

Sustainable Tourism in the Nature and National Parks of Europe

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The nature and national parks of Europe

There are more than 10,000 protected areas in Europe, and they are quite varied. IUCN-The World Conservation Union (IUCN) has identified ten categories of protected areas. They are: (I) scientific reserve or strict nature reserve; (II) national park; (III) natural monument; (IV) managed nature reserve or wildlife sanctuary; (V) protected landscape; (VI) resource reserve; (VII) natural biotic area or anthropological reserve; (VIII) multiple-use management area; (IX) biosphere reserve; and (X) World Heritage Site. Category I (scientific reserve/strict nature reserve) has the highest level of protection. Category II (national park) areas are fully protected and usually state-owned. There are 143 national parks in Europe. These are comparable with North American national parks. However, Category V (the protected landscape) is much more common in Europe, with 1,097 examples at the last count. The ten English and Welsh so-called national parks are in fact Category V protected landscapes! These national parks, unlike American examples, are mainly in private ownership. The significance of the designation is to provide strong legal protection for these areas.

The administrative systems, legal protection, resources, and staff of European nature and national parks vary enormously. Later in this article the Peak National Park is explained, but it is unusual in the strength of its powers and the size of its budget and staff.

The Federation

The Federation of Nature and National Parks of Europe is a non-political independent international voluntary body. It has approximately 200 members from 31 European countries. All the English and Welsh national parks are members. It has a small staff based in Bavaria, Germany. The president for 1993 to 1996 is

Aitken Clark, who is chief executive of the Broads Authority (National Park) in England.

The main aims of the Federation are to:

- Encourage practical co-operation and exchange of information, experience, and staff between national parks and nature parks and

- with other organisations and individuals responsible for nature conservation;
- Promote international joint efforts to establish new parks and to improve the management of existing ones; and
- Disseminate information and technical knowledge on the management of natural and cultural heritage protected within the parks.

It is worth emphasising the *management of the natural and cultural heritage*. Within a densely populated European context there are few areas which are not managed and where the centuries of occupation are not part of the cultural landscape which has been protected. For example, the English and Welsh national parks have three aims: the conservation of the area, the provision of opportunities for outdoor recreation, and the interest of the local people. In the Peak National Park alone there are 38,000 residents.

Loving them to death?

The European Federation recognises both the importance and the dangers of tourism for Europe's protected areas. It considered the topic so important that in 1991 it set up its first working group to look at sustainable tourism for protected areas in Europe. The project was supported by the European Commission (DGXXIII) Tourism Unit under its Rural and Cultural Tourism Programme.

The project had four aims:

- To develop guidelines to help managers of protected areas and the tourism sector take a new approach to tourism in and around protected areas.

- To identify case studies illustrating how sustainable tourism is being developed for protected areas and to begin to produce a database of such information.
- To report the current position of sustainable tourism related to protected areas in Europe.
- To recommend the action required at international and national level and within the tourism sector to achieve sustainable tourism.

The working group was chaired by Norbert Heukemes from the Hautes Fagnes–Eifel Nature Park in Belgium. The Countryside Commission of England seconded Rosie Simpson to manage the project. A fourteen-member working group from eleven European countries was set up which included several managers of protected areas together with representatives from the tourism and research sectors and from private governmental and non-governmental organisations. I was privileged to be a member of this group.

We had an interesting working method, as we were attempting to use practical experience of tourist management in protected areas from many parts of Europe. We set up three workshops. They were held in: The Broads, England (covering northwestern Europe); Triglav National Park, Slovenia (covering the Mediterranean area); and Tatra National Park, Slovak Republic (covering Eastern Europe). At these workshops were presented 40 case studies of sustainable tourism projects within the protected areas. Sixteen are used in the published report (FNNPE 1993).

The general conclusions of the report

We first had to decide, What is sustainable tourism? Our definition is: "When tourism is sustainable, the natural and cultural resources and the environmental, social and economic well-being of an area are maintained forever."

Several trends in tourism to and within Europe are apparent. Steady growth (3 to 4.5%) is predicted over the next decade, with tourism to the Mediterranean region expected to double in the next 30 years. There will be a growing demand for holidays based on nature and outdoor activities and for cultural and educational tourism, and an increase in tourism that is "environmentally friendly." At the same time, there will be a 45% increase in the number of cars in Europe over the next 20 years.

We then defined tourism activities that are generally *compatible* with protected areas. First, there are those activities based on the areas' special character and quality, such as appreciating nature or cultural and educational tourism. In general, these activities are quiet and done on a small scale or in small groups. Second are those activities that cause no damage, disturbance, or pollution.

In turn we looked at tourism activities that are generally *incompatible* with protected areas:

- Large-scale facilities associated with organised or mass tourism (for example, time-share developments).
- Activities that are noisy, involve large numbers, or that repeatedly disturb the wildlife (for example, water skiing).

- Skiing and other large-scale sports facilities and events (for example, the impact of the 1992 Winter Olympics on Vanoise National Park in France).
- Motorised recreational activities (for example, motor rallies within national parks).

We realised that protected areas could not be looked at in isolation and that there was a need for *zones* for sustainable tourism in and around protected areas. We defined these as: (i) a sanctuary zone; (ii) a quiet zone; (iii) a zone for compatible forms of tourism without further development; (iv) a zone for sustainable forms of tourism development; and (v) a zone immediately outside the protected area that would be developed sustainably.

Guidelines for sustainable tourism in and around protected areas

Apart from the case studies, guidelines for sustainable tourism formed the core of our report. We were very much aware of the range of skills and experience within different protected areas and therefore set out a fifteen-step process for managers of protected areas (Table 1). Finally we felt there was wider action needed for sustainable tourism in and around protected areas. We recommended stronger legislation and effective enforcement of controls, national strategies and policies for sustainable tourism, a European charter for sustainable tourism operation in and around protected areas, a European action programme for sustainable tourism in and around protected areas, and improved training.

Table 1. Steps in Sustainable Tourism Planning

1. State clear conservation aims.
2. Compile an inventory.
3. Work in partnership.
4. Identify the values and image on which to base sustainable tourism.
5. Assess the carrying capacity and set standards that must be maintained.
6. Survey and analyse tourist markets and visitors' needs and expectations.
7. Identify tourism activities that are compatible with the protected area.
8. Propose "new tourism products" to be developed.
9. Assess the environmental impacts of proposals.
10. Specify the types of visitor management required, such as zoning and channeling, interpretation, and education.
11. Propose traffic management systems.
12. Devise a communications and promotional strategy.
13. Establish a programme for monitoring and review.
14. Assess resource and training needs.
15. Implement the plan.

Case study: Managing Dovedale

One of the most useful parts of the project was the series of case studies which were presented. Sixteen of these are written up in the report and with a contact person in that park who can be reached for further details. The case study of Dovedale in the Peak National Park needs to be set in context.

Figure 1 shows the locations of the national parks of England and Wales. **Figure 2** shows the more detailed location of the Peak National Park. It was established in 1951 with an area of 555 square miles. It has 38,000 people living within its boundaries, and about 16 million more live within one hour's travel time.

The result of its particular location in the north of England, particularly between the conurbations of Manchester and Sheffield, means that the Peak National Park is under the greatest pressure. It has about 22 million visits per year, which makes it the most-visited national park in Europe, and the second-most-visited in

the world. (I believe the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Tennessee and North Carolina is the most-visited American national park with approximately 9 million visits per year. Yellowstone has about 3 million per year.)

The national park is also under intense pressure for development of housing, recreation developments, and even quarrying. The National Park Authority only owns 4% of the land. About 12% is owned by the large national conservation charity, the National Trust.

The Peak National Park has a board, with one-third appointed by the national government and two-thirds by the local government in the area. It has a budget of about £7 million per year (50% central government, 25% local government, and 25% direct income) and has a staff of more than 200. Apart from the powers which are familiar to North American readers of having information, interpretation, rangers, field staff, etc., the strongest powers are as a planning authority.



Figure 1. National Parks of England and Wales



Figure 2. Detailed location of the Peak National Park

Any building in the park has to be authorised by the park authority, and more than 1,000 applications a year are so received. More than 80% of applications are approved, but usually with tight conditions controlling materials, siting, and design. There is an appeal system against refusal. Normally, no compensation is payable for a refusal.

This is the background to the case study of Dovedale, which is a popular beauty spot in the southern part of the National Park.

Too popular for its own good?

Dovedale first became famous 300 years ago after a well-known local figure described it in a book on fishing. The River Dove winds through a series of magnificent limestone dales and then into a deep gorge. The area is tremendously popular, attracting over two million tourists each year, around three quarters of a million of whom walk the Dovedale footpath. As many as 2,000 people an hour use the famous Stepping Stones river crossing on busy Sundays in summer.

Most visitors were arriving by car and parking in a very visible car park. They were causing traffic congestion and parking problems as well as eroding footpaths and valley sides—in a nationally important wildlife and geological site.

Visitors have been a mixed blessing for local people too. Owners of the car park and caravan site and those providing tourist accommodation earn money from them. However, farmers have suffered in their everyday work with problems from traffic jams, trespassers, disturbance to sheep, and lit

ter left by visitors.

Carrying capacity

Park managers could see that the carrying capacity of the valley was being exceeded and that action was needed. Although the national park owns no land in Dovedale, it is responsible for working with landowners and other organisations to make sure that the landscape beauty is conserved. A management plan was produced and discussed with landowners, including the National Trust (the previously mentioned conservation group), as well as with visitors and local people. There was general agreement that action was needed to ease the problems, improve visitor facilities, reduce pressure on the landscape and wildlife, enhance the dale, and help the local community.

Elements of the plan have been implemented jointly by the national park, landowners, and local councils. *Car parking within the dale has been reduced from 750 to 400 spaces* and new, smaller landscaped car parks have been built within three kilometres (Figure 3).

A ten-year scheme of footpath restoration was carried out. An all-weather path was created allowing visitors to enjoy the dale throughout the year without causing erosion. Only natural limestone has been used so that the path blends into the landscape. The work was carried out by local contractors and volunteers.

Traffic management was improved with a total ban on cars at the busiest times. Further improvements will be seen if current proposals are accepted to ban traffic on one stretch throughout the whole year. This will allow easy



Figure 3. Aerial View of Dovedale Car Park Before and After Reduction (Upper Photograph from 1980, Lower from 1991; Orientation Arrows Point to Same Location in Both)

and safe year-round access for walkers, families (especially those with baby buggies), and people with disabilities. Other aspects of the project include improved ranger services, better public toilets and information for visitors, an environmental education service based at the nearby youth hostel, and the restoration of eroded areas.

Results of the scheme

The scheme has been successful in reducing the number of visitors to the area and in increasing the capacity of the footpath for walkers in a way that is sensitive to the environment. Traffic congestion has been reduced, local peoples' needs have been taken into account, and the nature and landscape of Dovedale has benefitted. The Dovedale project has also demonstrated the value of working in partnership, an approach that involves listening, understanding, discussion, negotiation, and joint funding by all the partners concerned.

A number of key aspects are essential for success: a clear management plan is needed; the park authority must be able to act as a catalyst and co-ordinator for change; and the park or its partners must have the powers, negotiating skills and resources, and will to implement the plan.

Park managers also had the confidence to enable them to reduce the capacity of the area and to restore it. Although only limited information was available on the visitors and ecology of the area, park managers used their professional judgment to take decisions. Sometimes action is needed urgently to make tourism use sustainable and to avoid further damage.

Conclusions

The protected areas of Europe vary in their attractiveness, their exposure to pressure, and the management regimes applied to them. The Federation of Nature and National Parks of Europe tries to bring the best experience to all. The strength of the report *Loving Them to Death? Sustainable Tourism in Europe's Nature and National Parks* lies in its rich experience of the managers of many of these protected areas, which are for the first time brought together in an attractive report. Sustainable tourism is a fashionable topic at present. The challenge for the Federation is to ensure that the best of standards identified in the report are brought to bear in many of the other protected areas of Europe. That requires political commitment, professional skill, and resources—which are often singularly lacking!

Reference

- FNNPE [Federation of Nature and National Parks of Europe]. 1993. *Loving Them to Death? Sustainable Tourism in Europe's Nature and National Parks*. Diana Shipp (ed.). Grafenau, Germany: FNNPE. [This title is available from FNNPE, Kröllstrasse 5, D-8352 Grafenau, Germany. Telephone 49(0)8552 2839 Fax: 49(0)8552 3242. The price is 30 Deutschmarks.]

