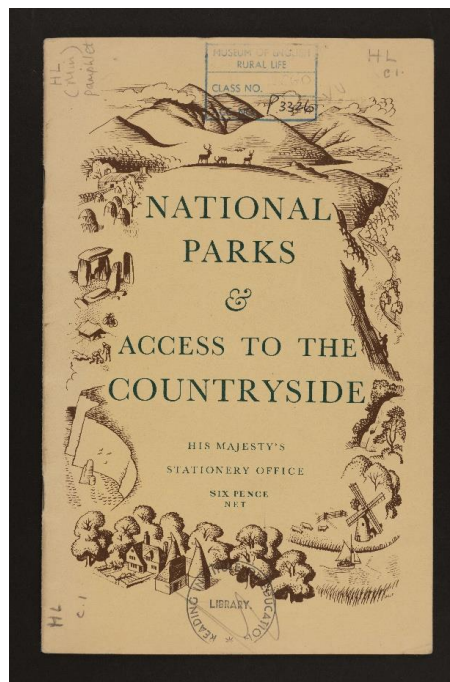


25. National Parks

In this response, the Landscape Architect Mark Loxton uses a booklet from the collection as a reason to explore the early history of National Parks. This small volume was published in 1950, on the eve of the establishment of the first National Parks the following year, in 1951. Through a combination of striking wood cut images of rural scenes and detailed text, it tells the story of hard-fought rights for landscape protection and countryside access, the prevention of the enclosure of common land, and the extraordinary establishment of protected national landscapes.

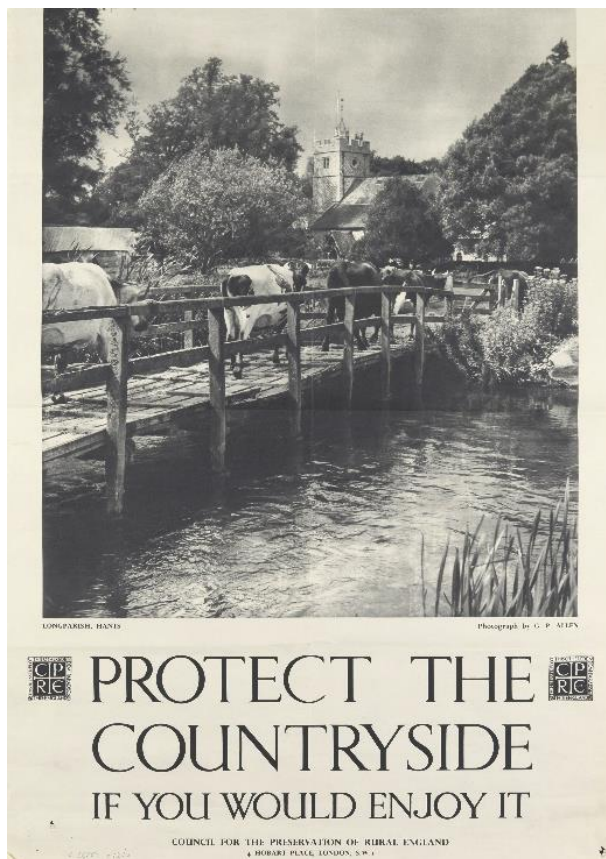
Ministry of Town and Country Planning, National Parks and Access to the Countryside (London: HMSO, 1950)



Illustrations of varied landscapes on the cover of *National Parks and Access to the Countryside* (MERL LIBRARY PAMPHLET 2860 BOX 07/05).

A campaign for National Parks started in 1884 with the “Access to Mountains (Scotland) Bill” which was put forward by James Bryce MP. This did not succeed but over time his efforts influenced many others to try again to establish legislation for greater access to the countryside. During this period the enclosure and restriction of access to common land brought a great deal of public resentment. Although The General Enclosure Act of 1865 ended private enclosure this still continued in part. As a result the Commons Preservation Society was founded whose members through legal means prevented new enclosures taking place, including Hampstead Heath, but “the need for further legislation remained.”

In addition to the loss of common land there was also concern with the preservation and beauty of the countryside and a need to stop "the process of rural desecration" The National Trust was incorporated in 1895 under the Companies Act to "hold and administer certain tracts of country and to ensure the preservation of their beauty." This was confirmed by statute in 1907. In 1926, the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) was formed.



CPRE 'Protect the Countryside' poster showing an image of Longparish, Hampshire (MERL SR 3CPRE F/2/4)

These voluntary organisations did much to publicise the need for change and the use of compulsory powers through legislation to rectify these growing concerns. The CPRE also campaigned for the creation of National Parks.

In 1929 the then Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, appointed the Addison Committee to investigate a means of creating a network of "nature reserves and nature sanctuaries" to safeguard and protect flora and fauna from " disorderly development and spoliation". The Committee also examined ways to improve pedestrian access to and within areas of natural beauty and the practicalities of establishing National Parks. The Committee's report was presented to Parliament in 1931 but no further progress was made. A year later in April 1932 an act of wilful trespass by over 500 walkers took place at Kinder Scout, open moorland within the Peak District in Derbyshire. This together with similar protests in other parts of the country resulted in substantial publicity and pressure on Government to act.

By 1939 some progress had been made with the passing of the Law of Property Act, the Town and Country Planning Acts 1925 and 1932 and the Rights of Way Act 1932. However "the piecemeal nature of this legislation had left much that was unsatisfactory in the machinery for giving people what they demanded and the problem was as yet by no means resolved." This being the protection and access to the countryside.



A railway poster from 1932, which hints at the rising popularity of rambling in this period (MERL 2009/16).

In 1947, two Committee reports, "Footpaths and Access to the Countryside" and "National Parks" were published under the chairmanship of Sir Arthur Hobhouse. Even though the Committee had considered the experience of other countries in setting up National Parks, given the density of population and the extensive industrialisation of Britain, it was recommended that only the "aesthetic and education values of areas of beautiful country should be recognised by Statute". The Committee recommended the creation of twelve National Parks these being: the Lake District, North Wales, the Peak District, Dartmoor, the Yorkshire Dales, the Pembrokeshire Coast, Exmoor, the South Downs, the Roman Wall, the North Yorkshire Moors, the Brecon Beacons and the Black Mountains.

For footpaths and access to the countryside, the Committee recommended a survey of all rights of way, a tribunal to settle disputes, a mechanism for the closure, diversion and creation of new rights of way and long distance footpaths. All these recommendations were incorporated into "The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. A triumph for the efforts made by the many individuals and societies over 65 years.

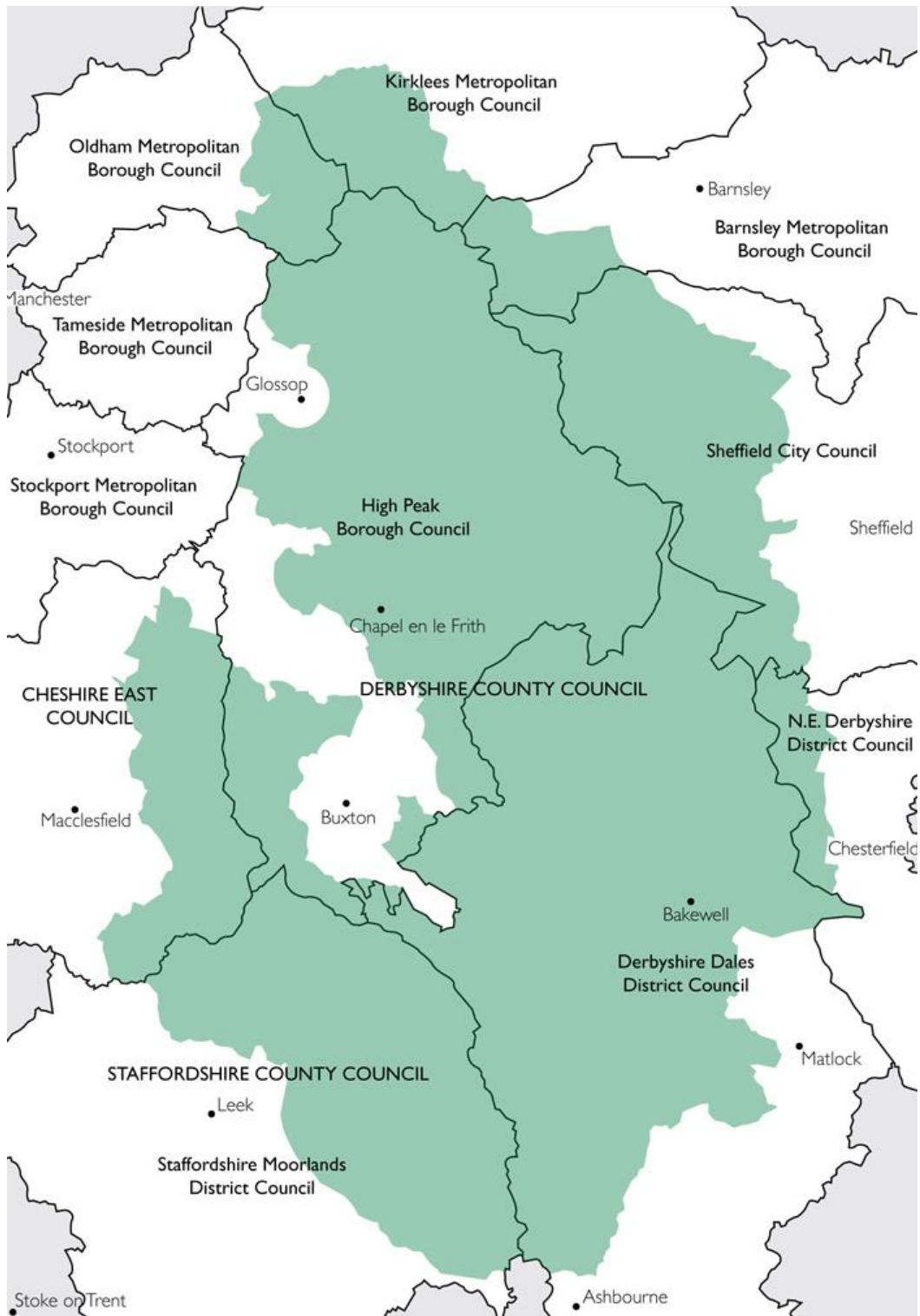


1934 photograph by Eric Guy showing a bridge over the River Dove in what would later become the Peak District National Park (MERL P DX289 PH1/256).

In 1951, the Peak District was the first area to be designated as a National Park. Extending across parts of the counties of Derbyshire, Yorkshire, Staffordshire and Cheshire, the park covers 1,438 square kilometres (555 square miles). With over 13 million visitors each year the Peak District is the most accessible of the English National Parks being within easy reach of the large cities of Greater Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield. Visitors come to enjoy the tranquillity, as well as taking part in many activities including walking, hiking, cycling, climbing, caving and visiting the scenic local towns and villages and associated cultural heritage.

The Park is centred within a beautiful and varied landscape, which ranges from limestone dales with rare flora, including orchids, to peaty gritstone moors with heather, bilberry and sphagnum moss. Moorland bird species include Ring Ouzel, Golden Plover, Red Grouse and Curlew. This habitat is also home to Mountain Hares.

The guardian of this ancient landscape is The Peak District National Park Authority whose objectives are to “conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Peak District and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the area's special qualities”. Although most of the land within the park is privately owned, the Authority achieves its purpose through partnerships and working with local landowners and farmers.



This map shows the extent of the Peak District National Park.

The Peak District was the first National Park in England, followed by the Lake District, and Dartmoor, both confirmed later in the same year 1951. The North York Moors in 1952, Yorkshire Dales and Exmoor in 1954, Northumberland in 1956, the Broads 1989, the New Forest in 2006 and the South Downs in 2010. This totals 10 National Parks covering an area equivalent to 9% of the total land area for England.



Parkhouse Hill and Chrome Hill in the Peak District National Park (Courtesy and Copyright Chris Gilbert).

In Wales the first National Park was Snowdonia in 1951, followed by Pembrokeshire in 1952 and Brecon Beacons in 1957. The total area of these parks covers an area of 20% of Wales.

The Scottish Parliament passed the National Parks (Scotland) Act in 2000 which resulted in two National Parks Loch Lomond and The Trossachs in 2002 and the Cairngorms in 2003. The total area of these two parks covers an area of approximately 0.08% of the total for Scotland.

There are no national parks in Northern Ireland although a park within the Mourne Mountains has been suggested.

Since 1997 each National Park in England and Wales is managed by a National Park Authority who have to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the park area and promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment by the public of each park's special qualities. The National Park Authorities' planning powers vary only slightly from other authorities, but the policies and their interpretation are stricter than elsewhere. Where conflict arises between development and conservation the 'Sandford Principle', conservation comes first. The Park Authorities in Scotland have a similar framework.

Future Challenges to National Parks and Access to the Countryside: The story continues into the present day with the *Landscape Review* led by Julian Glover published in 2019. The report commissioned by the Government was to examine the workings and condition of the National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB's). The principle recommendation is to establish a *National Landscape Service* incorporating all of the National Parks together with all AONB's. The purpose of such a governing body would be to help strengthen and improve the current situation as well as to put the preservation of natural beauty at the core of the recommended changes. Other pertinent issues include: climate change, the need to plant more trees and to control upland catchments to avert flood risks. The report also identified a need for more reliable funding.

Further Information (online):

For more information about the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Booklet see: [MERL LIBRARY PAMPHLET 2860 BOX 07/05](#)

For more about CPRE holdings see: <https://merl.reading.ac.uk/collections/council-for-the-protection-of-rural-england-cpre-archive/>

For more about Council for National Parks holdings see: <https://merl.reading.ac.uk/collections/council-for-national-parks/>

Glover, J. (2019) *The Landscapes review*. Final report, September 2019. Defra, London. See: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/833726/landscapes-review-final-report.pdf

Mark Loxton has written this response in connection with his role as one of the Friends of the Landscape Archive at Reading (FOLAR) – to find out more about FOLAR see: <https://www.folar.uk/>

FOLAR

Friends of the Landscape Archive at Reading