

## New Forest Notes – March 1997

### **Forest parking charges**

In March 1996, the Deputy Surveyor dipped his toe into the water of charging for use of New Forest car parks and found it rather hot. His initial presentation to the Verderers was to test their reaction to the principle of charging and he received a cautious reply. The Court said that it would consider charging in individual parks as part of an overall strategy. In January of this year, the Commission renewed its application, this time with slightly more detail. We know, for example, that the first targets are from Bolderwood to Brockenhurst along the Ornamental Drive. Charges are also proposed for Commission sites on the outskirts of Lyndhurst and Burley to tie in with the District Council's proposals for their village car parks. In other words, the Deputy Surveyor does not want his parks filled with commuters' and shoppers' vehicles displaced by the Council's charges. However, the Lyndhurst and Burley proposals are really a side issue, and it is the true Forest car parks which present the greatest problem.

At their February meeting, the Verderers had the opportunity to ask questions of the Commission's recreation manager, Mike Seddon. His replies were, as always, helpful and efficient. In my view at least, they were also far from reassuring. My assessment of reaction to the Commission's plans is that there are two distinct camps among those who influence Forest opinion. Firstly, there is a relatively small group opposed to any sort of charging whatsoever, for car parking or anything else. Then there are those who, while recognising charging as a legitimate conservation tool, believe that the Commission's present proposals are ill-considered and probably wrongly motivated. In the absence of radical alteration to the plans, this majority group will almost certainly make sure that they are rejected. I have certainly not met anyone, outside the Commission, who is happy with what is now proposed.

All those opposed to the Commission's present plans would probably have slightly different ideas as to what constitute the main defects. However, the areas of contention may be summarised as follows, Firstly, the charging is directed at a group of honeypot sites in an area of the Forest which is capable of withstanding reasonable levels of recreational pressure. Such sites, although profitable targets for charging, are among the last which should be dealt with. Charge-resistant visitors displaced from them, will put extra pressure on vulnerable parts of the surrounding Forest. Mr. Seddon feels that such displacement is unlikely. Those concerned with the protection of the Forest believe that it is the parks in remote areas which, if not closed down, should be the first to be subjected to charges while the honeypots remain free. The Commission seems unable to agree to this and it is difficult to accept that their motive is other than financial.

Legal control of verge and highway parking is regarded by many as an essential preliminary to any car parking charges at all. The Forestry Commission, however, while giving "serious consideration" to the problem, seems to think that the parking charges should be approved first and that the inevitable chaos outside the parks can be sorted out afterwards. That at least must be the inference from their failure to bring forward any concrete proposals. The Commission has also failed to explain what is to happen on the innumerable lengths of verge within the Forest which it does not

own and which therefore fall outside the scope of any present or future bylaws. If there were no other objections to the submitted scheme, it must fall at this hurdle alone.

The shunted pressure from the Crown Forest to the privately owned Adjacent Commons which would follow from any charging scheme, is acknowledged by the Commission as a problem, but not apparently one of theirs. In other words, the National Trust, County Council and other commons owners must fight their own battles against recreational pressure and accept the consequences of what the Commission chooses to do on its own land. It is not an argument likely to commend itself to those on the receiving end of the policy.

Mr. Seddon's answers to questions on the appearance of the meters, their power source, collection of discarded parking tickets, local residents' permits, protection for commoners and security were more complete and reassuring. However, these are very much secondary matters.

The Verderers will consider the subject again this month, including the support (if any) for the scheme which may be expressed at the next Court.

### **A Forgotten Landscape**

From time to time I have expressed concern at the endless stream of surveys, assessments, and reports supposedly done to assist or direct the management of the New Forest. It is a refreshing change to discover one which makes no claims to such a worthy purpose and is a straightforward piece of research for its own sake. The National Trust has recently commissioned an archaeological and landscape assessment of its large landholding in the Forest with a view to recording the rich and largely unpublished store of ancient sites in its care. The work is being undertaken by the New Forest Section of the Hampshire Field Club whose programme of field research throughout the New Forest over forty years has built up a very detailed record of nearly a thousand previously unknown archaeological sites. Not far short of a hundred of these are on Trust land. To avoid theft by metal detector operators and others, most of this research has to remain unpublished.

I am aware that archaeology in any form less spectacular than television's "Time Team" leaves most people cold. Certainly the National Trust's New Forest antiquities, while fascinating to local historians, would probably be regarded by the public as near the top of any dull-subject league.

However, one remarkable site has come to light which is quite unique in the Forest. It is now being surveyed.

In 1979 the National Trust purchased Half Moon Common at Bramshaw from the Paultons Estate and had to pay rather heavily for the privilege. The common is sandy heathland dotted with Scots pine and containing a number of low hills. On one of these is a little crescent-shaped earthwork which gives its name to the common. It marks the site of some ornamental planting dating from the 18th century. We know from a map of 1759 that an elaborate system of grand avenues based on Paultons House once existed and that the Half Moon earthwork marked the termination of one of these. What was not known until recently is that a precise planting record of this avenue survives on the common. At the moment it looks as though every tree planted was marked by a low mound. They included outliers from the main avenue arranged in a complex pattern. As Paultons Estate declined and was turned over to agriculture and forestry — more recently to dinosaurs — all

trace of the formal landscaping was destroyed, except here on the common. We know that Capability Brown undertook landscaping work at Paultons, but I am told he was in the business of eliminating formal layouts rather than creating them. The avenue would therefore seem to date from an earlier period.

Work on the Trust's property is likely to continue for some months with a number of Section members assisting with fieldwork and documentary research. (

### **Rams**

For some people this heading may bring back unhappy memories of the sheep wars which plagued the Godshill area until about two years ago, but I have in mind the inanimate variety — hydraulic rams. A hydraulic ram is a rather ingenious form of water pump which depends upon the flow of water in a stream to pump part of that flow to a higher level. A glance at the 1909 edition of the Ordnance Survey's six inch maps shows many such pumps located on private land in and around the Forest, but presumably they all fell into disuse as piped supplies spread throughout the district. Only on Exmoor have I seen or rather heard them in use: they make a very distinct monotonous clanking noise.

I know of only one hydraulic ram which operated on the open Forest and that was at Ober Water. It served the fountains at Rhinefield House and was the subject of some furious litigation between the Verderers and the Office of Woods in the 1880s. However, Mr. H. C. Wheeler, of Fern-down, has written to me enquiring about the remains of a ram and ram house in Water Copse In-closure at Brockenhurst. He tells me that he lived at Beachern Wood from 1927 until 1946 and can remember playing on the remains of the ram at that time. Who or what the pump served remains a mystery. Apparently the Forestry Commission has suggested a military origin, but I would have thought that rather unlikely. A supply to New Park would seem more probable. I (and no doubt Mr. Wheeler) would be very interested to hear if anyone knows the history of the remains.