

## **New Forest Notes - June 1994**

### **Damage to Holmsley Inclosure**

An unpleasant aspect of a Verderers work is that so much time is spent looking at disagreeable things - broken fences, poor animals, encroachments and so on. Perhaps because of this I have for too long put aside suggestions that I should "look at what the Forestry Commission is doing to Holmsley Inclosure". The Inclosures are, after all, not strictly within the Verderers jurisdiction. However, the clamour of complaint became irresistible, so I looked.

Holmsley is one of those woods which, if it had not been for wartime fellings, would now be one of the gems of the New Forest. It was planted with oak in 1811 and because of its landscape qualities by the 1940s, felling was carried out in a patchwork fashion so that even today narrow strips of the original trees have survived the ravages of chainsaw and storm. In 1948, much of the wartime felling area was replanted with conifers of various sorts, mostly Norway Spruce and Douglas Fir. In those days it was standard practise for the Forestry Commission to replace hardwoods with conifers. Large areas of this post planting succumbed to the great storm of 1990, leaving the Commission to replant once again. This time, however, they chose to adopt a technique which is relatively new within the statutory Inclosures of the New Forest. They deep ploughed the site with a machine of incredible power which crashed through tree stumps, piles of cut timber, drainage channels and everything else in its path. The resulting chaos is almost unbelievable., although now it is being temporarily softened by the new spring growth of vegetation. There is a rather pointless discussion going on as to whether the device used was a plough or a scarifier, but whatever it was the physical and visual consequences are quite unacceptable in an area such as the New Forest, whether or not they constitute good commercial forestry on a Scottish mountainside. In fact while I hesitate to question the expertise of the trained commercial tree growers, I find it hard to see how a total disruption of the intricate hand-dug drainage system of the Napoleonic period can benefit tree growth. I walked the water logged battle field which has resulted from the work and I have seldom seen planting in this Forest look so sickly. Tiny Douglas Fir, dead and dying are to be seen everywhere, standing in a sea of stagnant water or saturated soil.

Bearing in mind that the New Forest is so highly prized for its landscape, scientific properties and recreational value, it is difficult to see what could have prompted this work. I do not object to modern forestry techniques just for the sake of doing so, but the Forests Inclosures have successfully produced generations of trees without such devastation and there is no reason to suppose that they could not continue to do so under gentler and more traditional management. Fortunately, this is a story with a happy ending as the Deputy Surveyor assures me that the machinery employed in Holmsley will not be used again in the Forest. I hope this assurance is suitably recorded in the Queens House for the benefit of his successors long after Holmsley has been forgotten.

### **Holidays Hill Reptiliary**

The Forestry Commission has this month stirred up trouble for itself in another part of the Forest, this time with a parking meter rather than a plough. At Holidays Hill Cottage off the A35 west of Lyndhurst, there exists a reptiliary comprising a series of concrete chambers in which are displayed New Forest reptiles of various type. The attraction is reputed to have started as a keepers hobby over

twenty years ago and has since grown to become one of the most popular tourist magnets in the Forest. The reptiliary is carefully landscaped with "natural" interiors for the concrete tanks so that the inmates of this miniature zoo show no obvious signs of distress - not that the emotional state of reptiles is very easy to assess. The location of the site, however, is about as unsuitable as it would be possible to find. It is deep in the Forest and approached over a long gravel road through the woods, thus ensuring maximum disturbance in an otherwise unspoilt area. If we must have such attractions (the unadulterated Forest supposedly being too dull for the visitor), it is now generally accepted that they should be located outside the crown lands and preferably on the Forest's boundary.

If I remember correctly, the original establishment of this site was opposed as was the first phase of upgrading and car-parking construction in 1976. Now the Commission has broken new ground by the provision of a pay and display meter in the car-park which seeks to relieve the visitor of £1 per car and which has certainly ruffled a good many feathers locally. It is claimed that the meter was installed and the site again upgraded without the usual consultation. Certainly the Verderers knew nothing of it.

To my mind, neither the meter itself, nor the process of charging visitors is particularly offensive, although why anyone should bother to pay is quite beyond me. By verge parking on the gravel access road and a pleasant stroll of less than one hundred yards, the visitor can avoid even the appearance of avoiding the meter. I doubt if the Commission could successfully claim this as "wilful evasion of parking charges" under its bye-laws. The meter may have sparked off this controversy, but it has taken the New Forest Association to point a finger at the real problems presented by the reptiliary - its unsuitable location and extremely dubious legality. The Forestry Commission is permitted to use its Inclosures for the production of timber and for that only. At the time of the Denny oil inquiry it was made clear that the establishment of an oil well would contravene the New Forest Acts. Similarly, in order to legalise the Set Thorns camp site, the area has technically to be "thrown open" to become part of the Open Forest and subject to the Verderers jurisdiction and the payment of compensation. There would seem no difference of principle here - snake display is not timber production any more than oil drilling or camping. The Association is rightly pressing for an answer to this important if technical question. Closure or relocation of the site may well have to be considered.

### **Nesting Notices and a Bovine Problem**

Regular users of the Forests car parks cannot have failed to see the Forestry Commissions new notices appealing to dog walkers to keep their pets under close control during the nesting season. I suppose there may be some owners who heed this request, although I must say I have seen little sign of it. My experience at Black Gutter car park off the Fordingbridge road illustrates the point well.

On one of the few really beautiful days this spring and during a weekday morning when the Forest is relatively empty, the sole occupant of Black Gutter car park was a smart yellow camper van. It was parked so close to a new nesting warning that the driver could not have failed to see it. The van was deserted, but in the valley below was a woman and a child, together with no less than six dogs of

various sizes rampaging up and down Black Gutter with every curlew for miles screaming. So much for the Commissions apparent faith in public goodwill and the value of education !

A not unrelated problem arose out of a recent Verderers' discussion of new Ministry of Agriculture regulations on cattle ear tags. The new rules require the display of a special identification tag in the right ear, but the Ministry officials had evidently not reckoned on the special problems presented by the New Forest. One of my colleagues complained that he would certainly be unable to comply with the rules as his cow has no right ear - it was torn off by loose dogs in the Forest.