roads, the seriousness of the problem becomes obvious. Any attempt at restricting access is a major blow to the public's, interest in the Forest and to all those local people who use the Inclosures on horseback or foot, for business or pleasure.

It must be said straight away that the Forestry Commission's concern to exclude unauthorised vehicles and grazing livestock is perfectly proper and will no doubt receive almost universal support. For this reason, the locking of vehicle gates where there is an adjoining wicket is perfectly acceptable. The agisters and others needing vehicular access for their work all carry keys. Similarly, if the Commission wishes to construct the so called "box gates" which are used on the fenced main road margins and which are proof against being left open by trippers, this also would be welcome and would ensure that the Inclosures are kept free of grazing stock, if at some cost. It is the arbitrary destruction of Inclosure tracks and the locking or removal of gates which has always caused concern to the local community.

Most of the Inclosures were made in the 19th century with the design and layout being dictated by an Inclosure Commission which included a number of the local gentry. Almost by definition, these gentlemen were hunting enthusiasts and the rides and gates so much valued public today reflect the concerns of these Commissioners. Many of the tracks may serve little purpose for timber extraction, but they are a vital communication network within the Forest. In the- early days of the Inclosures it was common for the large gates to be locked outside the hunting season, although the wickets were, always open. However, as the influence of the hunting aristocracy declined, the Forestry Commission tried to economise by doing away with "redundant" rides and gates and by locking even the wickets.

The New Forest Association, among others resisted these attempts and in a London conference of interested parties in 1927, sent the following resolution to the Verderers. "This conference deprecates the locking of gates across rides in the Crown enclosures as detrimental to the inhabitants of the New Forest and the public." The Association won temporary concessions in several spheres of Forest management at that time, but after the War the Commission again set about trying to limit access to the Inclosures. A survey in 1970 revealed fifteen Inclosures in which there had been recent destruction of rides by planting across them. Locking of gates on grass rides was not then a major problem, but in eight Inclosures deer fencing was causing material interference with the ride network. The almost total abandonment of minor ride maintenance, formerly of a very high standard, was already (and remains) a major impediment to the use of the Inclosure track network.

Now it appears we are to face a new period of "review" with some Inclosures already almost totally locked and a steady trickle of ride destruction and gate removal. The Commission has promised the Verderers that there will be consultation (of undefined scope) on future proposals, but this hardly meets the case. This must be an instance in which the Forest societies and other users can combine in resisting any further loss of the Inclosure ride network resulting from planting- over, locking or gate removal.

### **Notices on the Forest**

The Forestry Commission land agent has an uphill and not always very successful struggle against unauthorised notices placed on the Forest, usually by the proprietors of commercial establishments who feel that they have a divine right to advertise their services on Forest land, irrespective of the byelaws. The margins of the fenced roads where there is a divided interest between the Forestry Commission and the County Council seem particularly vulnerable to this form of heavy weight flyposting. On the non-Forestry commission land (chiefly the Adjacent Commons), things are even worse with only an overworked and often rather uninterested planning authority to challenge the advertisers. In one gross example a tearoom is displaying four separate advertising signs on the Forest at weekends, without any apparent challenge.

Various committees have considered the problem of advertising on the Forest, have reported at length and, as usual produced no material improvement. I suppose one can have some slight passing sympathy for the hard pressed private business trying to improve trade at the Forests expense, but utterly unnecessary public authority advertising is an entirely different matter.

The New Forest District Council, planning authority for the whole Forest, which sought to set standards of good design, is the latest of such offenders. I had always assumed that road naming was the business of the County Council and it has been carried out by them in the Forest in a reasonable and fairly discreet manner - give or take a few superfluous signs. Now however, the District Council has taken to erecting rather garish road name signs on minor trackways. I have seen one on a cul-de-sac lane with no more than six houses. The need for signs may be arguable and the design a matter of taste, but for the District Council to advertise itself on each board is unforgivable. I can only assume that it represents a piece of intended image building in advance of the local government review. Similarly we are now being subjected to the disjointed head logo of the New Forest Committee on every 40m.p.h. sign in the Forest. Surely it is time for all concerned with signing the Forest to accept a strong presumption against any form of notice unless it is crucial for road safety and against all forms of advertising, whether for private profit or public image-puffing.

### **County Council Rubbish Tipping**

A second criticism of public authority activity in the Forest will no doubt make it seem that I have finished in a very bad frame of mind. I wish that it was not necessary, but a complaint from the Commoners about the state of the County Councils chipping dump at Beaulieu Aerodrome, cannot be allowed to pass without support. In response to a presentment made at the November court, a party of Verderers inspected the site which is supposed to be used solely for the storage of Chipping's for use in surfacing roads . It lies in the middle of the open heath approached by a long access road which is locked against unauthorised vehicles. What the inspecting team found was sordid heaps of

rubbish, some of which I have since been told is the waste material from cleaning tarring machines. Polythene and plastic was blowing about all over the place and the surrounding Forest was decorated with a liberal scattering of soiled plastic road signs. Conditions were, in short, disgusting. There seems to be a widespread assumption in some public departments that the New Forest is wasteland and can be treated as such with impunity. The old County Council dump at Setley was not much better and when the Verderers finally succeeded in closing it down, they agreed not to take action against the illegal chipping dump at Beaulieu for a period of ten years. Having seen the County's response to this concession I for one regret that it was ever given. The highway authority has written that the New Forest is " a special and unique area" Which it is incumbent upon the authorities to maintain and enhance, but actions speak louder than words. No doubt the Forestry Commission would, rightly, prosecute a private householder found depositing bags of refuse in the Forest, but I do not expect to see such action in this case.