



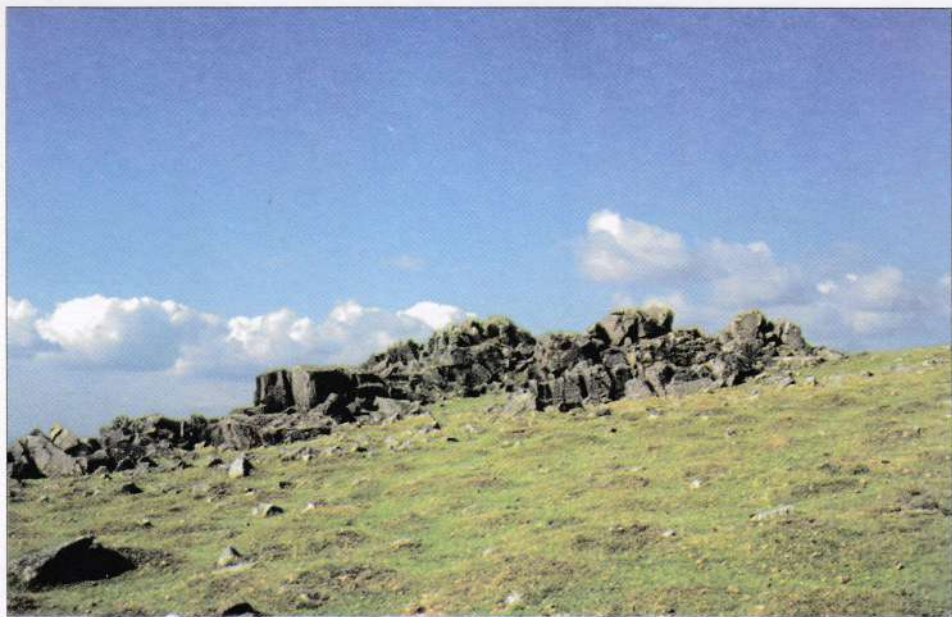
Fur Tor to Tavy Cleave

Wild Country

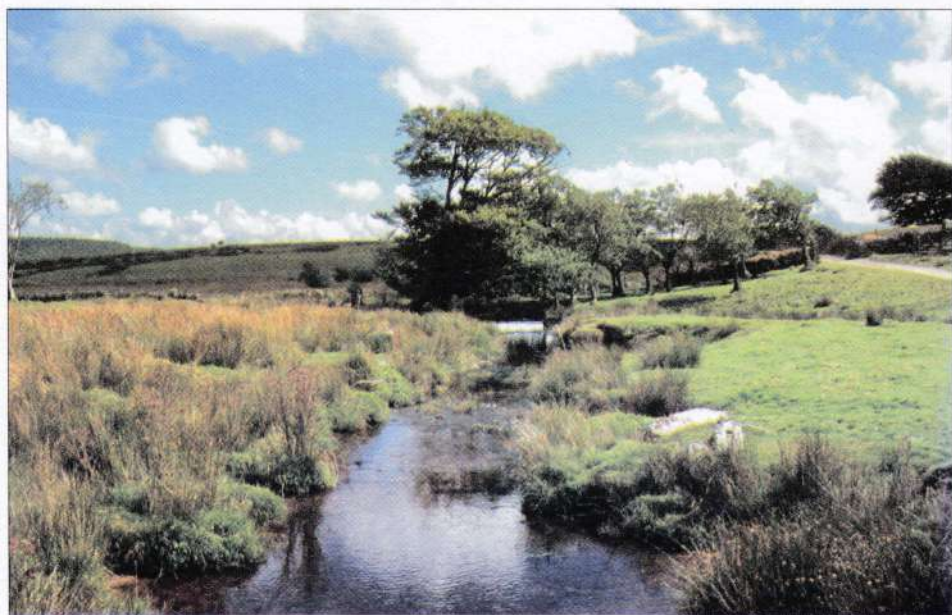
Sylvia Sayer

*Line Drawings by Sylvia Sayer
Photographs by Hugh Robinson
Introduction by John Bainbridge*

Dartmoor Preservation Association
Publication Number 13



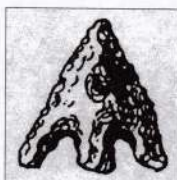
Little White Tor



Cherry Brook

Wild Country

Sylvia Sayer



*Line drawings by Sylvia Sayer
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Introduction by John Bainbridge*

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The Dartmoor Preservation Association

The DPA is a registered charity, existing to protect and preserve public access to and interest in Dartmoor. It campaigns to save Dartmoor's landscape, antiquities, flora and fauna, and cultural heritage.

DPA members receive a regular newsletter and other publications, share in the ownership of parts of Dartmoor; receive discounts on books and walking equipment; and can participate in our programme of free guided walks. If you would like to join the DPA please write to: Dartmoor Preservation Association, Old Duchy Hotel, Princetown, Devon PL20 6QF, telephone us on (01822) 890646 or email us on info@dartmoor-preservation-assoc.org.uk or visit our website at www.dartmoor-preservation-assoc.org.uk for a downloadable membership form.

ALL PROFITS FROM THIS PUBLICATION WILL GO TO THE
DPA SYLVIA SAYER LAND PURCHASE FUND
TO ENABLE US TO BUY AND PROTECT PARTS OF DARTMOOR.

DPA PUBLICATIONS

- 1890 A Short History of the Rights of Common...etc. with Report and Appendix of Documents (No.1)
- 1893 Identifications of the Names of Places mentioned in the 1st Volume of the Publications of the Association (No.2)
- 1930 Protest Against the Proposed Afforestation of Dartmoor (No.3)
- 1953 The Dartmoor Preservation Association: a brief outline of its work from 1883-1937 (No.4)
- 1964 Misuse of a National Park: Military Training on Dartmoor (No.5)
- 1970 The Dartmoor Bibliography non-fiction (No.6)
- 1972 The Meldon Story (No.7)
- 1974 The Dartmoor Bibliography non-fiction. Supplement Number 2 (No.6A)
- 1979 The Dartmoor Bibliography non-fiction. Supplement number 2 (No.6B)
- 1983 A Dartmoor Century 1883-1983 One Hundred Years of the Dartmoor Preservation Association (No.8)
- 1997 Mr Crossing's Report (No.9)*
- 1998 Dartmoor Under Threat - China Clay Quarrying (No. 10)**
- 1999 Plundered Dartmoor (No.11)*
- 1999 Sacred Land - Working Land (No.12)*
- 2000 Wild Country (No.13)*

* Currently in Print

** Photocopy only available

Dedicated to

THE FOUR JUST MEN

*Mr John Hunt MP
Mr John Cordle MP
Mr George Wallace MP
and
Mr Michael Cocks MP*

who saved the Dartmoor National Park
from the ravages of the
Swincombe / Foxtor Reservoir Scheme
in 1970.

Night Thoughts in a National Park

Silent, in breathing darkness Dartmoor lies,
Her proud horizons looming on the skies.
I lean against my window-ledge, and deep
Draw in the balm of night, forgetting sleep.
Lawless is Dartmoor still, and fierce and free,
But sieged by man and man's stupidity;
A falling citadel, its magic mined
By human moles, barbarian and blind.
How long can primal loveliness survive
Our witless, jackboot, jet-propulsion drive,
Our chequebook-pressured, teeming world of strife,
Ammonite-twisted, breeding away its life?
Thinly across the Moor a night bird cries;
The river's voice in rushing cadence dies,
Then rises airborne from its rocky fall,
Sending to sentient heart a lonely call:
"Courage to fight the fight. Courage is all."

Sylvia Sayer, September 1964

A biographical note on Sylvia Sayer is on page 24.

Introduction

In 1970 Lady Sayer, then Chairman of the Dartmoor Preservation Association, gave a memorable address on the future of the uplands to a conference jointly organized by the Country Landowners Association and the Northern Pennines Rural Development Board. As Lt-Colonel Gerald Haythornthwaite, Chairman of the Standing Committee On National Parks, said at the time "The address she delivered was considered by many who heard it to be such a noteworthy statement of the social and environmental value of the remaining wild uplands of our countryside that it should be given permanent form".

Two versions, in fact, were published. The first by the Standing Committee On National Parks and the second by Sylvia Sayer herself. The two texts were slightly different, each containing a few paragraphs that were not in the other. In preparing this edition I have combined both versions as far as possible, so that we have the fullest possible text available. Both original publications were illustrated: Sylvia Sayer's with her own delightful drawings of Dartmoor scenes. These examples of her art were so charming that I could not imagine this edition without them and so here they are to enjoy. The Standing Committee's publication contained a number of photographs. These have been replaced by some excellent pictures of wild countryside by Hugh Robinson.

I have made no attempt, in this edition, to update Sylvia Sayer's original text. It was written at a time when a "backs-to-the-wall" battle was being fought to protect Dartmoor; for the spectre of a massive and destructive reservoir at Swincombe had not gone away. The final defeat of the Swincombe Reservoir, which would have cut the heart right out of the Dartmoor National Park, was achieved only thanks to the campaigning zeal of Sylvia Sayer, the DPA and its allies.

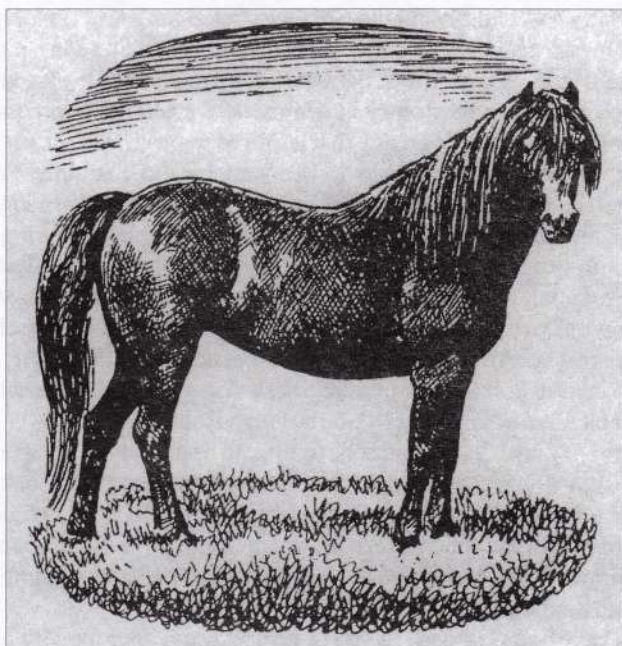
Some lessons have been learned. In one of my last conversations with her, Sylvia told me how pleased she was that the Dartmoor National Park Authority was upholding national park values by opposing the expansion of china clay quarrying on south-western Dartmoor given that the Dartmoor Committee of her day had sold out. Her suggestion that the more unsightly conifer plantations should be cut down and restored to wild countryside has come to pass at Dendles Wood again thanks to the present National Park Authority.

But there is much still to do. The military still despoil northern Dartmoor, quarrying remains a threat and the Dartmoor landscape is being changed by the proliferation of fencing. The DPA looks to the Dartmoor National Park Authority to be as resolute in fighting these threats as it has been over china clay quarrying and waste tipping.

Wild Country is much more a work of environmental philosophy than a record of battles lost and won. It is in very fact a blueprint for a national park vision; the thinking behind it, born out of often bitter experience on the campaigning trail, elevating Sylvia Sayer to the level of great environmentalists such as John Muir creator and founding father of the national park ethos. The officers of the Dartmoor Preservation Association are often asked just what the DPA stands for? *Wild Country* is as good an answer as any to that question.

John Bainbridge

Introduction



WHAT IS WILD COUNTRY?

Perhaps it would be as well first to try to define what we mean by wild country, for I have noticed that very often when one speaks of wild and natural landscape it is the signal for someone to get up and say that there is no truly natural or virgin landscape left now in these islands, and that we preservationists must remember that even the remotest parts of Britain, even uncultivated moorland, are in fact man-made, or is the result of man's activities through the ages; and this is usually said in order to disarm opposition to some projected plan for the exploitation or development of an upland area - usually, but not always, in a national park.

But I think that we must get away from arguments about whether or not our remaining areas of uncultivated upland do, or do not, look as they did before man evolved from the apes and started domesticating other animals and tilling the earth. For it simply does not matter now, and we should not waste time splitting verbal hairs.

We all know perfectly well what Professor Fraser Darling or Mr. Rattray Taylor mean when they talk about our last wilderness areas, or what President Johnson meant when he talked about America's "natural splendour". They mean the mountains, the spacious hill country where you can see the shape of the land for miles, where nature is still manifestly dominant over man; they mean the rocks and heather, the bracken, the gorse and the bogs. That is wild country, and in Britain it is all that we have left of truly virgin land; and it is slowly vanishing, not only in Britain but in every part of our man-polluted planet.

THE TRACES OF MAN

Over the centuries, man has of course left his traces on our wild uplands, and these age-old survivals are an essential part of their value and interest. The little prehistoric hut circles, the rings of standing stones, the wavering marks of the ox plough, the ruins of the long-gone tinnerns' huts and workings - these can be sought out in the lonely places, and they speak to us and fire our imagination and sense of history.

The cardinal difference, in their impact on the scene, between these ancient survivals of man's handiwork and the man-made developments of today, is of course a difference of scale, of use and of material. In past ages man had to rely on his own muscles, not on machines, and he had to use the natural materials to hand, such as stone and wood. Nature had little difficulty in assimilating the results of that kind of activity into the landscape, and so the essential wilderness still survived.

But now, with his earth-movers and concrete mixers, man can demolish whole mountains, and raise other mountains out of industrial waste. He can block up valleys with gigantic concrete dams, and drive roads into the remotest country, so that droves of motor vehicles can penetrate and spread wherever it is physically possible to drive them. He can implant a blanket of conifers over a vast upland area, entirely changing its nature and ecology. He can excavate pits two miles long and a mile wide, so that quite a sizeable area of landscape entirely disappears.

So that now, in the 20th century, where man is active in exploitation, nature can no longer assimilate his activities, and true wilderness dies.

A BARREN WASTE?

Does it matter if wilderness dies - if we finally exploit and tame it all? Some people would argue that it does not. To them, wild country is a barren waste (with the accent on waste). Its very unusedness irks them, and is a challenge to their sense of human dominance and power, for here is something still untamed and apparently unproductive, not earning CASH, land with which apparently nothing is being DONE, but with which of course something must be done, or out of which money must be made, or we are failing the might of man and the god of Progress.

It has been my lot, in 22 years of public life, to serve on local authorities as a parish and district councillor, as a Minister's nominee to a national park planning authority, and as chairman of a preservation association of some activity. I have often enough had to accompany fellow-councillors and others on site inspections on Dartmoor to consider whether or not certain proposed developments should be permitted. I do know quite well how coldly wild open country strikes some people, and what their instinctive reactions are to it. It says nothing at all to them and they reject it, and it rejects them.

SOME BARREN MINDS

Not long ago I took a photograph of one such party, a rather large one attended by the chairman of the Water Resources Board, representatives of landowning and farming interests, water undertakers, planning authorities, aldermen and councillors, on a bleak and windswept area of central Dartmoor. There they all stood, on the rim of a great natural amphitheatre, looking out across the wilderness; a group of good worthy citizens in Homburg hats and raincoats and pointed town shoes.

"Just a barren wilderness", said one stout alderman to another "and a perfect site for a reservoir"; and I think he voiced the opinion of the majority of that particular party. But a minority of those present felt - and said - that he could only have produced that remark out of a totally barren mind.



IRREPLACEABLE TREASURES

For of course, if he had had eyes to see, or even legs that were capable of walking, he could at least have discovered one fact about that great stretch of open moorland, even if he could never have understood its magic and appeal. He could have found out, for example, that he was looking at an area in which is written the history of our race, with its tangible evidence still there to give pleasure and enlightenment and the thrill of discovery.

The vast reservoir and its wide-ranging ancillary works which that alderman hoped would be imposed on central Dartmoor would in fact destroy or permanently affect more than 45 prehistoric and historic sites, ranging from Bronze Age settlements and circles to mediaeval crosses and 18th century tinnerns' dwellings and mills.

These are what the Duke of Edinburgh's 1970 Countryside Conference designated "Countryside Treasures", and urged their careful conservation. In any true scale of values, places which, in over-urbanised England, still possess so many of such treasures, are the very reverse of "barren wastes"; they are, rather, rich treasuries, the heritage of future generations, and are certainly not ours to destroy.

And that alderman and his friends were also looking at, but not seeing, a habitation of herons, larks and curlews, and of the buzzard and the raven, which may be observed in this wonderful solitary place - a place which, to municipal eyes, and to other eyes that should have seen more clearly, that day seemed so empty and featureless.

THE REAL VALUES

But of course the value of wild country to the nation - that is, its value to human beings present and future - far transcends even its possession of the treasures of our past or the abundance of its wild life. Its greatest value of all lies in what it can still give us of freedom, challenge and inspiration. There is an immense difficulty in getting this understood where the decisions on development proposals are finally arrived at, either locally or in Whitehall. It would be a lot easier of course if wild country displayed some obvious and immediate monetary value (I say obvious and immediate, because of course, in terms of rational land use planning in an overcrowded island, it has a hidden financial value that will be much more easily recognised in a few years' time).

It is a simpler matter to invoke protection for rurally romantic scenes of picture-book prettiness, adorned with cosy cottages, bursting cornfields, and roses twining round every porch in sight; these appeal to all of us. Wild country of course has none of these things. It can be stern and austere, even cruel, soaking the visitor to the skin or freezing him to the marrow, reducing life almost to its elements of rock, and air, and water. It is no place at all for solid citizens in Homburg hats and raincoats and pointed town shoes, with a car parked at the nearest possible point, and lunch and drinks booked at the nearest possible pub.

But unfortunately, disastrously, it is they who still possess the power to destroy it.

THE HUMAN NEED

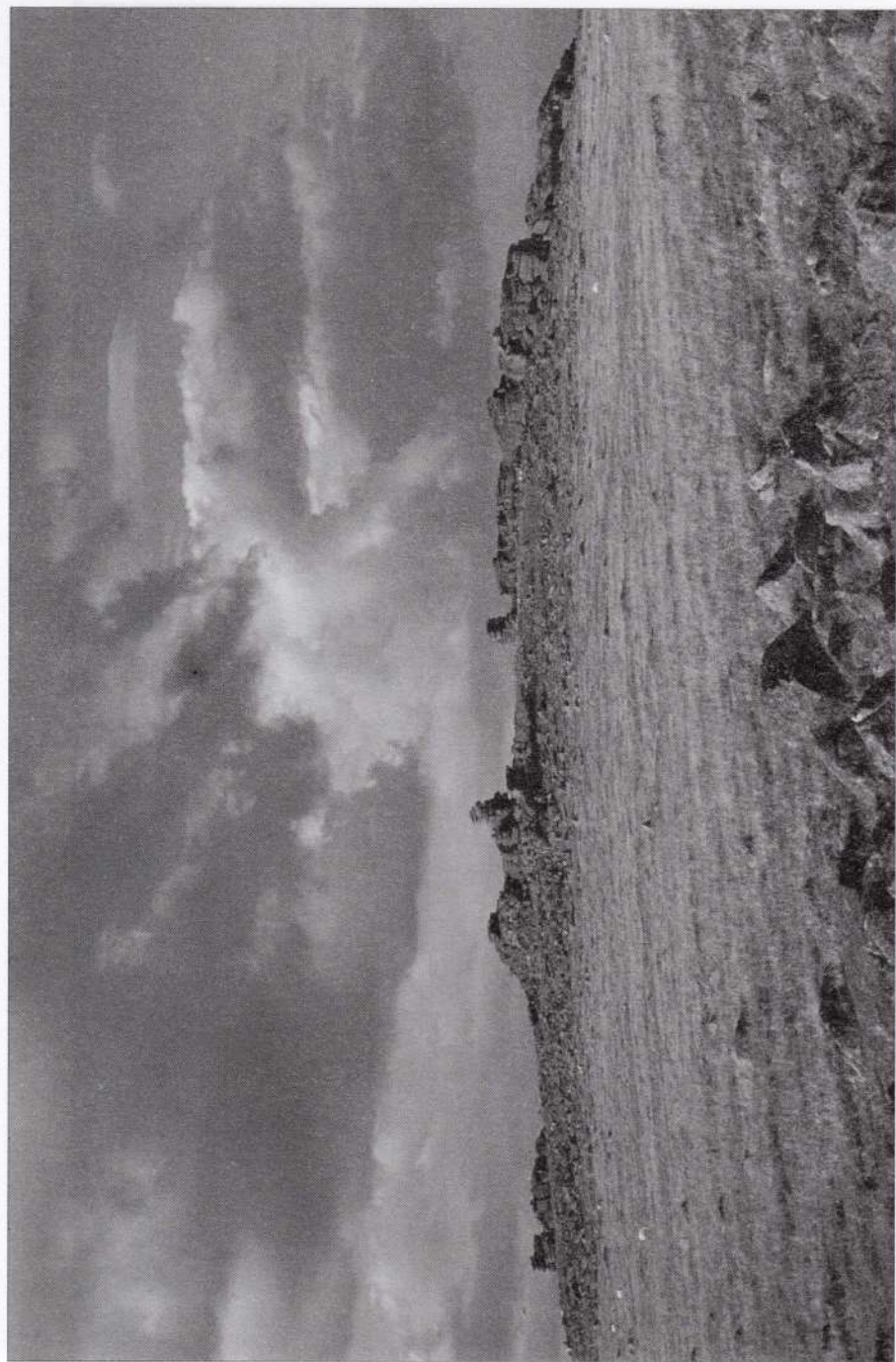
It is well understood that a proportion of people in this country are unable to feel the inspiration of the untamed hills, just as some people are tone-deaf to great music. They cannot help the lack of this particular endowment, and it is their own great loss. But there are others, many others, who experience a sense of liberation and renewal whenever they have the chance to set foot on wild land. Millions of quiet people do feel this. They are intelligent and perceptive people of every class and age group - and I repeat this: of every class and age group, for no error is greater than to suppose that the love of wild country is an upper class or elderly preserve; they are people who, forced to live a daily life of crowding and stress, find that escape to remote uplands is their great restorative of mind and body, and are willing to make a real physical effort to get out into the wild.

National Parks are not just a nice but slightly unnecessary and expendable luxury for a fortunate few. They are in fact a vital provision for a very real human need.

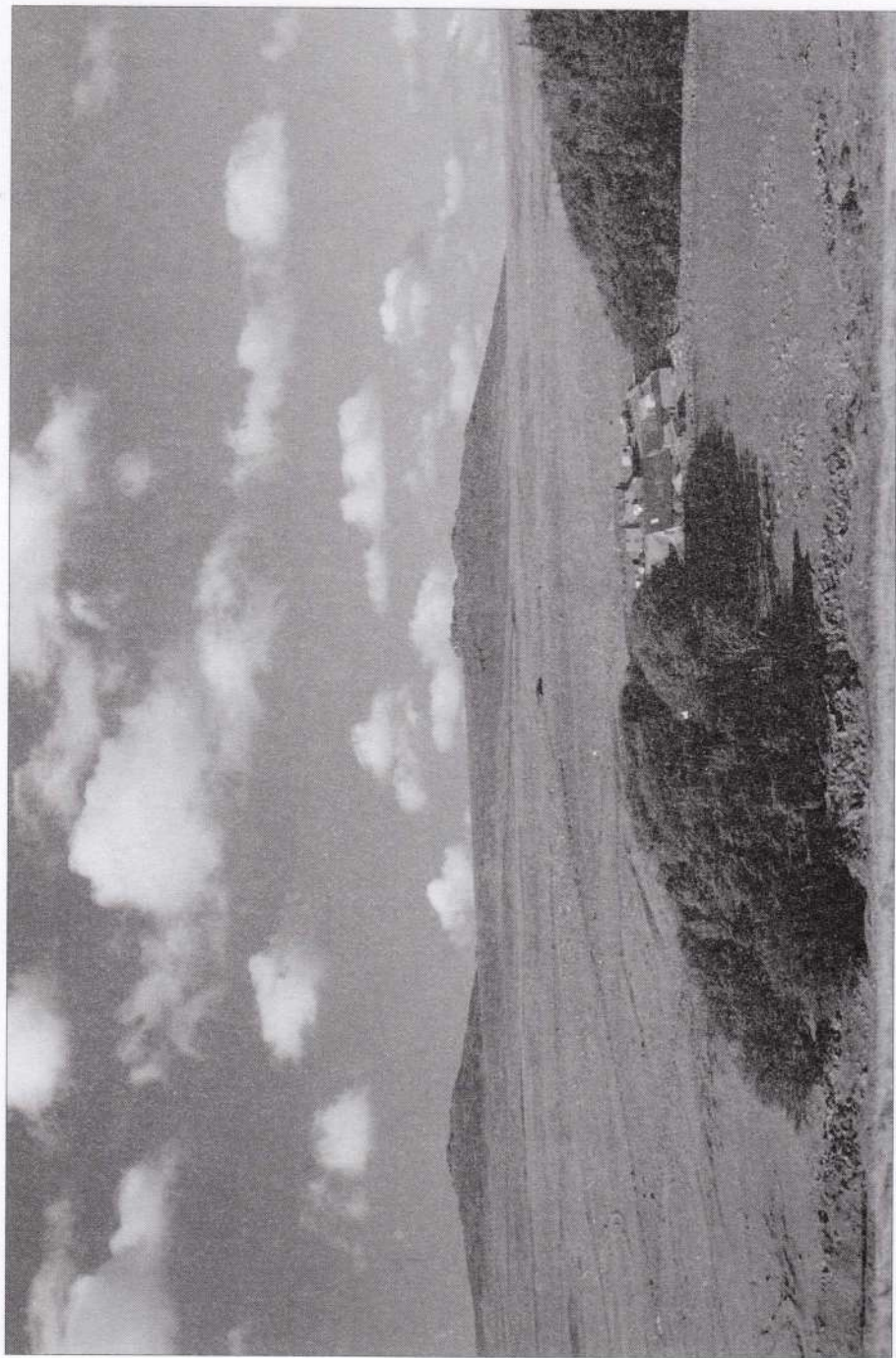
And here, to clear up some possible misunderstandings, let me say that those who are struggling to save the essential character of these last wild areas are not backward-looking selfish middle class reactionaries suffering from fossilised minds, who want national parks preserved as it were in aspic, without land management or planning, without the planting



Vixen Tor



Great Staple Tor



W. Mill Tor, E. Okement Farm, Row Tor



Oke Tor

of one more tree or the building of one more house. On the contrary, we fight for the protection of our wooded valleys, we advocate shelter belts and are not even against all conifers, and we strongly support the kind of farming suitable to the soil and the site. And some of us have worked very hard indeed as members of local authorities to encourage the right kind of building in national parks.

If those who doubt this could attend the meetings of the Standing Committee on National Parks (now the Council for National Parks), I think they would realise that between us we know a great deal about land management and use, and that in fact far from being a backward-looking lot or some kind of privileged and selfish elite our sights are fixed further ahead than most, and that our hard work, all of it voluntary and pretty costly to ourselves, is being done not for ourselves and our own personal interests but for the benefit of future generations, who will be even more overcrowded and urbanised than we are now.

Any animal, human or otherwise, needs some provision of space to move freely in, and scope for his energies, if he is to develop as a balanced and healthy being. The scientists in that well-known experiment gave the imprisoned rats plenty of food and water: in that sense they were affluent rats; but what the scientists deprived them of was SPACE, and slowly the grossly overcrowded rats lost all interest in their surroundings, and eventually sat all day in a kind of apathy, until they died.

Who can say with any certainty that in about 30 years' time or less, the ever-multiplying human race, with its car-jammed roads and multi-city living, may not be nearing the frustration of those imprisoned rats? In the great built-up conurbations in these islands, have we not at times almost reached such frustration already? Why are the city young rebelling, and why are so many of their elders now living in fear and apprehension of some approaching catastrophe?

AN ESSENTIAL NATIONAL RESOURCE

The Duke of Edinburgh well understands the need for space and adventure and the value of the wilderness: his Leaders' Handbook defines as Gold Award country "wild country in which the candidates will be dependent on themselves, to the extent of being both at some time and distance from any help". It is of course the very toughness, the very difficulty and hardness, the very remoteness of such country that makes it an essential national resource.

No one has more perceptively argued the case for conserving wild country, or more clearly revealed why rural developers often find preservationists intractable to deal with,

than Mr Gordon Rattray Taylor. In his recent work *The Doomsday Book* he says (in Chapter 10):

“Do people need the wilderness, as distinct merely from a low density of population?

If reduced stimulation were all that were required, a dark room would suffice; and the man who enjoys the wilderness is not under-stimulated - his senses are alert to colours, sounds, shapes, odours, textures and other impression. The appeal of nature has been expressed by poets, who stress its moral and religious character; ... I argue that it is of central importance to us all, those who fail to experience it being the victims of a psychological disability. A country which professes freedom of religion should not therefore destroy the conditions of a quasi-religious experience, and those who do so inflict irreparable loss on those who benefit from such an experience”.

and in his final chapter he again affirms

“Even if we take a rationalist view, and deny the presence of a divine element, it remains an experience of value and importance - which is why people become so deeply involved in attempts to protect it - and one which it would be unjust and unwise to deprive people of. I say ‘unwise’ as well as ‘unjust’ because it is evidently an ennobling experience, and we do not have too many of those; and probably it helps people to withstand the stresses of modern life. A world in which people live largely in cities may need nature more, rather than less... There may at some future date be a general demand for the restitution of a relationship with nature. If by then we have destroyed nature, we shall have committed an unforgivable wrong”.

If my own convictions did not tell me that this gets down to the heart of the matter, the evidence of the many letters I receive would confirm it - letters not from cranks or fanatics but from ordinary, hard-working, well-balanced, reasonable people; the solicitor who wrote that he could not get through his week's work in Plymouth if he could not look forward to his 15-mile walks over Dartmoor every week-end, whatever the weather; the Torquay bus driver who, after working hours gets into his own little car and drives up on to Dartmoor for a walk over Haytor whenever he can, to “recharge his batteries”, as he puts it; and of course all the many exiles whose work keeps them far from the Moor for most of the year, but who think of, and plan, their precious holiday there for many months ahead.

THE VALUE OF WILD COUNTRY STILL UNDERESTIMATED

Wilderness, then, means far more, and to far more people, than the nation's policy-makers - the politicians, the senior civil servants who in fact rule our lives - are yet prepared to accept or admit. And because its value is still so grossly underestimated, the pressures on it are being allowed to escalate, and exploitation to spread.

I have written so far of my own experience in evaluating and defending the wild country of the Dartmoor National Park. But what I have to say is applicable to nearly all the national parks and indeed to many upland and relatively wild areas which are not designated as national parks at all.

To the defenders of wild country, Conservation Year 1970 fell far short of the hopes it raised. Many people consider it to have been little more than a display of polished platitudes. As long ago as 1952 Harold MacMillan, as Minister responsible for town and country planning, promised Parliament that in national parks, amenity and access were to have priority over other interests and claims; but the promise has long remained unfulfilled, and the military training areas, the mineral extraction, the reservoir schemes, the commercial afforestation, the radio masts and all the rest, have gone on expanding in national parks ever since, and Conservation Year seemed to make no difference to this process.

Nine times out of ten there are alternative sites available outside the national parks for these developments - alternatives that would spare our last surviving reserves of wild country; but almost invariably these alternative sites, which are more "valuable" in calculable terms of cash price per acre than open moorland, are ruled out by local planning authorities and by Whitehall because the lobbies of powerful vested interests are able to prevent their use.

Wilderness still lacks an effective lobby in the corridors of power.

A RAY OF HOPE

But one gleam of light did irradiate the last weeks of Conservation Year 1970, and it shone out like a beacon. A Committee of four far-seeing MPs - Mr John Hunt (Chairman), Mr John Cordle, Mr George Wallace and Mr Michael Cocks - summarily rejected a reservoir Bill that would have destroyed the natural character of a vast area of central Dartmoor - at Swincombe: the 'great natural amphitheatre' mentioned earlier.

They resisted the immensely powerful local and financial pressures, and decided in favour of long-term national need. Such justice for a national park seemed so rare that at first the decision could hardly be believed. But the impression it has made is very great, and

has given fresh hope to the defenders of national parks throughout the country. It has done more; it has given many people renewed faith in the processes of Parliamentary democracy.

We have seen already how little a certain type of mind worthy and able in other ways though it may be is able to comprehend and appreciate the glories of our national parks. Unfortunately the running of the parks since their inception in the early 1950s has been largely committed to the mercies of just such people.

On every park authority the nominees of the county council or councils outnumber by two to one those appointed by the Secretary of State supposedly with the aim of injecting some representation of the national interest into the management of the parks. All too often we find that even these appointed members are drawn from local interest groups.

Gerald Priestland, the BBC commentator, has said of President Johnson that he would be remembered for his efforts, with his wife's, to conserve America's natural beauty. Perhaps something like this may one day be said of one of our own Prime Ministers - if he has been able to persuade his senior Government officials to get their values right, and if he is prepared to overcome public inertia or hostility. It could not yet be said of any of our own political leaders.

No wonder too many of this island's inhabitants still regard the quality of their environment as a relative triviality, of little importance compared to industrial expansion, the balance of payments, dollar-earning developments, or prestige adventures like the Concorde: all summed up in that unpleasant in-word Growth, so dear to the devotees of materialist technology, who perhaps need reminding that some kinds of growths can kill.

No doubt arguments such as these render one liable to the charge that they are the views of a romantic idealist - a woman, of course - who is clearly unable to assess or appreciate the fundamental importance of these issues of growth and expansion, or the seriousness of the financial situation of a country that has for years been living beyond its means. But even idealists can understand the present situation pretty well, and they are as anxious about inflation as anyone, for continued inflation can bring our whole way of life tumbling down in financial chaos.

Yet inflation will only be cured if people are given some kind of hope and inspiration; materialism alone will dig us further into the mess. It is certainly arguable that there is an even more deadly chaos threatening our whole planet, and that our own neglect of, and indifference to, the plight of our natural environment and the soundness of our people is the form of self-indulgence that we can now least of all afford.

Yet we are still indulging in it, and as someone pointed out in a letter to *The Times* not long ago, the extent of our rulers' devotion to conservation may be gauged by noting that

the Countryside Commission is allowed to spend as much in one year for preserving the countryside as the Ministry of Defence is allowed to spend in two hours.

PIECEMEAL DISINTEGRATION

The results of this inversion of values may be seen up and down the land, and I do not here intend to attempt to catalogue the numberless erosions to which the countryside in general and national parks in particular are now being subjected. I will only say that, like all the others, my own small national park of Dartmoor is suffering a process of piecemeal disintegration - all of it for somebody's material advantage - and that the frontiers of its wildness are contracting very fast.

I have closely observed and loved Dartmoor for over 60 years, and am able to assess its losses in painful perspective. Of course it still has much beauty, and an unmistakable identity of wildness, or it would not still be loved so much by so many, and it would not still be worth fighting for. But if the erosion continues at its present accelerating pace, in another 10 years Dartmoor's real wildness will have been cut into separate smaller islands of moorland, divided by artificial works of man in one form or another, and there will be no real remoteness left, no real challenge, no hope then for the adventurous and the hard-pressed of getting right away from it all.

That would be a national loss, and those who helped to bring it about would not be forgiven.

A FAILURE OF COMMUNICATION

And here I must make a plea for better understanding to the powerful interests primarily concerned with land management, notably the Country Landowners' Association, the National Farmers' Union, the Forestry Commission and the Timber Growers' Organisation. Conservationists still find it harder than it ought to be to get the value of wild country as *wild country* understood by these associations, official or otherwise.

It is not going to be easy to forget the part played by the CLA and the NFU in the battle for Meldon, that lovely valley, now wrecked and soon to be inundated, which a senior planning inspector once described as "one of Dartmoor's rarest beauties" or that when it came to the Swincombe fight, the CLA actually claimed the credit for inducing the Water Resources Board to choose that particular national park site - in order, as their journal put it, to avoid placing reservoirs on "agricultural" land (however poor and difficult to farm).

If central Dartmoor had been finally blighted by the vast Swincombe reservoir and its system of ancillary canals, how could the CLA or NFU have expected ever to wipe out the bitterness that their share in that loss had aroused?

AN EXPERT'S ASSESSMENT

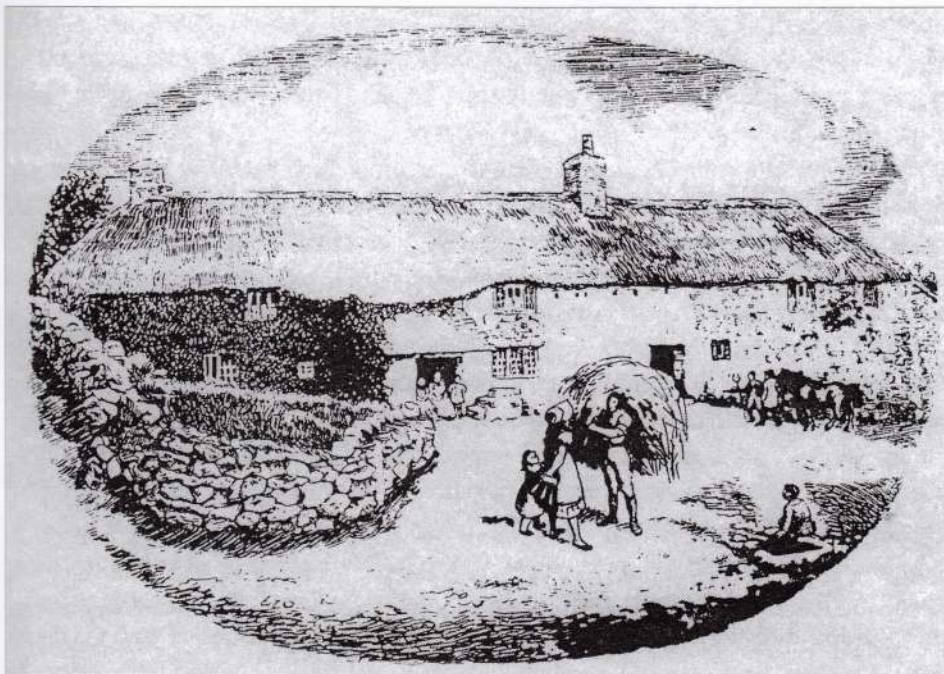
We commend to the executives of both the CLA and the NFU, and of the Forestry Commission and Timber Growers' Organisation (whose commercial forestry practices are destroying Dartmoor's broad-leaved woodlands, and blanketing the hills with featureless conifer units) the Report by Sir Frederick Gibberd, CBE RA MTPI FRIBA, who advised Plymouth in the Swincombe case. This report says "The moorland sites are in a unique and irreplaceable area of wild landscape. The agricultural sites, which although very beautiful and of individual character, have counterparts elsewhere in Devon - areas of wild landscape are becoming increasingly rare. It is generally accepted that there must be very strong reasons indeed for disturbing the character of a National Park, and in our view it can only be considered if there are no reasonable alternatives. *The preservation of wild landscape is of vital importance to the nation, and only if there are no reasonable alternatives should it be sacrificed*".

Mercifully, it is unnecessary now to argue the case between the Swincombe site and the many alternative sites outside the National Park, some on Grade III and Grade IV agricultural land; but I will add that it is the considered view of many land use experts that at this stage of our environmental affairs, the whole question of the siting of new reservoirs in this country should be decided not merely in terms of a local water authority's convenience, or influenced by the 'keep-out' slogans of the farming lobby, but in the broad context of long-term regional planning, and by a tribunal which is able to investigate impartially every aspect of the issues involved. We would not fear the decisions of such a tribunal, which should show the same impartiality as a Parliamentary Committee. We have learned, alas, to have little confidence in the impartiality of a Ministerial inquiry.

THE COMING M5 AVALANCHE

The South-West of England is going to be faced very soon with a new avalanche of people and cars, as the M5 motorway nears completion. The Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks and the Devon coast are already at saturation point: the additional influx of visitors should now be being planned for in such a way as to provide them with alternative recreational attractions and facilities in the agriculturally difficult and relatively deserted areas of mid-Devon, by siting the new reservoirs there, and developing them as Country Parks. These Country Water Parks should be combined with an extension of the afforestation which is already taking place in these areas of poorer mid-Devon agricultural land.

If the present erosion of the true wilderness areas is allowed to continue, and if no wise long-term provision is made for recreational facilities additional to the national parks and



the coast, I ask the landowning and agricultural interests to consider what is likely to be the effect, in future years, on country estates and all kinds of farmland, of an unplanned-for, hit-and-miss influx of motorised visitors looking for picnic sites and spaces to play in. For people will not keep out of the cornfields or private woodlands once the national parks and coastal approaches are jammed to a standstill.

They will then park where they can and spend the day where they choose, and if there are not enough play-places designed to receive them, where they can park and picnic and fish and bathe, they will spread over private land and along the rivers, and there will be too many of them to be controlled. The British are no longer a deferential race.

ARATIONAL POLICY

It was very encouraging to read the excellent article by M. John Quicke, himself a Devon landowner, in the August 1970 number of the *Country Landowner*. Mr Quicke advocates intensifying the agricultural use of good land, while warning that intensification is economically possible only on this better land, and that farmers on the poorer land may well have to look for alternative sources of income, such as recreation. In the

circumstances that is a brave as well as a rational policy to put forward, but then, it is Mr Quicke who, more than anyone else, has done most to build a bridge of understanding between the defenders of Dartmoor and the CLA, and we are very appreciative of his vision and fairness.

We have before now been asked what kind of a farming future the Dartmoor Preservation Association would envisage for Dartmoor, since we strongly oppose the further fencing, ploughing or commercial afforestation of open moorland, our contention being that all of Dartmoor's surviving moorland now comes within the definition of 'critical amenity land'. We reply that our observation shows us that those native farmers who still farm Dartmoor in the traditional way seem to be weathering the economic tempests much better than the more ambitious newcomers, who go in for grant-subsidised expansion over vast acreages of open moorland, while their in-fields become progressively more rush-ridden and neglected; an expensive and fruitless exercise for the unwilling taxpayer, and often a disaster for the national park, as both access and archaeological monuments get obliterated in the process.

Thus it does seem to us that from every point of view it is the small-scale traditional husbandry that should be encouraged and supported in the Dartmoor National Park, and if this proves difficult to maintain in the cold winds of economic change and Common Marketry, then the taxpayers' contribution ought to be directed, and would be far more willingly and generously directed, not towards subsidising developments destructive of his own national park interests, but to subsidising the kind of traditional hill farming that conserves the landscape and the freedom of the open moor, and allows the non-controversial age-old dual use of hill-grazing and access that has gone hand in hand on Dartmoor from earliest times.

We have been very glad to find that others are now advocating the same thing, and that experts are advising that there is a case for limiting agricultural subsidies on balance of payment grounds, while introducing amenity subsidies designed to keep the countryside a going concern. This is, we believe, a positive and rational answer to a problem that has been allowed to become more difficult and controversial than it ever need to have been.

BRINGING THE HILL FARMS BACK TO LIFE

It would be the right kind of change to see all the little hill-farms coming back to life again; their in-fields well cultivated and drained; the moorlands better regulated and grazed in summer, the animals supervised by the horse-riding farmer and not the mechanised cowboy, and taken off the Moor altogether in winter; the heather-burning controlled, and

not allowed to become an exercise in arson; the farmer and his wife given financial help to accommodate seasonal paying guests, not only in the farmhouse itself but in one or two well designed stone-built or timber cabins - far kinder to the landscape than the intrusive caravan - grouped near the farmhouse and screened by shelter belts of ash and beech. It would be a change to see deer on the moorlands and in the valley woods again, not for hunting but for variety and beauty.

In making these proposals I have spoken principally of Dartmoor because that is the national park I know best and have closely observed for more than 60 years. But the upland areas of all our parks face similar problems and cry out for similar solutions.

What is needed is recognition by Government that the hill farmer farming by traditional methods on the traditional scale has a more than economic role. The hill-farmer is a conservator of landscapes nationally valued and precious in proportion. Once this is grasped it becomes only rational to make available to farming of this kind the financial support it needs.

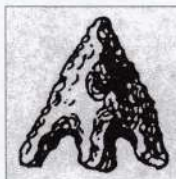
It would be a magnificent change to have military training finally banned from all national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty, and it would be a very sensible change to have some of the Forestry Commission's earlier and uglier plantations in some national parks carefully felled, and the land restored to the good hill grazing it once was.

It is not so much the reclamation of land as the reclamation of our own sense of values that is most needed now.

THE MOST VALUABLE PRODUCTS OF ALL

I submit therefore that wild country whether on Dartmoor, in the Pennines, the Cheviots, mid-Wales or Snowdonia or the Lake District is very far from being barren or unproductive. On the contrary these uplands provide the most valuable products of all the products of health and happiness at a time when such simple and uncomplicated benefits are becoming in ever shorter supply.

If we want our uplands managed in the true national interest, the most essential change is to have the value of wilderness fully understood and legislated for, while there is still some wilderness left to save.



Sylvia Sayer

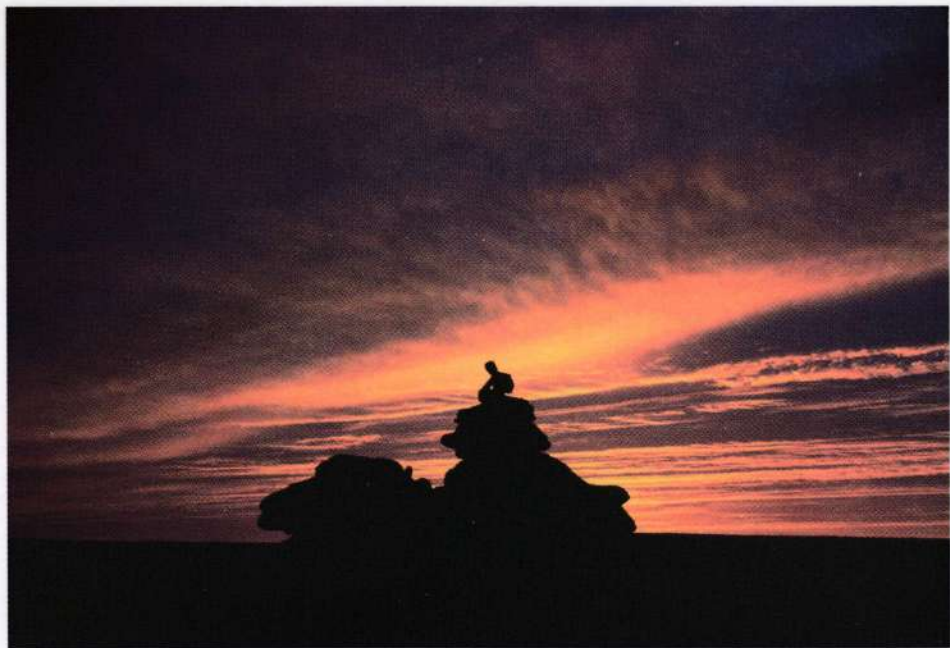
Sylvia Sayer was born in 1904, the grand-daughter of the prominent Dartmoor conservationist Robert Burnard. After studying art and living for a while in China she returned to Dartmoor and spent the last half of the 20th century defending the National Park from the many environmental threats which faced southern England's last great wilderness. She became in turn Chairman and then Patron of the Dartmoor Preservation Association, one of England's oldest conservation bodies. She was also associated with many environmental organizations, being an honorary life vice-president of the Council for National Parks, a vice-president of the Ramblers' Association and president for many years of the Devon Ramblers' Association. Her other publications included *The Outline of Dartmoor's Story* and *The Meldon Story*. Sylvia Sayer was active in the Dartmoor conservation movement right up to her death at the age of 95 in January 2000.



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Wild Country is a vision for the preservation of Britain's last remaining areas of wilderness, written by the eminent 20th century conservationist Lady Sylvia Sayer, sometime Chairman and then Patron of the Dartmoor Preservation Association.

In this important book Sylvia Sayer set out her belief that wild countryside, far from being a barren waste, is a national asset which benefits all who live on these crowded islands. An asset that must be saved for future generations and not sacrificed for the short-term economic benefit of the few.

Since its first publication in 1971 *Wild Country* has been recognized as a classic text for the inspiration of the environmental and national parks movement.

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