

## **NEW FOREST NOTES SEPTEMBER 2007**

### **Development of shops in the camp sites**

Those residents and traders who watched Forest politics in the 1990s will remember that there have been repeated rows over the attempts to set up shops within the camp sites on the Crown lands. When the sites were wholly controlled by the Forestry Commission, the wardens they employed sold various goods to the campers and the Commission made determined efforts to widen the scope of such sales. Of course no consent had ever been given by the Verderers for shops of any form within the camps, so the whole operation was run under the counter from the camp offices. However, consent was eventually given for the sale of bread, milk, bottled water, tent pegs and freezer packs. Such goods were supposed to represent emergency supplies for campers arriving ill-equipped, although why New Forest visitors should not be expected to plan for their holidays like everyone else, I could never understand. All this happened in 1997, but the Commission remained dissatisfied with the commercial opportunities the Verderers had provided for them and a year later it tried to force the Court to back down and permit gas sales as well. The Verderers listened carefully to the Forestry Commission's arguments and to the counter presentments made by local traders who saw this as the thin end of a wedge which would eventually damage their shop sales. They also heard from amenity groups who hated the idea of further commercialisation of the camp sites. When the decision (to refuse consent) was eventually made, the Verderers considered only what would be good for the Forest and its traditional character, ignoring the competing commercial interests of the camp managers and the local traders. So matters have remained from 1998 to the present day, but of course the captive market of huge numbers of campers is irresistible and it seems that a new attempt is underway to force the Verderers to concede much wider selling rights within the camps. This time the approach is ingenious: I have even heard it described as devious.

There has been much effort to promote local farm produce under the title of "New Forest marque". That must be a good thing and if local farmers, local shops and the visitors can all benefit without damage to the Forest, I am sure everyone will be delighted. The promoters of New Forest marque have now, it seems, been seen as a possible Trojan horse to break into camp shop sales. In other words, the idea is to say to the Verderers, "Surely you will not refuse sales on camp sites which will benefit local farmers?" If the Verderers agree, the door will be then be open to full-scale trading. I am not sure that the Verderers' Court is quite so gullible as to fall for this. Last time it carefully ignored all trading considerations and made its judgement on what was best for the Forest. So, I imagine, it will do this time. In any case, I can hardly see that allowing direct sales to campers, cutting out the reasonable ambitions of local shopkeepers (who must serve the community all year round and not just in the peak holiday season) is really in the interests of local producers. They need someone to sell the beef when the visitors are all back in their home towns and shopping at Tesco.

### **Badgers and bovine TB**

A couple of months ago, I wrote about the outbreak of bovine tuberculosis and the possibility of local badgers becoming infected. I was then taken to task for suggesting that badger populations are very high in the Forest. I suppose that whether or not the population is “high” depends on what you regard as being the Forest. I certainly did not have in mind the barren core of heaths and woods, but the Forest as a whole. I can well imagine that badgers are reluctant to live in the middle of an unproductive heath, but there are also about 20,000 acres of private property, much of it relatively rich farmland and copses within the perambulation. This land is as much New Forest as Beaulieu Heath. It is such farmland that comprises much of the commoners’ holdings and on which their cattle spend part of the year. I can only judge from hearsay as to other farmers’ experience, but in my own part of the Forest we are practically under siege by badgers.

My holding comprises isolated fields scattered across three villages along the north edge of the Forest. When I first came here, forty years ago, one seldom saw a badger or even traces of badger activity. In those days local people used to go to the large sett in Millersford Plantation to watch what was then a rare animal - but not any more. Now there are setts within a few yards of every one of my fields and signs of badger activity are everywhere. Even in my farmyard there is a latrine area while my neighbour’s hen houses are under regular threat. My own aviary I have to protect with an electric fence six inches above the ground, while there are badgers crashing about my garden most nights. A couple of years ago there was a terrible row in the early hours and no amount of shouting or shining lights from the house could persuade them to desist. Eventually I went out with a torch and discovered two badgers fighting in a water trough. They only agreed to break it up when I stood over them with a light.

I have no particular objection to badgers as a species, but I certainly feel very uneasy about their presence around my livestock, however reassuring are the statements of the badger support groups. There is too much misery among colleagues in the West Country resulting from tuberculosis for anyone to be complacent.

### **The road to nowhere**

Roads are the modern curse of the New Forest. Noise from them wrecks what would otherwise be peaceful and remote places. Litter from the fouls both woods and heaths, while wildlife and livestock are killed wholesale. Speed limits are universally ignored and pressure for the construction of more and better routes threatens the integrity of the Forest itself – but it was not always so. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century roads were regarded as picturesque and were frequently included in views chosen by artists. Centuries before that there was a pattern of Roman roads across the Forest which is still only dimly understood. For example there is the famous road from Applemore to Lepe, the authenticity of which has been challenged from time to time. Then there is the undoubted road which roughly followed the A 31 and which was excavated at Cadnam some years ago. A branch road from Minstead to Fritham has been suggested, and another controversial Roman alignment has been imagined as following the B roads north from Cadnam towards Downton. Of recent discoveries and theories, only the road from Fritham towards Pitts Wood is really convincing, with a superb length surviving at Ashleycross.

I am inclined to leave Roman road identification to the experts and perhaps the most intriguing of all the Forest's lost roads is almost certainly very much later in date. It can be found east of the A 337 north of Lyndhurst, diverging from the existing road by only a few degrees near Broughton Road. It then runs north over Foldsgate Hill and appears as a 16ft wide carriageway bounded by two side ditches and low banks on a sandy hill west of Fair Cross. Here the total width of the earthworks is about 55ft. Then, inexplicably, it disappears completely in the woods near Little Fox Hill. It seems never to have continued further north, as substantial causeways and bridges would have been necessary for a continuation into Furzey Lawn. Was it never completed, or is it some form of purely ornamental ride such as that made by the Duke of Bolton from Emery Down to Burley Lodge in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century? At the moment there are no answers to these questions from either archaeologists or historians, but in a way it is comforting that the Forest is able to preserve unexplained a few of its mysteries.

### **John Broughton**

This summer has seen the death of a remarkable man who was both a New Forest commoner and a veterinary surgeon. Indeed, John Broughton's pony brand –"VET" made a convenient advertising slogan and was well known throughout the north of the Forest. John specialised in equine work and as a result of a lifetime's experience, he was able to inspire immense and usually justified confidence amongst his clients. One had the feeling that if John could not solve a horse problem, it was likely that nobody could. I remember once when a favourite mare of my father's was hit on the then unfenced A31 road and suffered a broken leg, he and John Broughton decided to try to save her. The usual treatment for such an injury is a bullet. Somehow or other John managed to patch her up and although the leg healed badly twisted, she went on to live for many years and to breed and gallop as though nothing had happened.

John Broughton was also interested in some of those perennial problems which plague horse keepers, such as acorn and ragwort poisoning. He once told me of an experiment he carried out in which a group of New Forest ponies was turned into a field of newly cut ragwort – with no ill effects whatever. It is always said that wilted ragwort is particularly attractive and lethal to horses and it is an experiment I don't think I would like to try myself.

Eventually John retired from professional work, but he continued to ride hard, well into old age. He was one of the great post-war characters of the New Forest and will be much missed.

Anthony Pasmore