



From: David Parks
Website: Prehistoric Dartmoor Walks

To: Dr Kevin Bishop
Dartmoor National Park Authority,
Parke,
Bovey Tracy
Newton Abbot
Devon TQ13 9JQ

1st November 2021

Re: DNPA Review of Dartmoor Commons Act Byelaws - Consultation

Dear Dr Bishop,

I just want to make my views known about the proposed new byelaws. In my view these proposals are illiberal, discriminatory, disproportionate and will fail to address any of the problems we face today on Dartmoor.

In my view it is entirely the wrong approach and I agree with Tavistock and Buckfastleigh Town councils that these proposals should be dropped in their entirety.

The existing byelaws have not been used to tackle problems. If the current restrictions cannot be enforced then all we are doing by creating new restrictions is criminalising and alienating responsible users of Dartmoor.

There are issues that do need addressing and I think the way forward is to harness the great resource which is the community of people who use Dartmoor recreationally, who live or work on Dartmoor.

Laws will not stop people having barbeques in a dangerous way - education is the only way of doing this.

Laws will not stop littering and anti-social behaviour; education is the way to do this.

We should be encouraging people, especially young people to enjoy Dartmoor and to learn how to enjoy the countryside in a responsible way - not threaten them with fines for camping and leaving no trace in the wrong place or in a 4-person tent or in a group of more than 6.

DNPA should be working **with** the walking, cycling, back-packing communities and not imposing restrictions.

Those of us who oppose the new byelaws do so because we care passionately about Dartmoor.

We need solutions that work, not knee-jerk byelaws that restrict access.

Please abandon this approach and let's work together to make things work.

A bit about me and problems with the survey

I'll just briefly say a little about myself and why I feel passionately about these issues. I have been using Dartmoor as a walker for forty years and I'm the author of the archaeology website Prehistoric Dartmoor Walks (<https://dartmoorwalks.org.uk>). The website is entirely based on using public transport or bicycle, I do not own a car and I do not drive.

Since the ending up the Transmoor bus many years ago it has not been possible to access most of central Dartmoor on a day trip from Exeter without a car and this has forced me to cycle and camp.

The byelaws relating to both cycling and camping will make it more difficult for people like me to visit Dartmoor. They discriminate against cyclists and those who cannot walk great distances to back- pack.

I have a feeling that the people proposing these byelaws assume that all users of Dartmoor drive cars and can afford expensive hotels and bed & breakfast accommodation for prolonged periods.

I have completed the Survey Monkey but I 'm very concerned that this is an inadequate tool for a consultation process. As a cyclist it could be that Dartmoor is one of the only places in England where I could take a wrong turn and end up with a fine, everywhere else it would typically be a civil matter if I have no right of way.

Cyclists are likely to respond negatively on the survey to the sections affecting them where as other respondents probably won't see the problem from the perspective of a cyclist. Dog walkers are likely to object to the sections affecting them but maybe not to the sections affecting others. The natural result is that the survey pits one user group against other with the result that each is in a minority. You will obtain the result you desire and can claim a majority in favour of all the proposals. This would be a fundamentally flawed approach.

The end of the first covid lock-down and visitor numbers

I was just re-reading the DEFRA 8-point plan for national parks.

DEFRA National Parks: 8-point plan for England (2016 to 2020)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-parks-8-point-plan-for-england-2016-to-2020>

It advocated a 10% increase in visitors to National Parks in the period 2016-2020. There was undoubtedly more than that since the Covid crisis began last year. My point here is that it is public policy to have more visitors and that of course brings more pressures. The question is how do we handle those pressures without unnecessarily imposing restrictions.

The end of the first lock down in the context of the covid crisis in June 2020 led to a huge increase in domestic tourism. People who would not normally visit or camp on Dartmoor did so for the first time. There were problems at Bellever which led to restrictions under the current byelaws. Those restrictions were needed and imposed under the current regulations. I totally support the use of these restrictions – if I have a criticism, it is they were not used earlier and that no-one was prosecuted.

It was not just Dartmoor that suffered from huge numbers combined with anti-social behaviour. It was unfortunately a feature of the end of the lock-down. The point is things have quite clearly calmed down since.

I fear the byelaws were framed in the heat of those problems. The result is proposals which are totally over the top, disproportionate, illiberal and likely to alienate entire user groups on Dartmoor.

Please abandon these plans, education is the answer

There is no harm in a local authority putting forward changes and then backing down in the light of the opposition that comes from significant sections of the public. Good leadership includes the ability to be humble and admit to getting it wrong, it is not ploughing forward for fear of loss of face.

I see little positive in these proposals except for one very important thing – this has got the whole community of Dartmoor aware that there are issues that need tackling. We should drop these byelaws and harness the goodwill of all the user groups to launch education campaigns to get the results we all want.

Yours sincerely

David Parks

Web author

Prehistoric Dartmoor Walks

<https://dartmoorwalks.org.uk>