

‘AN INTIMATE CHARM’:  
THE CREATION OF NATIONAL PARKS IN ENGLAND & WALES

by

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## *Abstract*

This thesis examines the history of the creation of national parks in England and Wales, and emphasises the continuous nature of the campaign for national parks over decades that built in strength and reshaped political and popular attitudes in its favour. This study traces the origins of the idea which built upon traditions of environmental conservation and a trend towards the preservation of aspects of town and country life. Numerous organisations that were interested in national parks for their value of both environmental and countryside preservation and recreation, promoted the idea of national parks in the early twentieth century and lobbied the government to act. The 1930s were a key period in the campaign for national parks with the publication of the Report of the Committee for National Parks in 1931, the peak of the open access movement led by ramblers, the formation of the Standing Committee on National Parks, and the disappointing first attempt at legislation to provide public access to the countryside in 1939. Campaigners for national parks continued their efforts during the Second World War and in the post-war period when their cause was advanced by the publication of the Scott Report (1942), the Dower Report (1945), and the Hobhouse Report (1947), all of which concluded in favour of national park creation in Britain. The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act was eventually passed in 1949 when political, economic, social conditions coalesced into an atmosphere in which meaningful national park legislation was possible.

## *Chapter One – Introduction & Historiography*

Those who fought for the establishment of national parks in Britain would “be attacked by those who think that any expenditure on the preservation of the natural beauties of the countryside is unjustifiable”. So wrote the Secretary to the National Park Committee in its 1931 report. He continued that they would be

assailed by enthusiasts who wish to press their own fancies or look for action on more heroic lines; importuned by private individuals who see in the proposals an opportunity of private gain and opposed by others who resent any interference with private interests. In many cases they will be called upon to hold an even balance between conflicting interests, and at all times they must be prepared to take a long view, and to leave it to time and a later generation to vindicate their actions. But if the task is likely to be difficult it should also provide an enviable opportunity of conserving for all time some of the most glorious works of Nature in this country.<sup>1</sup>

The Secretary was uncannily prescient in his description of the difficulties encountered by the national park movement over the next two decades. While inspired by the establishment of national parks around the world in the late nineteenth century, Britain faced numerous hindrances in creating a national park system. Its geography was not extensive, as was the case in the United States or Canada, nor did it have broad expanses of wilderness. Instead the nation possessed a semi-natural landscape transformed by thousands of years of human occupation, a high population density and very little public land which could be turned over to national parks to be held in trust for the entire population. Even though they were faced with opposition from country landowners, a lack of public funds, and unreceptive and unwilling governments, numerous organisations and

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<sup>1</sup> Financial Secretary to the Treasury, National Park Committee, *Report of the National Park Committee* (London: HMSO, April 1931), 43.

individuals continued to press government circles for the establishment of national parks in England and Wales.

The movement for the establishment of national parks in Britain dates back to the Romantic era of the early nineteenth century, although it reached its apex in the 1930s and 1940s. Diverse outdoor organisations, pressure groups, philanthropists, and volunteer bodies contributed to the movement for national parks in England and Wales, inspired by a spectrum of motivations. Some advocates were driven by a desire to create recreational opportunities for everyone in Britain through expanded legal access to the countryside. Others viewed national parks as a way to conserve the natural environment. Many were motivated by an anti-industrial reaction and a desire to preserve the tranquility and quintessential charm of the British countryside against unfettered urban and industrial encroachment.

During the 1920s and 1930s, supporters of the development of a national park system lobbied government circles, and engaged in various forms of public promotion of the concept. The idea was directed at Liberal, Conservative, and Labour politicians and *bien pensants* in the 1930s, but plans to develop national parks never substantially advanced, hindered by lack of government motivation, landowners' resistance or economic situations, and finally by the outbreak of the Second World War. During wartime, national park advocates continued to build on the foundations of the movement established in the previous decades. It was in the post-war era that national park advocates finally found a willing government partner in the newly elected Labour Party, which was itself determined both to guide and to respond to the British public's desire for substantial reform following the privations of the Depression and war. After several preparatory government reports,

the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act was eventually passed in March 1949, enabling the creation of thirteen national parks in England and Wales since 1951.

The historical analysis of the establishment of national parks in Great Britain has often fallen outside the discipline of history itself. The diverse range of contributors to British national parks historiography reflects the multi-disciplinary nature of environmental history. There has been little analysis of the entire story of the establishment of national parks, as most scholarly studies have focused on smaller portions of the whole process or have included an historical section, sometimes almost apparently as an afterthought, within larger examinations of the contemporary state of the national park system.

American environmental historian John Opie wrote that the discipline has always been “dogged by the spectre of advocacy.”<sup>2</sup> This is most certainly true of many historical analyses of Britain’s national park movement. The contributors to national parks historiography include activists, environmental researchers, and former protesters from the ranks of public land access movement; they are users, advocates, and admirers of Britain’s national parks. Therefore, these contributors are motivated by a diverse set of impulses. Some seek to justify their prior activities in relation to national parks. Others wish to memorialise the processes that led to the creation of national parks in Britain. They may continue to advocate for contemporary policy with regards to national parks through the lens of historical analysis. These motivations are not unusual in the field of environmental history: Opie explains that its practitioners occupy a place in the gulf between objectivity

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<sup>2</sup> John Opie, “Environmental History: Pitfalls and Opportunities,” *Environmental Review* 7, no. 1, Special Issue: Papers from the First International Conference on Environmental History (Spring 1983): 10.

and advocacy.<sup>3</sup> Many of the contributors to the historiography of national parks in Britain occupy a gulf as well, between historical detachment and modern national park activism, and this has clearly coloured both their analyses and the lessons to be learned from the history of national parks in Britain.

The history of the creation of national parks in Britain has been most extensively discussed by Gordon E. Cherry in *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II: National Parks and Recreation in the Countryside* (1975).<sup>4</sup> Cherry spent the majority of his career at the University of Birmingham where he held numerous posts including Senior Lecturer and Deputy Director of the Centre of Urban and Region Studies and Head of the School of Geography.<sup>5</sup> He was considered a leading figure and a pioneer in the scholarly study of town planning and specialised in the history of planning.<sup>6</sup>

Cherry's book is part of an official history series of environmental planning commissioned at the behest of the British government. As such, Cherry's history, by his own admission, examines only the creation of Britain's national parks from an official perspective.<sup>7</sup> As an official historian, Cherry was given access to a range of government documents which he used as his main sources of information including department files and papers from the Home Affairs Committee, the Lord Privy Seal's Committee, and from Cabinet.<sup>8</sup> In the book, Cherry argues that government countryside planning policy was

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon E. Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II: National Parks and Recreation in the Countryside* (London: HMSO, 1975).

<sup>5</sup> James T. Boulton, "Obituary: Professor Gordon Cherry," *Independent*, October 22, 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-professor-gordon-cherry-1339852.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Boulton, "Obituary: Professor Gordon Cherry."

<sup>7</sup> Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, vii.

shaped by a variety of influences and that policy emerged as a result of outside influence by pressure groups.<sup>9</sup>

Cherry's analysis focuses on the development of national parks in Britain through the lens of recreation planning. He writes that the questions concerned with recreation in the countryside entered popular debate in the 1930s. Cherry analyses the passage of the Access to Mountains Bill in 1939, but identifies the Bill's major flaw in that it gave no access to the countryside anywhere, "merely the machinery for obtaining it."<sup>10</sup> Cherry writes that the national park idea returned to the national agenda after World War Two when "social idealism and unity of purpose was so strongly in evidence."<sup>11</sup> However, he does acknowledge the importance of the work of government planners during the war in creating rural land utilisation plans for peacetime. Cherry's analysis credits the Standing Committee on National Parks for maintaining pressure on the government throughout the war years. At the end of the war, the general political opinion was in favour of national parks, but their creation was opposed from other sources including the Farmers Union that wanted to protect farming interests and the County Councils Association that wanted to safeguard rural interests.<sup>12</sup> He states that the question of national parks and access to the countryside ultimately came down to a question of political will.<sup>13</sup> Cherry discusses the multiple amendments to the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act before its eventual passing in 1949 mainly to satisfy opposing government departments.<sup>14</sup> The book continues to chart the history of national parks legislation subsequent to the 1949 Act.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 106.

While Cherry's history is the most detailed in the field, due to its nature as an official history, it is a politically-neutral recounting of the history of the establishment of national parks in Britain. The changing of political parties in power barely features throughout the account, despite opposing political ideologies featuring in later historical analyses of the subject. Cherry's work is commendable for its meticulous recounting of the national parks debate in government circles from the 1930s to the 1940s. However, it is not a comprehensive account of the national parks movement in Britain.

The two most well-known scholarly works on the British national park system were written by Ann MacEwen and Malcolm MacEwen. It must be said in any discussion of the MacEwens' work that they were activists and champions of national parks, not impartial academics. However, it must also be said that, although their partiality coloured their work, it did not undermine its integrity. Both were Honorary Research Fellows at University College, London at the time of publication of their first book on the national parks. Ann MacEwen was a planning consultant who had worked in both local and central government, as well as in private practice and in university teaching and research. Malcolm MacEwen worked in law and journalism, as well as being a member of the Exmoor National Park Committee from 1973-1981, vice-president of the Exmoor Society, and a member of the Council for National Parks.<sup>15</sup>

The MacEwens' work on national parks in Great Britain is credited with providing the field the "intellectual basis" it previously lacked, and their books are commonly

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<sup>15</sup> Notably, Malcolm MacEwen campaigned against the ploughing of the moorland in Exmoor National Park, and became well-known as a fierce defender of conservationist policies in national parks.

regarded as the most comprehensive studies in the field.<sup>16</sup> Their first book on the subject, *National Parks: conservation or cosmetics?* was published in 1982. It is a critical examination of the national park system and covers a diverse range of subjects pertaining to the National Park system from 1949 to 1982, with the history of the development of the national parks being discussed in Part 1. The MacEwens' goal in writing *National Parks: conservation or cosmetics?* was to modernise the debate surrounding environmental conservation in Britain and initiate a new conversation about national parks within the context of the "political, economic, social and cultural conditions of the 1980s."<sup>17</sup> *National Parks: conservation or cosmetics?* was published a part of the Resource Management Series which promoted a prominent role for academic research in "developing informed policies on resource use."<sup>18</sup> The section on the history of the creation of national parks in Britain is included to provide context for the rest of the book which concentrates on contemporary issues facing the national parks in the early 1980s.

Their historical section covers the national park idea and the 1949 National Park Act, and is generally focused on the environmental conservation, rather than recreational, aspect of parks. The MacEwens discuss the importance of scientific and conservation organisations, including the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves and the British Ecological Society, in the national park movement.<sup>19</sup> Their historical analysis focuses mainly on the government's role in the creation of national parks and the bulk of the

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<sup>16</sup>Chris Hall, "Ann MacEwen," *Guardian*, September 6, 2008, <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2008/sep/06/conservation.wildlife>; Chris Hall, "Obituary: Malcolm MacEwen," *Independent*, October 23, 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/obituary-malcolm-macewen-1347769.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Ann MacEwen and Malcolm MacEwen, *National Parks: conservation or cosmetics?* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), xiv.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, ix.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

historical analysis is concentrated on the 1940s. The MacEwens write that the National Park Act was passed in this period because “the Second World War was the decisive factor that made the politically unattainable politically possible” and that national parks were created to make a “better Britain.”<sup>20</sup> The MacEwens also write that government support for the national parks was primarily found within the Labour Party and mention some of the prominent cabinet ministers of Clement Attlee’s government formed in 1945 who had connections to the rambling movement.<sup>21</sup>

The largest section of the MacEwens’ historical analysis examines the assumptions and consequences of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. The MacEwens write that the 1949 Act’s most successful section is its third part that deals with nature conservation. However, they are critical of the heavy multi-organisation bureaucratic approach to nature conservancy, particularly the conflict that arose due to the roles of the National Parks Commission and the Nature Conservancy, both established in 1949.<sup>22</sup> *National Parks: conservation or cosmetics?* examines the public access provisions of the 1949 Act which the MacEwens praise for giving the public access rights to the British countryside. However, they nevertheless pointed out that landowners and farmers were still able to undermine the Act’s intentions and directives, thereby preventing public access to certain areas.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the national park authorities’ powers were limited to certain spaces within the parks.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

The MacEwens' second major analysis of the British national park system, *Greenprints for the Countryside? The story of Britain's national parks*, published in 1987, features a similar section on the history of national parks to their first book.<sup>25</sup> It covers, in only a few pages, the creation of the first national parks, the influence of William Wordsworth's writings on views of the British landscape, the Ramblers movement, the effect of the Second World War on galvanising political action in Britain, and the major reports and committees of the 1940s that examined the feasibility of national parks in Britain. It is very much an overview rather than a detailed historical analysis. *Greenprints for the Countryside?* emphasises the uniqueness of the British countryside at the time of the creation of national parks. The MacEwens write that Britain's national parks were not intended to conserve uninhabited wilderness, but rather preserve the character and promote the enjoyment of inhabited landscapes where the land is managed for a "multiplicity of purposes."<sup>26</sup> *Greenprints for the Countryside?* also discusses how supporters of the national park idea in Britain were disappointed by the 1949 Act which exempted forestry and farming from development restrictions.

Three decades after their publication, *National Parks: conservation or cosmetics?* and *Greenprints for the Countryside?* remain the seminal books in the study of national parks in Britain. However, the MacEwens' historical analysis in both books is presentist in its approach. The MacEwens examined the 1949 Act through the lens of the issues facing the national park system in the 1980s. Many of those challenges were a consequence of some of the flaws inherent in the 1949 legislation and the MacEwens were not reluctant

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<sup>25</sup> Some sentences used by the MacEwens in *Greenprints for the Countryside?* are lifted directly from their earlier *National Parks: conservation or cosmetics?*

<sup>26</sup> MacEwen and MacEwen, *Greenprints for the Countryside? The Story of Britain's National Parks*, 4.

to critique them aggressively, and perhaps slightly unfairly, with the benefit of 1980s hindsight. Nevertheless, the historical sections in both books form the base of many other historical analyses of Britain's national parks.

*A People's Charter? Forty Years of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949* by John Blunden and Nigel Curry was commissioned by the Countryside Commission, in conjunction with HMSO, to "record and evaluate progress made since the legislation," however the book's first section is a narrative overview of the national park movement that led to the Act's passing.<sup>27</sup> Blunden was a professor of geography specialising in resource management, and Curry, a professor of countryside and environmental planning, who collaborated on multiple projects concerning countryside management in Britain in the 1980s. As an official publication of the HMSO, *A People's Charter?* is a commissioned history, rather than an academic examination, of the national park story in Britain.

*A People's Charter?* argues that there was "no single 'conservation movement' that provided clear momentum for pressure to introduce the 1949 legislation."<sup>28</sup> Instead, a wide range of interests, notably conservation and recreation, shaped the movement. The first chapter of the book examines different motivating factors of conservation including aesthetic, scientific and material benefit. Blunden and Curry identify the beginnings of the conservation movement in Britain in the nineteenth century, and describe its escalation in the early twentieth century. Class plays a significant role in Blunden and Curry's account

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<sup>27</sup> John Blunden and Nigel Curry, *A People's Charter?, Forty Years of the National Parks and the Access to the Countryside Act 1949*, (London: HMSO, 1989), 6.

The source base upon which the history was constructed is unclear, as the book provides only a list for further readings without specific citations in the text or a bibliography.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

of the national park movement, and they state that class differences influenced conservation and recreation values.<sup>29</sup> Blunden and Curry examine the government's response to the public pressure by summarising the major reports published in the 1930s and 1940s concerning countryside land use. *A People's Charter?* also examines the passage of the *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Bill* through Parliament, including clauses and amendments to the Bill. Blunden and Curry pay particular attention to criticism that the National Parks Commission should have received more powers in order to successfully counter opposition to the parks scheme. As an HMSO publication, *A People's Charter?* takes a fairly neutral tone in its analysis of the national park movement and the passing of the Bill, however its detailed narrative overview is one of the most comprehensive examinations of the subject.

In *A History of Nature Conservation in Britain*, David Evans argues that the National Parks Act of 1949 was “a direct result of the war.”<sup>30</sup> He therefore places the key elements of national park establishment in the brief 1945-1949 period. The book provides a short overview of national park development in Britain, focusing on the government reports of the late 1940s. Evans emphasises how the concept of “a brave new world” and “a land fit for heroes” fuelled ideas of what post-war Britain could look like in the minds of planners, including the provisioning of national parks for the “common” people.<sup>31</sup> Evans argues that the “official view [moved] perceptibly towards countryside conservation” during the war and that national park advocates responded to government thinking in this area by increasing their pressure.<sup>32</sup> However, Evans, as a nature conservationist, is quite

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>30</sup> Evans, *A History of Conservation in Britain*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 1997), 60.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

critical of the National Park Act, writing that it was not strong enough legislation to create a national park system that meets “international standards.”<sup>33</sup> Evans places this blame on legislators more interested in appeasing local populations and authorities.

B.W. Clapp’s *An Environmental History of Great Britain since the Industrial Revolution* (1994) includes a short section on the conservation movement in Britain. Clapp writes that the conservation impulse is often driven by a sense of history, whether conscious or unconscious, as well as interest in the preservation of peace and quiet.<sup>34</sup> The book briefly mentions the creation of national parks in Britain in the context of a wider preservation movement happening across Britain, notably an interest in preserving older buildings. Clapp writes that a desire for recreational opportunities, as well as a desire to prevent development in the countryside lay behind the movement for national parks in Britain.

I.G. Simmon’s book, *An Environmental History of Great Britain from 10,000 Years Ago to the Present* (2001), makes several references to national parks, but usually in passing within the context of ecological preservation in general. Simmons, an historical geographer who spent much of his career at Durham University, writes about several groups whose advocacy for environmental preservation led to the creation of national parks, but he discusses them independently to the national parks narrative. For example, he mentions the Society for the Preservation of Nature Reserves which advocated for state involvement in the protection of wildlife.<sup>35</sup> Simmons also writes about the importance of

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 77.

<sup>34</sup> B.W. Clapp, *An Environmental History of Britain since the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Longman, 1994), 124, 134.

<sup>35</sup> I. G Simmons, *An Environmental History of Great Britain, From 10,000 Years Ago to the Present* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 179.

Romantic writers, notably William Blake, for inspiring anti-industrialisation sentiment in British society and a desire to conserve the traditional countryside.<sup>36</sup>

The creation of British national parks is also briefly examined in *The Invention of the Park: From the Garden of Eden to Disney's Magic Kingdom* (2005) by Karen R. Jones and John Wills, which features a chapter that discusses the development of national parks around the world. The book places the British experience in the international context, which shows that Britain's development of national parks was slow compared to much of the rest of the world. However, Jones and Wills write of the late 1940s that "the time for park creation seemed politically appropriate, given the new Labour administration's public works and social betterment philosophy."<sup>37</sup> Jones and Wills also emphasise the international outlook of British lawmakers, noting that they drew inspiration and knowledge from the North American experience.

John Sheail has been the most prolific writer about the history of national parks and of nature conservation in general in twentieth century Britain. Sheail is a geographer by training and has worked as a Senior Principal Scientific Officer in the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (a division of the British Natural Environment Research Council) and as professor of geography.<sup>38</sup> Across a career beginning in the mid-1970s, Sheail has written numerous articles pertaining to the development of national parks and countryside access in Britain, and his writing on national parks contrasts with many other works in the field. His historical analyses are characterised by a less triumphalist or heroic narrative than those

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 120.

<sup>37</sup> Karen R. Jones, and John Wills, *The Invention of the Park from the Garden of Eden to Disney's Magic Kingdom* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 83.

<sup>38</sup> The field of environmental history in North America is generally called "historical geography" in Britain, and Sheail's scientific background is representative of many academics, like I.G. Simmons, who study environmental history in Europe.

offered by many of his fellow scholars and often focus on the government as the critical actor in the establishment of national parks.

Sheail's 1975 article, "The Concept of National Parks in Great Britain 1900-1950" focuses primarily on the government's role in the establishment of national parks in Britain. Sheail discusses the debate surrounding which locations should be chosen for national parks in the 1940s. He refers to several activist organisations such as the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves and the Council for the Preservation of Rural England.<sup>39</sup> Sheail writes that these organisations were effective at securing government support for national parks because they coordinated their activities within the framework established by the Standing Committee on National Parks.<sup>40</sup>

In *Rural Conservation in Inter-war Britain* (1981), Sheail examines the public discussion surrounding the possibility of creating national parks in the 1920s and 1930s, particularly at the government level. He writes that there was a growing opinion that local planning authorities possessed neither the legal nor the financial means to protect areas of outstanding scenery and recreational value.<sup>41</sup> Instead, according to Sheail, opinion began to shift in favour of the creation of an "ad hoc group of commissioners" who could designate a series of parks. Much of the section on national parks in the book focuses on the debate in government during the 1930s on how to finance their creation and upkeep. The text analyses the decade-long debate, which started with the Labour government of Ramsay MacDonald and continued with the National Government and Conservative

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<sup>39</sup> John Sheail, "The Concept of National Parks in Great Britain 1900-1950," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, No. 66 (November 1975): 41-2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>41</sup> John Sheail, *Rural Conservation in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 115, 121.

administration through the 1930s. The debate was complex, involving multiple governmental departments including the Treasury, the Exchequer and the Ministry of Health on the subject of national parks funding. Sheail identifies the Ministry of Health as being particularly opposed to the creation of national parks out of fear that it would deflect funding from what it considered more important projects.<sup>42</sup> There were also conflicting opinions concerning the effectiveness of a government-led national parks scheme, with some members of the House of Commons arguing that the National Trust would be better suited to establish and operate a system of national parks. While Sheail's analysis of the national parks debate ends at the outbreak of the Second World War, he concludes that the war did not provide a "fresh start," but simply interrupted "the long search for a more effective and responsive pattern of regional planning."<sup>43</sup>

Sheail also discusses national parks in his book *An Environmental History of Twentieth-Century Britain* (2002). He describes a "Third Force:" a "self-conscious concern to preserve amenity, and wildlife and (...) opportunities for outdoor recreation," emerging in the countryside in the twentieth century, alongside farming and forestry. Sheail credits the Council for the Preservation of Rural England for raising government support for the national parks and keeping "the national parks issue alive" after the Labour government in the early 1930s failed to establish a park system despite supporting it in principle.<sup>44</sup> In this work, when discussing national park creation, Sheail focuses on the influential impact of John Dower's advocacy for national park creation, both in his seminal

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 118.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 115, 122.

<sup>44</sup> John Sheail, *An Environmental History of Twentieth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 108.

1945 White Paper and his earlier articles and pamphlets.<sup>45</sup> Sheail writes that Dower's report provided a "sound foundation" on which the National Parks Committee and the Government could develop a national park system in Britain.<sup>46</sup> Beyond the section on John Dower and the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, Sheail makes only brief references to the national park system in the book. He does, however, place the development of national parks in the wider movement for environmental conservation in Britain.

In his recent "The Access to Mountains Act 1939: An Essay in Compromise," (2010) Sheail writes about the debate and resistance to attempts to pass the bill, which would give public rights of access to parts of the countryside, through Parliament. Sheail writes that there were surprisingly low levels of support for the bill in the late 1930s in Parliament despite rambling developing as an exceptionally popular pastime for members of the public.<sup>47</sup> The article emphasises the power of Britain's landowning elite in forming public policy in the inter-war era, in contrast to the comparatively low power of working class ramblers advocating for public access. Sheail writes that the landowners successfully lobbied for amendments to the bill which essentially led to an empty bill that maintained the status quo of public land access being voluntary and at the will of the landowner. Sheail concludes that although the Access to Mountains Act was a failure in guaranteeing public access rights, the Second World War galvanised more support for public access rights and fueled the campaign for national parks in Britain.<sup>48</sup> The article argues that the eventual

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<sup>45</sup>*Ibid*, 115-122.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid*, 122.

<sup>47</sup> John Sheail, "The Access to Mountains Act 1939: An Essay in Compromise," *Rural History* 21, no. 1 (April 2010): 61.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 70.

passing of the watered-down bill showed that finding a balance between public rights of access and private land ownership in any subsequent legislation, particularly concerning a unified national park policy, would require significant compromise between interest groups and the government.

In “From Preservation to Conservation: Wildlife and the Environment, 1900–1950” (1987), Sheail gives a brief overview of what he identifies as the major groups advocating environmental conservation in Britain. He discusses the importance of the shift in terminology from preservation to conservation, as the latter term implies not only the protection, but the enhancement of wildlife populations.<sup>49</sup> This change in vocabulary occurred in the 1940s, first in the United States and then in Britain.<sup>50</sup> The article also briefly covers the groups and their leaders who advocated for national park creation in Britain, notably the British Ecological Society.

Sheail’s 1999 article “Creating Landscapes from the Old - an English Perspective on Nature Conservation” represents a relatively cursory examination of the environmental conservation movement in Britain. The establishment of the Nature Conservancy in 1949, the same year as the National Parks Act was passed, marked a decisive movement in environmental conservation, as it was the first scientific body to act on the behalf of the government to protect wild plant and animal life, and identify and preserve sites of geomorphological and geological interest.<sup>51</sup> Sheail points out that ecologists in Britain were slow to realise the ways that past human activity had shaped the British countryside

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<sup>49</sup> John Sheail, “From Preservation to Conservation: Wildlife and the Environment, 1900-1950,” *Biological Journal of the Linnean Society* 32, no. 2 (1987): 175.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 175.

<sup>51</sup> John Sheail, “Creating Landscapes from the Old – An English Perspective on Nature Conservation,” *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift - Norwegian Journal of Geography* 53, no. 2-3 (October 1999): 71.

and coastline.<sup>52</sup> Sheail ultimately argues that within the modern countryside, nature conservation can only occur through the active management of certain species and habitat.<sup>53</sup>

Finally in regard to Sheail's work, his most recent book, *Nature's Spectacle: The World's First National Parks and Protected Places* (2010), discusses the history of the establishment of national parks around the world.<sup>54</sup> The world's first national parks in the United States and Canada are the most frequently discussed in the book, however Sheail also examines the establishment of diverse national park systems around the world. The historical analyses of the British experience in this book marks a notable departure from Sheail's previous works on Britain's national parks. This may be because *Nature's Spectacle* was intended for more general readership than his previous academic research publications. The British experience is discussed primarily in two separate sections on the right to roam and parks and post-war planning.

Sheail identifies multiple groups advocating for public access to the countryside, as well as its preservation including the National Trust and the Ramblers' Association. Sheail focuses less on the government as the primary actor, and gives more credit to the grassroots rambling movement in the national park narrative. However, Sheail rejects the simplified dichotomy of progressive ramblers versus elite Tory landowners, and argues that the opposition to the right to roam was more broadly based.<sup>55</sup> Sheail adopts a more heroic and

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<sup>52</sup>*Ibid*, 72. An example of this was the Norfolk Broads: by the late 1950s it became clear that a landscape and ecosystem that had been deemed "natural" was in fact the product of mediaeval farming practices. This in turn set off a debate as to whether such an "artificial" landscape was worthy of its official designation as a national park.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

<sup>54</sup> John Sheail, *Nature's Spectacle: The World's First National Parks and Protected Places* (London: Earthscan, 2010).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 248.

simplistic narrative to the creation of national parks in the post-war era than in his previous accounts. He writes that the Second World War motivated the British Government to provide the public with better access to the countryside and create “national possessions” for everyone’s enjoyment.<sup>56</sup> Sheail states that the passing of the Act was in part due to the work of leading figures of the post-war Labour Government, notably Hugh Dalton (who was a prominent member of Cabinet, as well as president of the Ramblers’ Association).<sup>57</sup> Sheail briefly summarises the post-war government debate on national parks which led to the eventual passing of the 1949. In *Nature’s Spectacle*, Sheail adopts a less critical and analytical perspective than his previous examinations, and employs a more optimistic narrative voice that acknowledges the challenges of establishing national parks in Britain, while seemingly celebrating their creation and their purpose.

In their revisionist article, “The policy origins of Britain's National Parks: The Addison Committee 1929-31”, (2001) John Mair and John Delafons write that the work of the Addison Committee was a significant moment in the creation of national parks in Britain, but its importance has been overlooked in more general historical accounts. The authors argue that the establishment of the Addison Committee in 1929 by Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald marks the entry of a government into the debate concerning national parks creation in Britain. Mair and Delafons emphasise the role of Lord Bledisloe as being the first British politician to seriously consider establishing parks in Britain. The article discusses the creation of the Addison Committee, some of the major witnesses to give statements in favour of parks, as well the Committee’s conclusions which were in favour of the scheme. Despite no action being taken by the government on national parks due to

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 284.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 288-9.

the economic situation of the early 1930s, Mair and Delafons argue that the Addison Committee laid the foundation for national park proposals in the 1940s and was an “important stepping stone” in park establishment in Britain.<sup>58</sup>

Other historical analyses have looked specifically at the issue of public access to land for recreational purposes. Indeed, it is probably the part of the British national parks story most closely examined, yet many analyses consider the question of access to land for recreational purposes to lie *outside* the context of the history of national parks. Although by no means the only group interested in increasing public access to land, the rambling movement of the early twentieth century has received the bulk of attention in historical examinations of public land access rights.

Howard Hill’s 1980 book, *Freedom to Roam: The Struggle for Access to Britain’s Moors and Mountains* is one of the most popular books on the rambling movement.<sup>59</sup> In his review of Hill’s book, social historian David Rubinstein writes that it is “almost impossible” to determine the political effects of the mass trespasses that became a cornerstone of the protest movement for access led by ramblers’ groups because one’s view is affected by one’s own bias for or against this type of direct civil disobedience.<sup>60</sup> Hill himself was a Rambler who participated in mass trespasses to advocate for public access to the countryside as a nineteen year old in 1932.<sup>61</sup> While he does not dwell extensively on his personal experiences, there is a clear undercurrent to the historical analysis showing

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<sup>58</sup> John Mair and John Delafons, “The Policy Origins of Britain’s National Parks: The Addison Committee 1929–31,” *Planning Perspectives* 16 (2001): 307.

<sup>59</sup> Howard Hill, *Freedom to Roam: The Struggle for Access to Britain's Moors and Mountains*. (Ashbourne: Moorland Publishing, 1980).

<sup>60</sup> David Rubinstein, “Review of *Freedom to Roam: The Struggle for Access to Britain's Moors and Mountains*,” By Howard Hill. *History Workshop*, no. 11. Oxford University Press (2011): 179.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 179.

that Hill believes that the cause was justified. However it does not discredit his historical analysis; his passionate narrative of the rambling movement is well-supported by primary source research.

In *Freedom to Roam*, Hill offers a history of the land access movement in Britain. He writes that the rise and growth of the open-air movement can be attributed to a revolt in the nineteenth and twentieth century against urban existence.<sup>62</sup> Hill discusses the roots of the earliest rambling societies in the nineteenth century which he reports were comprised primarily of members of the middle class. He also charts the rise of working class rambling movements in the early twentieth century, as well as a brief mention of women's rambling clubs. Hill discusses how ramblers varied in political affiliations from moderate Labour Party supporters to more radical communists and socialists. As such, there were varying levels of support within the rambling community for acts of civil disobedience.

*Freedom to Roam* argues that the working-class support for national parks went beyond a desire for recreational opportunities, and was also driven by interest in natural environments and local flora.<sup>63</sup> Hill is particularly outspoken against the preservation of land for the purpose of the field-sport pursuits of the upper class, and he decries the denial of public access rights to such lands. He writes in particularly excoriating terms of aristocratic grouse shooting, calling the competition among shooters for record kills “nauseating and degenerate,” and ridicules the justification of the sport as being a provider of food when in reality millions of Britons could not afford grouse in their diet.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Howard Hill, *Freedom to Roam*, 13.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 46-7. In the early twentieth century it was not uncommon to see bags of more than 1,000 grouse on shoots; the record was a bag of 2,929 birds in Lancashire in 1915. See Hugh Gladstone, *Record Bags and Shooting Records* (London: H.F. & G. Witherby, 1930) for an exhaustive treatment of British field sport kills in the early twentieth century.

Hill argues that although no successful legislation governing public access rights was passed during the interwar era, it was the most important phase of the struggle to secure such legal access.<sup>65</sup> The book covers in detail many of the mass trespasses that occurred in the 1920s and 1930s. Hill identifies the Kinder Scout mass trespass of April 24, 1932 as being the most significant because of the public attention it received, particularly surrounding the trial of several of the trespassers. However, Hill argues that it was not the militancy of the interwar ramblers' movement that failed to gain public access rights, but rather the lack of it.<sup>66</sup> *Freedom to Roam* also emphasises the role that the rambler's movement played in the passing of the *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act* of 1949, particularly through the movement's members' pamphleteering, letter-writing campaigns to MPs, public meetings and their inclusion of government members on walking holidays.<sup>67</sup> Hill's book argues that the passing of the *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act* was the culmination of a multi-generational struggle for land access for common people putting pressure on the British government.

*Freedom to Roam* is not an unbiased historical analysis. Hill approaches the subject influenced by his personal experiences and in favour of the general principle underlying the national parks. While he praises the creation of the national parks and the 1949 Act's achievements in extending legal land access rights, his book is nonetheless a call to action for the continuation of the fight to access public land.

Tom Stephenson's *Forbidden Land: The Struggle for Access to Mountain and Moorland* (1989) also examines the history of the rambling movement and the public

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<sup>65</sup> Hill, *Freedom to Roam*, 50.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 82.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 89.

access to the countryside campaign.<sup>68</sup> Stephenson was also personally involved in the rambling movement, however, unlike Hill, he was a leader of the rambling campaign. He was a Labour Party worker in the 1920s. In 1933, Stephenson became a journalist for the *Daily Herald*, starting his writing career on the countryside. He remained involved with the Ramblers' Association from its inception in 1935 until his death in 1987, holding various leadership positions. He also was press office for the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, starting in 1943. *Forbidden Land* is not strictly a personal memoir, but rather a researched historical account of the movement with Stephenson's personal experiences intermixed.

Unsurprisingly, Stephenson credits the rambling movement as being the key factor in ensuring countryside access and the creation of national parks in Britain. He discusses briefly the origins of the rambling movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Stephenson notes that while many of the early ramblers were illiterate, there were also many educated or amateur naturalists.<sup>69</sup> Stephenson proceeds to discuss the origins of the Ramblers' Association founded in 1935 by a council of local rambling clubs. *Forbidden Lands'* third chapter recounts many examples of confrontations or prosecutions between landowners and ramblers from the 1890s to the 1950s, with a narrative clearly in favour of rambling rights. *Forbidden Land* discusses the first unsuccessful attempts at passing Access to Mountain Bills in the late nineteenth century.

Stephenson effectively separates the trespass at Kinder Scout from the larger rambling movement in Britain. While he acknowledges the good intention and enthusiasm

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<sup>68</sup> Tom Stephenson, *Forbidden Land: The Struggle for Access to Mountain and Moorland*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

of the trespassers, he nonetheless argues that the Kinder Scout trespass “contributed little, if anything” to the access to mountains campaign.<sup>70</sup> Stephenson even suggests that the militancy of the trespassers was a hindrance to negotiations for access to the mountains.<sup>71</sup>

Stephenson is critical of the Addison Committee for its lack of rambles on the committee and few mentions of in the final report of the value of access to uncultivated land.<sup>72</sup> He praises John Dower’s Report of 1945 for its “masterly and eloquent statement of the case for national parks” and writes that “it echoed many statements made by the R[amblers’] A[ssociation] over the years.”<sup>73</sup> His account of the passage of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 is noteworthy for his inclusion of his personal memories concerning the Act’s passage through Parliament. However, Stephenson writes that even he as an employee of the Ministry doubted that every stipulation of open access would be fulfilled.<sup>74</sup> Stephenson concludes his account by praising the rambling movement and its success in opening up the British countryside for the enjoyment of the public. He critiques the suggestion that preserving the countryside requires limiting public access, writing that the idea of “protecting natural beauty and then prohibiting public enjoyment of it is preposterous and impracticable.”<sup>75</sup>

Nigel Curry discusses the history of national parks and public land access in the first chapter on the historical context of recreational land use in Britain of his 1994 book, *Countryside Recreation, Access and Land Use Planning*.<sup>76</sup> Predictably, Curry’s historical

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<sup>70</sup> Stephenson, *Forbidden Land*, 153.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 163.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 195.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 198.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 208.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 232.

<sup>76</sup> Nigel Curry, *Countryside Recreation, Access and Land Use Planning* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1994), 6.

section concentrates on the issue of recreational land access use with only little mention of the wildlife and nature conservation aspect of the parks. Curry structures his historical analysis around the two-sided debate on land access, which he demonstrates through his use of charts on groups in favour of land access and those opposed.

Curry's work is noteworthy for its emphasis on class aspects of the debate. Curry argued that the working class ramblers in northern England tended to be more radical in their advocacy compared to the middle class land access advocates in lowland middle England.<sup>77</sup> According to Curry, the middle class movement was more interested in access to southern England and the Home Counties, while the working class focused their advocacy on the wilder northern areas of England and Wales.<sup>78</sup> While discussing the major government reports of the 1940s on the subject, Curry writes a belief that everyone should have equal rights to the countryside underpinned their recommendations for national park creation. However, no report expected that countryside recreation would be to everyone's taste.<sup>79</sup> Curry argues that legal rights of access remained the most contentious issue of the 1949 Act and that the final provisions of the Act were a compromise between conflicting interests.<sup>80</sup>

Curry also suggests that there was a stated opinion held by Romantics and politicians alike that the countryside was not for the enjoyment of all, but rather for those who had the "tastes and inclinations for quiet, even genteel enjoyment."<sup>81</sup> Thus, for Curry the only forms of recreation to be condoned in the parks as suggested by the Act were ones

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 14-16.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

that were peaceful and undistruptive to others.<sup>82</sup> This demonstrated, in Curry's opinion, that the debate surrounding public land access has been always been influenced by class opinions.

In "Kinder Scout and the Legend of the Mass Trespass" (2011) historian David Hey argues that too much emphasis has been placed by historians and the media on the Kinder Scout trespass of 1932 as representing a pivotal moment of the land access movement in Britain. Hey writes that the Kinder Scout trespass was important, but it must be regarded in context of a larger movement, rather than as "a single stunt."<sup>83</sup> He discusses the history of the rambling movement in northern England which he dates to the latter half of the nineteenth century. The article describes the diverse membership of rambling and outdoor organisations which represented a spectrum from industrial workers to university professors. The Kinder Scout trespass forms the bulk of the article's content. Hey does not deny its symbolic importance, but writes that its legendary status in the movement is a result of the 1960s and 1970s Marxist historical interest in the struggles of the working class, and anniversary celebrations in the decades afterwards.<sup>84</sup> The Kinder Scout trespass, according to Hey, has been unfairly overshadowing the rest of the decades-long struggle of the land access movement.

It may be seen from this review that the historiography of the creation of national parks in Britain has been formed thanks to the work of a diverse range of scholars and activists from across multiple disciplines. However, the historiography for the most part has been either quite general or focused on one particular aspect or part of the decades-

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>83</sup> David Hey, "Kinder Scout and the Legend of the Mass Trespass," *Agricultural History Review* 59, no. 2 (December 2011): 199.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 216.

long movement. In some works, notably those of the MacEwens and of Nigel Curry, historical attention has been included only to contextualise the modern problems within the national park system, which form the focus of their work, and not as a standalone historical analysis. Cherry's official history, while thoroughly researched and detailed, focuses only on government action but is politically neutral in its analysis. There is little comprehensive analysis that combines all the major forces from both the government and the public that contributed to the establishment of national parks in Britain, and what has been done is only a brief overview of the history. This thesis examines the national park campaign from a broader perspective - from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the passing of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 - and argues that the post-war period was not a *key* moment in the parks movement but was, instead, the culmination of a decades-long process that built in strength and which, over time, reshaped political and popular attitudes in its favour.

Chapter Two will discuss on the roots of the movement in Romantic writings, early preservationist societies, the development of science-based environmental conservation and the first attempts to expand public access to Britain's moors and mountains. However, the chapter will concentrate on the national park movement in the 1920s and 1930s. It will examine various advocacy groups and individuals that sought to pressure the government towards developing a national park system including rambling and outdoor organisations, the Councils for the Preservation of Rural and Wales and the Standing Committee on National Parks. The government's first exploratory steps towards national park development with the National Park Committee from 1929 to 1931 and the abortive Access to Mountains Act of 1939 will also be analysed. Chapter Three will examine the

continuation of the national park movement into the 1940s and how it responded to the wartime climate. Government reports concerning land utilisation and the feasibility of national parks establishment in Britain will be examined. The Chapter will discuss how post-war attitudes towards government management of land, resources, and the economy created an atmosphere that finally allowed the passing of national parks legislation.

## *Chapter Two – The Origins and Growth of the Idea to the 1930s*

Britain's landscape has been shaped by thousands of years of human occupation. Deforestation, drainage of wetlands, and intensive agriculture transformed Britain's countryside over centuries.<sup>1</sup> A strong desire to tame the wilderness of Britain was prevalent throughout the medieval and early modern eras. Natural wilderness was often regarded with contempt, while the transformation of wildlands into agricultural fields was viewed as both improvement of the landscape and a better use of space.<sup>2</sup> By the time the concept of lands being set aside for preserving nature for the public's enjoyment – in short, national parks - first emerged in Britain, the island no longer had vast areas of pristine wilderness.

The enclosure of common lands in Britain is a process which dates back to before 1500. The end of the feudal system and the gradual evolution from subsistence agriculture to international agricultural trade changed the landscape from a post-medieval system of communal exploitation and regulation of farmland, pastures, meadows, wastes and woodlands to a system of unitary land management.<sup>3</sup> The enclosure of common land intensified during the modern era and the Industrial Revolution, as a newly wealthy rising class of merchants and entrepreneurs sought to cement their position in elite society by buying vast countryside estates from the traditionally landed aristocracy who were not capitalising on the economic opportunities of industrialisation.<sup>4</sup> Between 1761 and 1844, over 2500 Enclosure Acts were passed by the British Parliament which enclosed more than

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<sup>1</sup> W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955).

<sup>2</sup> Evans, *A History of Conservation in Britain*, 17-18.

<sup>3</sup> Federico Cheever, "British National Parks for North Americans: What We Can Learn From a More Crowded Nation Proud of Its Countryside," *Stanford Environmental Law Journal* 26, no. 2 (June 2007): 266.

<sup>4</sup> Jones and Wills, *The Invention of the Park*, 26.

four million acres of common and open land in the countryside.<sup>5</sup> The great areas of open countryside, meadows, moors, and heaths that members of the upper classes purchased were fenced off and access for poor members of the community was blocked.

The enclosure of what had been common land drastically changed life in the countryside. Individual owners controlled large areas of land, meaning that local communities no longer had access to the land and waters from which they drew essential resources to support their life. People who lost their access to land were forced to relocate and the vast majority moved to urban areas to take up employment in the burgeoning factory system. In parallel with the enclosure movement, Britain was industrialising. In 1700, 80 percent of the English population earned its living from the land, but by 1800 only 40 percent were still agriculturalists.<sup>6</sup> In 1800, a quarter of the population lived in urban centres.<sup>7</sup> By 1851, half the population was urban, and by the outbreak of the First World War the figure had risen to approximately 80 percent.<sup>8</sup> In a little more than a century, the rural/urban demographic in Britain had shifted completely.

The concept of conserving specific areas of nature has a long history in Great Britain dating back to the medieval era when the lords of manors would enclose forested areas to keep deer for hunting and to act as timber reserves.<sup>9</sup> The oldest known deer park in Britain dates to the mid-eleventh century.<sup>10</sup> Certain forests were also protected throughout the High Middle Ages, although this practice declined by the end of the

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>6</sup> Cheever, "British National Parks for North Americans," 267.

<sup>7</sup> Evans, *A History of Conservation in Britain*, 22.

<sup>8</sup> Sheail, *An Environmental History of Twentieth-Century Britain*, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Simmons, *An Environmental History of Great Britain*, 110.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 110.

sixteenth century.<sup>11</sup> The mid-nineteenth century saw the creation of public parks in large cities including Peel Park in Salford and Victoria Park in East London, as well as the preservation of 3000 acres of Epping Forest in London.<sup>12</sup> However, these acts of preservation were extremely limited in scope and scale. Throughout the medieval and early modern periods, the preservation of the natural environment was generally not considered important as the British countryside underwent intensive agricultural expansion and growing resource exploitation.

The idea of national parks as a means to preserve landscapes of particular natural beauty in Britain is most often traced back to the artistic and literary movement of Romanticism. The movement emerged in the late-eighteenth century, as a reaction against industrialism and the mechanistic worldviews dominating British society in particular and, increasingly western European society more generally. The flourishing of Romanticism in the early-nineteenth century is indicative of a change in the perspectives held by the British public towards the natural environment. I.G. Simmons writes that the artistic movement formed part of an “alteration of sensibilities” that led to a reconsideration of the natural landscape.<sup>13</sup> Romantics re-positioned nature as being central to human concerns, however they were most interested in its aesthetic, social and cultural value and the emotional responses it aroused. Romantic artists idealised the wild open spaces of Britain’s moors, heathlands and mountains in art and literature. These locations were transformed in the public imagination from areas to be feared and avoided, or at the very least exploited and

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 111.

<sup>12</sup> Clapp, *An Environmental History of Britain since the Industrial Revolution*, 134.

<sup>13</sup> Simmons, *An Environmental History of Great Britain*, 132.

“improved,” to places possessing inherent value and which should be experience and protected.<sup>14</sup>

It was the work of William Wordsworth that was perhaps the most influential Romantic writing in shaping views of the British countryside and instilling a desire to preserve it. An anti-industrial sentiment and conservationist impulse is found throughout much of Wordsworth’s writing. Notably his 1844 poem “Sonnet on the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway,” published in the London *Morning Post* as part of Wordsworth’s public campaign against a proposed railway in the Lake District, opened with the lines “Is then no nook of English ground secure/ From rash assault?”<sup>15</sup> Wordsworth is commonly credited with issuing the first call for the establishment of national parks in Britain. In his 1810 *Guide to the Lakes* he described the Lake District, which a century and a half hence would become Britain’s second national park, as “a sort of national property, in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy.”<sup>16</sup> Wordsworth’s view of nature was unquestionably linked to ideas of class with an interpretation of the appreciation of nature belonging to those possessed of “high culture.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, it is striking how intertwined are class-based views of nature and the movement for national parks in Britain.

Idealism of the British countryside extending beyond Wordsworth’s work is found throughout Romantic writings and art. Romantic landscape paintings, including works by

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 132.

<sup>15</sup> Scott Hess, *William Wordsworth and the Ecology of Authorship: The Roots of Environmentalism in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 116, 118; William Wordsworth, “Sonnet on the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway” in *Guide to the Lakes* (London, Francis Lincoln, 2004), 135.

<sup>16</sup> William Wordsworth, *Guide to the Lakes* (London, Francis Lincoln, 2004), 93.

<sup>17</sup> Hess, *William Wordsworth and the Ecology of Authorship*, 126.

J.M. W. Turner, popularised the visual appeal of Britain's countryside. William Blake's poem "And did those feet in ancient time" (now better known as the lyrics to the hymn *Jerusalem*) written in 1804, and its juxtaposition of "Mountains green," "England's pleasant pastures" and "England's green and pleasant land," with "the dark Satanic Mills" also inspired the British conservation impulse, particularly around the industrial heartland of Northern England.<sup>18</sup>

Romanticism marked a turning point in popular views of nature in Britain, eschewing as it did the progress of industrialism, in favour of a nostalgic view of the peaceful countryside and a desire to protect Britain's natural beauty. The Romantic landscape ideal influenced popular taste, which in turn, influenced the selection of the types of lands as being worthy of protection in any new national parks system.<sup>19</sup>

Nineteenth and early-twentieth century naturalists also played a role in the evolution of early British conservation impulses. Naturalists were interested in the conservation of nature for its scientific and ecological value, as opposed to the Romantics who were most interested in its aesthetic and spiritual dimensions. Scientific conservation emerged in the twentieth century, replacing sentimentality with criteria based on biological significance or interest as the foundation of the need for the conservation of nature.<sup>20</sup> As the field of ecology developed, naturalists began to examine ecosystems as entire systems rather than studying individual species in isolation. This led to a realisation in the scientific community that habitats in Britain were threatened by human activity, most particularly by

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<sup>18</sup> William Blake, "And did those feet in ancient time," in *The Complete Writings of William Blake*, edited by Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 480-1; Simmons, *An Environmental History of Great Britain*, 120.

<sup>19</sup> Cheever, "British National Parks for North Americans," 262.

<sup>20</sup> Evans, *A History of Conservation in Britain*, 6-7.

urban development and expansion, and by industrial activities.<sup>21</sup> One of the first societies dedicated to conservation was the Plumage League, founded in 1889, now known as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The British Ecological Society, founded in 1913 as an offshoot from the Committee for the Study of British Vegetation (established 1904), helped bring science-based conservation ideas to prominence.<sup>22</sup>

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, numerous organisations were established to promote the preservation of certain aspects of town or country life in Britain. These societies included the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, founded in 1877 by the designer and socialist William Morris, among others, and, most notably, the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest and Natural Beauty established in 1895.<sup>23</sup> The Kyrle Society was established in the mid-1870s by social reformers Miranda and Octavia Hill with the aim “to bring beauty home to the people.”<sup>24</sup> Its work involved attempting to secure open spaces in and around London for the moral and intellectual improvement of the working class.<sup>25</sup> In 1912, Charles Rothschild founded the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves. Its goal was to collect and collate information on places “worthy of protection.”<sup>26</sup> Sheail writes that each of these preservationist organisations believed that preserving a part of the countryside, ancient building, animal or plant was also preserving and enhancing the “very fabric of human society.”<sup>27</sup> The nostalgic impulse

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<sup>21</sup> Cheever, “British National Parks for North Americans,” 263.

<sup>22</sup> Evans, *A History of Conservation in Britain*, 50.

<sup>23</sup> John Sheail, “From Preservation to Conservation,” 172.

<sup>24</sup> Simmons, *An Environmental History of Great Britain*, 183.

<sup>25</sup> Clapp, *An Environmental History of Britain*, 134.

<sup>26</sup> Sheail, “From Preservation to Conservation: Wildlife and the Environment, 1900-1950,” 172.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 172.

to conserve a part of the past contributed to a nostalgic feeling in society that influenced the national park movement.

One of the strongest factors that led to the creation of national parks in Britain was the fight for public access to the countryside. Rambling became an increasingly popular activity for both rural and urban populations in the mid-nineteenth century, especially in the Derbyshire Peak District, where some of England's most spectacular scenery is found. This area is surrounded by large industrial cities including Manchester and Sheffield. Howard Hill writes that the popularity of the open-air movement of the nineteenth and twentieth century was a revolt against urban existence.<sup>28</sup> Rambling provided urban dwellers the opportunity to escape what historian and preservationist G.M. Trevelyan described as the "smoke and squalor that enveloped their daily life."<sup>29</sup> Ramblers grew frustrated by the lack of access to the countryside.

In 1865, the Common, Open Spaces and Footpath Preservation Society was founded to prevent the sale of what remained of the commons in London to speculative builders.<sup>30</sup> The Society played an influential role in saving 3000 acres of the Epping Forest from development in 1865, as well as ensuring common access was retained to Hampstead Heath and Wimbledon Common.<sup>31</sup> While these three common areas provided open spaces for the people of Greater London, common land access remained a contentious issue for the rest of Britain.

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<sup>28</sup> Hill, *Freedom to Roam*, 13.

<sup>29</sup> G.M. Trevelyan, *English Social History*, quoted in Hill, *Freedom to Roam*, 13.

<sup>30</sup> Hill, *Freedom to Roam*, 20.

<sup>31</sup> Peak District National Park Authority, "A History of Open Access Land," *Peak District National Park Authority*, accessed December 10, 2015, <http://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/visiting/crow/crow-timeline>; Clapp, *An Environmental History of Britain*, 134.

Rambling clubs developed across Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the north of England in particular, where a large portion of the population lived in industrial city centres include Manchester and Birmingham, outdoor clubs and societies were formed, including the Hayfield and Kinder Scout Ancient Footpaths Association in 1876, the Manchester YMCA Rambling Club in 1895, and the Yorkshire Rambling Club in 1900.<sup>32</sup> In addition to promoting rambling, these organisations became advocates for public access to the moors and mountains of Britain.

The first Access to Mountains Bill, though it referred only to Scotland, was introduced to British Parliament in 1884 by James Bryce, Liberal MP for Tower Hamlets. Bryce was an active Rambler and a founding member of the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpath Preservation Society.<sup>33</sup> The Bill stated that “no owner or occupier of uncultivated mountain or lands in Scotland shall be entitled to exclude any person from walking on such lands for the purposes of recreation or scientific or artistic study, or to molest him in so walking.”<sup>34</sup>

The Bill failed to attract the support of many Liberal and Conservative MPs who were members of the elite landowning class and who had no desire to allow public access to their lands.<sup>35</sup> Parliament dismissed the Bill without debate, but the Bill was successful in garnering public support for the land access movement and drawing attention to the issue. *The Times* covered the Bryce’s Access Bill in a leader page column in 1884, stating that despite little chance of success, the Bill has a certain value to society and represents progress. The column questions that in determining “the comparative strength of the

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<sup>32</sup> Peak District National Park Authority, “A History of Open Access Land.”

<sup>33</sup> Hill, *Freedom to Roam*, 20.

<sup>34</sup> Stephenson, *Forbidden Land*, 131.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 137.

various forces now moving and ultimately forming the national character. What is the comparative weight of numbers and of rent? The sportsman is a survival of prehistoric times. The lover of the picturesque is a creature of modern civilisation.”<sup>36</sup> The *Times* article also credited the aristocracy with maintaining and ameliorating the beauty of the countryside which all classes can enjoy and appreciate, and concludes that some compromise needs to be found between maintaining rights of private property and allowing affordable access to visitors.

Bryce would introduce the same or a similar access bill twelve times before his retirement from Parliament in 1907.<sup>37</sup> While defending the Bill in a Parliament in 1892, Bryce stated:

Property in land is a very different character from every other kind of property. Land is not property for our unlimited and unqualified use. Land is necessary so that we may live upon it and from it, and that people may enjoy it in a variety of ways; and I deny therefore, that there exists or is recognised by law or in natural justice, such a thing as an unlimited power of exclusion... There is no such thing in the old customs of this country as the right of exclusion for purposes of the mere pleasures of the individual and there is no ground in law or reason for excluding persons from a mountain ... we must not be asked to pay compensation for what we have never given away.<sup>38</sup>

Bryce accused the “the thoughtlessness or selfishness of the few” of debarring “the lover of scenery and science from those enjoyments and pleasures they desire.”<sup>39</sup> He argued that “it is impossible to overestimate the worth of these pleasures to people like ourselves—

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<sup>36</sup> “Under the quaint title, Access to Mountains,” *The Times* (London), March 25 1884, 10.

<sup>37</sup> Curry, *Countryside Recreation*, 5.

Curry’s phrasing is ambiguous in this section, and is not explicit if all twelve bills were introduced by Bryce, or if he merely witnessed other attempts at access bills beside his own. “The Bill suffered the same fate as 12 others that Bryce witnessed during his 27 years in a Parliament dominated by landowning interests.”

<sup>38</sup> Parliamentary Debates, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. 2 (4 March 1892), col. 99.

<sup>39</sup> Parliamentary Debates, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. 2 (4 March 1892), col. 103.

people in whom education, expanding every year, stimulates the taste for poetry and beauty.”<sup>40</sup> He asked Parliament to support the Bill “in the hope of preserving for the people one of the most precious parts of their national inheritance.”<sup>41</sup> Bryce’s defense of the Bill shows an interest in the preservation of the natural environment of Britain and that he was not motivated simply by the desire for better recreational opportunities alone.

Subsequent Access to Mountains Bills which were expanded to include areas of England, Wales, and Ireland were introduced by other Members of Parliament in 1908, 1926, 1927, 1928, 1930 and 1931, but all failed to attract majority support from Parliament.<sup>42</sup> One of the major stated objections to these Bills was a fear that public access would disturb field sport, particularly deerstalking and grouse shooting.<sup>43</sup> Hunting was not only a popular pastime for the upper classes, but it also brought significant revenue to estates from paying visitors on hunting trips. However, the idea of open access to mountain and moorland was also deeply political because it represented an attack on private ownership of land.<sup>44</sup> Land ownership was an exceptionally powerful, though attenuating, symbol of power and prestige in British society.<sup>45</sup> The ownership of vast estates was rooted in aristocratic traditions. Allowing public access to the private lands of the countryside elite would have diminished the exclusivity of the countryside and

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<sup>40</sup> Parliamentary Debates, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. 2 (4 March 1892), col. 103.

<sup>41</sup> Parliamentary Debates, 4<sup>th</sup> ser., vol. 2 (4 March 1892), col. 103.

<sup>42</sup> Curry, *Countryside Recreation*, 5. Labour MP Charles Trevelyan introduced unsuccessful bills in 1908 (although, this was the first access bill to reach a second reading), 1926, 1927 and 1928; followed by Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson in 1930 and 1931.

<sup>43</sup> Stephenson, *Forbidden Land*, 135.

<sup>44</sup> Ann Holt, “Introduction” in Stephenson, *Forbidden Land*, 47.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 47.

undermined the notion of land ownership being a sign of superiority and being suited to the exercise of power.<sup>46</sup>

The access to land movement grew in strength in the 1920s and 1930s, driven mainly by middle and lower class advocacy. These decades saw an increasing public interest in the countryside and growing conflict between landowners and the British urban population. The rising popularity of the automobile in the 1920s and 1930s permitted more urban dwellers to leave cities on weekends, but they had little land accessible to them for recreational purposes. The concentration of land ownership in the hands of an elite few in Britain created a strong sense of political discontent amongst the British lower and middle classes. Ramblers organised “mass trespasses” on private property to draw attention to their lack of access to the countryside. Trespassing was a symbolic act of civil disobedience which successfully attracted the attention of the media and the public. Trespassing in the 1920s and 1930s was a civil offence, not a criminal matter, therefore trespassers could only be sued, not prosecuted.<sup>47</sup>

The most famous episode of civil disobedience, although not the first, was the Kinder Scout Trespass of Sunday, April 24, 1932. The trespass at Kinder Scout, a moorland plateau used for grouse shooting in the Peak District, Derbyshire, was organised by the British Workers’ Sports Federation (BWSF) which had strong ties to the British Communist Party.<sup>48</sup> In 1930, the BWSF had five thousand members across the country.<sup>49</sup> The Federation organised sporting events to raise money for striking workers and opposed

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 47.

<sup>47</sup> Stephenson, *Forbidden Land*, 88.

<sup>48</sup> Ben Harker, “‘The Manchester Rambler’: Ewan MacColl and the 1932 Mass Trespass.” *History Workshop Journal* 25, No. 1 (2005): 221.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 222.

“professional ‘bosses’ sports” which were viewed as exploiting workers and distracting them from the issue of class struggle.<sup>50</sup> The mass trespass was promoted by the BWSF through an article in the *Manchester Evening News* on April 19, 1932 and by distributing leaflets at train stations.<sup>51</sup> The Manchester and District Ramblers’ Federation and the Sheffield Clarion Ramblers, both condemned the mass trespass in advance and urged their members not to attend. Howard Hill claims that despite this condemnation, many members of these clubs joined the trespass.<sup>52</sup>

There exist wildly varying estimates of how many people took part in the trespass. The *Manchester Guardian* reported some four hundred ramblers, while the main organiser, Benny Rothman, set the figure at some six to eight hundred.<sup>53</sup> At the subsequent trial at Derby Assizes, the Crown, perhaps attempting to minimise the importance of the trespass and maximise the leaders’ roles, spoke of only one hundred and fifty to two hundred participants.<sup>54</sup> It is difficult to discern exactly what happened during the trespass, as there are many conflicting reports from newspaper articles, court testimonies, and personal accounts by Benny Rothman. However, it is agreed that during the walk, the ramblers had a brief physical altercation with a group of the Duke of Devonshire’s gamekeepers (on whose land they were trespassing), but they easily defeated them due to their vastly

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 222.

<sup>51</sup> Hey, “Kinder Scout and the Legend of the Mass Trespass,” 209.

One of the leaflets distributed at Eccles read “If you’ve not been rambling before, start now, you don’t know what you’ve missed. Come with us for the best day out that you have ever had.”

<sup>52</sup> Hill, *Freedom to Roam*, 63.

The Manchester and Sheffield rambling clubs were not opposed to the action of trespassing per se, as both clubs would have been involved in similar actions in the past. It seems that their refusal to support the Kinder Scout Trespass was because of its association with the BWSF, a much more politically radical organisation.

<sup>53</sup> “Mass trespass on Kinder Scout.” *Guardian*, April 25, 1932.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/uk/1932/apr/25/1>.

<sup>54</sup> Stephenson, *Forbidden Land*, 155.

superior numbers.<sup>55</sup> The ramblers completed their intended walk, but when they returned to the village of Hayfield to go home, five of the leaders of the trespass were arrested by police and charged with unlawful assembly and breach of the peace, to which were later added charges of riot and inciting to riot.<sup>56</sup> Another trespasser was also arrested for injuring a gamekeeper.<sup>57</sup>

The Kinder Scout Trespass, the arrest of the leaders, and the ensuing court case garnered attention across the country. Rothman, the spokesperson for the group, said at the trial, “We ramblers, after a hard week’s work, in smokey [*sic*] towns and cities, go out rambling for relaxation and fresh air. And we find the finest rambling country is closed to us... Our request, or demand, for access to all peaks and uncultivated moorland is nothing unreasonable.”<sup>58</sup> Rothman’s statement encapsulates the frustration that many ramblers across Britain, particularly in the industrial North, were feeling at having no access to open spaces. Media coverage of the trial portrayed it as representational of the widespread generational and class conflicts occurring in British society in the early 1930s.<sup>59</sup> Eleven of the twelve members of the jury were country landowners while the five accused were working class men from industrial city centres.<sup>60</sup> However, David Hey writes that the

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<sup>55</sup> Mass trespass on Kinder Scout, *Guardian*, April 25, 1932.

Again the numbers of gamekeepers presented are disputed, with reports ranging from eight to sixty gamekeepers there. It was reported that that the Duke of Devonshire’s keepers were assisted by a few temporary keepers. Hill, *Freedom to Roam*, 13.

<sup>56</sup> Mass trespass on Kinder Scout, *Guardian*, April 25, 1932; Hill, *Freedom to Roam*, 67; “Rioting On Kinder Scout,” *Times* (London), 8 July 1932, 16.

Tom Stephenson writes that the trespassers never actually reached Kinder Scout, but were really at Ashop Head, two miles to the north-west of Kinder. Stephenson, *Forbidden Land*, 157.

<sup>57</sup> “Ramblers Charged,” *Times* (London) 26 April, 1932, 13; Stephenson, *Forbidden Land*, 159.

<sup>58</sup> Benny Rothman quoted in Eric Allison, “The Kinder Scout trespass: 80 years on,” *Guardian*, April 18, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2012/apr/17/kinder-scout-mass-trespass-anniversary>.

<sup>59</sup> Harker, “‘The Manchester Rambler’: Ewan MacColl and the 1932 Mass Trespass,” 223.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 223; Hey, “Kinder Scout and the Legend of the Mass Trespass,” 212.

“ancient antagonism between town and country” was also present in the public’s opinion of the trespassers.<sup>61</sup> The accused ramblers were sentenced to prison terms of between two and six months.<sup>62</sup> Despite originally condemning the Kinder Scout Trespass, the Manchester Ramblers’ Federation made an appeal for clemency to the Home Secretary, which was unsuccessful.<sup>63</sup>

As has already been argued by Stephenson, Hey, and Hill, the Kinder Scout Trespass was merely one trespass in a decades-long campaign for rambling rights. The BWSF was an ephemeral organisation whose political affiliations brought it into conflict with other rambling organisations whose sensibilities were more middle-class in orientation. The publicity of the Kinder Scout Trespass nevertheless inspired other ramblers: on July 17, 1932 250 ramblers demonstrated and raised funds at Jacob’s Ladder also in Peak District and two months later 200 ramblers from Sheffield trespassed onto the Duke of Norfolk’s estate. Mass rallies were held throughout the 1930s at Winnats Pass to protest land enclosure and in support of national park legislation.<sup>64</sup> In 1935, the National Council of Ramblers’ Federation reorganised as the Ramblers’ Association which represented rambling clubs from across the country. In its first year, the Association attracted some 1,200 individual members and over 300 affiliated rambling clubs.<sup>65</sup> The Ramblers’ Association continued to campaign and lobby for open access ensured by Acts

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Eleven of the twelve jury members were country landowners: two-Brigadier-Generals, three Colonels, two Majors, three Captains and two Aldermen. The five accused were young “urban communists,” half of whom were Jewish: John Anderson (21), Jud Clynes (23), Tony Gillett (19), Harry Mendel (23), David Nassbaum (19) and Benny Rothman (20).

<sup>61</sup> Hey, “Kinder Scout and the Legend of the Mass Trespass,” 212.

<sup>62</sup> “Rioting On Kinder Scout,” *Times* (London) 8 July 1932, 16.

<sup>63</sup> Hey, “Kinder Scout and the Legend of the Mass Trespass,” 212.

<sup>64</sup> Roland Smith, *The Peak National Park*, Countryside Commission Official Guide (Exeter: Webb & Bower, 1987) 11-12.

<sup>65</sup> Hey, “Kinder Scout and the Legend of the Mass Trespass,” 214.

of Parliament over the next decades, long after the brief excitement of the Kinder Scout Trespass.

Private landowners were not the only opponents of expanded public access to the countryside. Many water authorities lobbied to ensure the prohibition of members of the public from gathering grounds, out of concern that allowing access could lead to pollution of reservoirs by contaminants introduced by rambling activities. This was a legitimate concern as water authorities had a statutory duty to provide clean water clear of any pollution.<sup>66</sup> However, Stephenson writes that there was a clear double standard in this policy as some authorities, including those responsible for Bolton, Bradford, Huddersfield and Manchester, leased their moors for grouse shooting, while banning ramblers.<sup>67</sup> Water authorities lobbied the government to limit public access to gathering grounds throughout the 1930s primarily on the basis of the water pollution risk.

The movement for the preservation of the countryside against urban expansion was led by The Council for the Preservation of Rural England which was established in 1926, followed by the Association for the Preservation of Rural Scotland in 1927 and the Council for the Preservation of Rural Wales in 1928. These organisations aimed to protect the countryside and campaigned against what they perceived to be threats against it. Their most pressing concern, particularly for the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE), was the drastic rise in housing construction in the inter-war years that expanded urban and suburban borders. They viewed themselves as “advisory bodies” and sought to

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<sup>66</sup> Water authorities were primarily concerned with the potential for a serious enteric disease epidemic if the water supply was to become contaminated by a person urinating or defecating on a water gathering ground. However, this defense is weakened by the fact that wild animals on the gathering grounds released similar contaminants.

<sup>67</sup> Stephenson, *Forbidden Land*, 101.

unite various other organisations such as the National Trust and the Commons and Footpaths Preservation Society, to create a larger and more forceful voice for preserving the countryside in Britain.<sup>68</sup>

In their most public action of support of national parks, the Council for the Preservation of Rural England produced a short film in 1938 that was shown in cinemas.<sup>69</sup> The six minute film contrasted squalid city life with the clean and fresh air of the peaceful and idyllic countryside. It explained that the organisation was trying to preserve the “unspoiled beauty” of the countryside.<sup>70</sup> The film was presented as a “case for the defense” of national parks in Britain.<sup>71</sup> The film’s narrator discusses how the United States already had twenty-one national parks, and that the CPRE was fighting to protect “great swaths of land” in England to be national parks.<sup>72</sup> The film briefly presented its proposal of a national parks system in Britain which it envisioned would cover almost a third of Britain’s total area. The CPRE argued that the cost “would not be prohibitive.”<sup>73</sup> The main goal of the film campaign was to attract public support of the CPRE and it directly asked the audience “Are you going allow such scenic loveliness to be despoiled because you won’t fight to preserve it?” and “Are you willing to give up your grand inheritance?”<sup>74</sup> It is impossible to judge the impact this film had on the national park movement since there is no information available on the distribution or potential viewing figures of the short film. Yet,

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<sup>68</sup> Sheail, *Nature’s Spectacle*, 246; Patrick Joseph Murray, “The Council for the Preservation of Rural England, Suburbia and The Politics of Preservation.” *Prose Studies* 32, no. 1 (2010): 31.

<sup>69</sup> National Parks UK, “History of the National Parks,” accessed December 10, 2015, <http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk/learningabout/whatisanationalpark/history>.

<sup>70</sup> “Rural England - CPRE National Parks Film 1938,” Council for the Preservation of Rural England, 1938, <http://www.cpre.org.uk/what-we-do/countryside/landscapes/achievements>.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> “Rural England - CPRE National Parks Film 1938.”

the existence of the film does show that there was strong support for national parks among the CPRE and that it had sufficient financial resources to produce and distribute such a film.

In the early twentieth century, the British government exhibited a growing interest in national parks that were being established around the world. As early as 1926, the Ministry of Health considered setting aside land to be preserved from modern development.<sup>75</sup> Lord Bledisloe, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture visited Banff, Jasper and Yellowstone national parks on a private trip to Canada and the United States in the mid-1920s.<sup>76</sup> He praised the parks for their preservation of plants and wildlife, and as a holiday resort for “persons of all classes engaged normally in strenuous work.”<sup>77</sup> In 1928, Lord Bledisloe wrote to the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, offering a portion of his vast estate in the Forest of Dean, along the English/Welsh borders, as a potential national park.<sup>78</sup> Bledisloe claimed in his letter that establishing a national park could potentially attract “thousands of votes” in the upcoming General Election for the “relatively trifling Treasury expenditure” of £30,000.<sup>79</sup> However, nothing came of his suggestion. Lord Londonderry, the First Commissioner of Public Works, doubted that the Forest of Dean was a good area for a national park and questioned whether there was

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<sup>75</sup> Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 9.

<sup>76</sup> Sheail, *Nature's Spectacle*, 247.

Lord Bledisloe was a major land owner in the Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire, who had served as a Conservative Member of Parliament for South Wiltshire from 1910 to 1918 and was associated with the growth of the Royal Agricultural College at Cirencester. While known for his interest in progressive farming methods and care for countryside aesthetics, he was also the only non-government proprietor of coalmines in the Forest of Dean/a proprietor of industry, including coal.

<sup>77</sup> Sheail, *Rural Conservation in Inter-War Britain*, 115.

<sup>78</sup> Sheail, *Nature's Spectacle*, 247.

<sup>79</sup> Lord Bledisloe quoted in Sheail, *Rural Conservation in Inter-War Britain*, 115.

adequate public support for it.<sup>80</sup> The Forestry Commission also rejected Bledisloe's proposal in a letter to the Prime Minister in October 1928. The Commission wrote that the Forest of Dean was an unsuitable location for a national park, citing extensive mining and quarry operations and a lack of wild bird life in the area.<sup>81</sup>

Bledisloe did not give up on his idea and continued to press for a national park after the May 1929 General Election from which the Labour Party emerged victorious. The new Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, appointed George Lansbury as the First Commissioner of Works.<sup>82</sup> Lord Bledisloe wrote to Lansbury on June 9 1929, again advocating for a national park and emphasising its value "FOR THE BRAIN WEARY WORKERS IN CROWDED URBAN AREAS."<sup>83</sup> He repeated his offer to allow public access to select areas of his property. The following day, *The Times* published a letter to the editor from Bledisloe, in which he commented that he had received enthusiastic support of his suggestion of creating national parks from "various organizations interested in the preservation of rural life and beauty or in the nation's standard of health."<sup>84</sup> His letter to *The Times* expressed his support of establishing a national park in the Forest of Dean and he could "conceive no insuperable obstacle to its utilization for this beneficent purpose."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Sheail, *Rural Conservation in Inter-War Britain*, 115.

Londonderry created a summary of points for and against national park creation for Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin. However, the portion of the document containing Londonderry's conclusion is too badly damaged to be read.

Mair and Delafons, "The Policy Origins of Britain's National Parks," 295.

<sup>81</sup> Mair and Delafons, "The Policy Origins of Britain's National Parks," 295.

The Forestry Commission was established in 1919 as a response to acute timber shortages that hampered ship production during the First World War. The Commission sought to improve the domestic timber supply and reduce the cost of softwood lumber for manufacturing. Its purpose did not extend to promoting forest conservation for the public's enjoyment.

<sup>82</sup> Mair and Delafons, "The Policy Origins of Britain's National Parks," 295.

<sup>83</sup> Bledisloe quoted in Mair and Delafons, "The Policy Origins of Britain's National Parks," 295. Bledisloe's capitals.

<sup>84</sup> Bledisloe, "A National Park for England?" *Times* (London) 10 June 1929, 12.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

Bledisloe admitted in the letter that he had always been afforded the luxury of enjoying a “beautiful country home” and wished to “extend a like privilege... to thousands of countrymen who are less fortunate.”<sup>86</sup>

Lansbury’s reply of June 21, 1929 opposed the plan on grounds similar to those of the Forestry Commission to Bledisloe’s idea regarding the Forest of Dean. Lansbury did, however, propose the idea of setting up an official enquiry to consider the question of national parks in Britain.<sup>87</sup> Lansbury favoured an inter-departmental committee to study the issue, over a Royal Commission or a committee of experts.<sup>88</sup> Lansbury, along with Noel Buxton, Minister of Agriculture approached Ramsay MacDonald with a proposal for an interdepartmental committee in July 1929 and the Prime Minister readily agreed.

MacDonald formally appointed the National Park Committee on September 26, 1929. The committee was tasked with the terms of reference to: “To consider and report if it is desirable and feasible to establish one or more National Parks in Great Britain with a view to the preservation of the natural characteristics, including flora and fauna, and to the improvement of recreational facilities for the people; and to advise generally, and in particular as to the areas, if any, that are most suitable for the purpose.”<sup>89</sup> MacDonald appointed Christopher Addison, who became Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries in June 1930, to chair the committee.<sup>90</sup> The Committee collected evidence from thirty-four groups

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>87</sup> Mair and Delafons, “The Policy Origins of Britain’s National Parks,” 296.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 296.

<sup>89</sup> Financial Secretary to the Treasury, National Park Committee, *Report of the National Park Committee*, 4.

<sup>90</sup> Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 13; Mair and Delafons, “The Policy Origins of Britain’s National Parks,” 297.

Addison was a trained physician and Professor of Anatomy, and was particularly concerned with ill-health in densely-populated urban areas. He entered Parliament as a Liberal MP in 1910. He was one of the key-founders of the Ministry of Health in 1919, of which he became the first

of witnesses representing various societies, organisations and associations between November 1929 and July 1930.<sup>91</sup> The first witness was Lord Bledisloe who again advocated for national park creation in Britain, in particular in the Forest of Dean, though he stated his primary interest was to advocate the principle of national parks, rather than dictate the choice of area.<sup>92</sup>

The Committee's report (*Report of the National Park Committee*, more commonly known as the Addison Report) was published in April 1931. The report acknowledges the many different factors driving supporters of the national parks movement. Among its witnesses, the British Correlating Committee for the Protection of Nature advocated for protection of flora and fauna, as well as features of geographic interest.<sup>93</sup> The Ramblers' Federation (representing rambling clubs from Glasgow, Huddersfield, Liverpool, London, Manchester and Sheffield) gave a statement in support of the recreational aspects of a national park.<sup>94</sup> Societies representing campers and the Youth Hostel Association advocated for the provision of campsites and lodgings within parks.<sup>95</sup> The Addison Committee also heard from organisations either opposed to or harbouring reservations towards national parks. The report stated that multiple witnesses testified that many outdoor public spaces already showed signs of "damage inflicted by thoughtless

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Minister. Addison joined the Labour Party and was re-elected to Parliament in 1929 as a Labour MP. MacDonald appointed him Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture in 1929.

<sup>91</sup> Financial Secretary to the Treasury, National Park Committee, *Report of the National Park Committee*, 5.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 21-22.

In November 1929, Lord Bledisloe was appointed Governor General of New Zealand, thus ending his involvement in the national park movement in Britain. Mair and Delafons, "The Policy Origins of Britain's National Parks," 298.

<sup>93</sup> Financial Secretary to the Treasury, National Park Committee, *Report of the National Park Committee*, 6.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 6; Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 14.

<sup>95</sup> Financial Secretary to the Treasury, National Park Committee, *Report of the National Park Committee*, 6.

individuals.”<sup>96</sup> It also acknowledged that there were concerns that expanding public access in the British countryside would “depreciate the economic values of some lands, *e.g.*, sporting and grazing lands, would involve a menace to public health in water catchment areas, and might be inimical to the preservation of flora and fauna, and even to the preservation of natural characteristics.”<sup>97</sup> There were also some reservations held by witnesses including committee member Arthur Stretton Gaye, a Commissioner of Crown Land, that national park facility development and public land acquisition would be an ill-use of public funds.<sup>98</sup>

The Report emphasised that large areas of Britain’s countryside were under threat from numerous factors including the extension of traffic facilities and urban and suburban expansion.<sup>99</sup> The Report stated that there already existed areas in the countryside with public access, however “the opportunities are not evenly distributed.”<sup>100</sup> It also noted that “growth of the open air habit has been a notable feature of post-war life” and that this activity should be encouraged and provisions should be established to facilitate it.<sup>101</sup> The Committee also acknowledged that “the disappearance or diminution of rarer species of British mammals and birds is a matter of common knowledge.”<sup>102</sup>

The Committee itself concluded in favour of a series of National Reserves and Nature Sanctuaries.<sup>103</sup> The objectives of this system of National Reserves and National

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 6-7.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 10-11.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>103</sup> The Committee favoured the term “National Reserve” over “National Park.” Financial Secretary to the Treasury, National Park Committee, *Report of the National Park Committee*, 7.

Parks would be “(a) To safeguard areas of exceptional natural interest against disorderly development and spoliation. (b) To improve the means of access for pedestrians to areas of natural beauty. (c) To promote measures for the protection of flora and fauna.”<sup>104</sup> The authors of the report felt it was “premature” to consider areas to be national parks, but recommended that areas should ultimately be “selected in view of their interest to the Nation as a whole” and “conveniently situated in relation to industrial centres.”<sup>105</sup> The report acknowledged it would be impossible to replicate national park systems established elsewhere, notably in the Dominions and the United States, because Britain is relatively small, densely populated and highly developed.<sup>106</sup> However, these considerations “emphasise the need of adequate measures for preserving the countryside.”<sup>107</sup> The report also stated that “if the grandeur of the natural features of other countries is lacking, there is to be found instead an intimate charm, and an association of the land and its monuments with the life history of the race, which is justly regarded as an invaluable national heritage.”<sup>108</sup>

The Committee suggested the appointment of a National Authority to oversee the creation of a park system with a budget of £100,000 per annum for five years. The Report admits that the task of the national authority will not be achieved easily:

They will be attacked by those who think that any expenditure on the preservation of the natural beauties of the country is unjustifiable; assailed

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<sup>104</sup> Financial Secretary to the Treasury, National Park Committee, *Report of the National Park Committee*, 39.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

Appendix II does however contain a list of areas suggested by witnesses as suitable for National Park purposes, but these suggestions did not factor into the main text or conclusions of the Addison Report.

<sup>106</sup> Financial Secretary to the Treasury, National Park Committee, *Report of the National Park Committee*, 39.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 7-8.

by enthusiasts who wish to press their own fancies or look for action on more heroic lines; importuned by private individuals who see in the proposals an opportunity of private gain and opposed by others who resent any interference with private interests. In many cases they will be called upon to hold an even balance between conflicting interests, and at all times they must be prepared to take a long view, and to leave it to time and a later generation to vindicate their actions. But if the task is likely to be difficult it should also provide an enviable opportunity of conserving for all time some of the most glorious works of Nature [*sic*] in this country.<sup>109</sup>

The prophetic statement summarised many of the conflicting views that shaped the debate surrounding the creation of national parks over the next two decades.

After the publication of the Addison Report on April 23, 1931, the Prime Minister's office asked the Ministry of Health to proceed with the suggestions of the Committee and re-affirmed MacDonald's support for a national park scheme. However, the plans did not advance as by the spring of 1931 Britain was in the throes of the Great Depression. In July 1931, the Committee on National Expenditure forecast a £120 million deficit by April 1932.<sup>110</sup> The government responded with severe spending cuts to social and welfare programs, thus eliminating the chances of funding for a national parks experiment. Ramsay MacDonald tendered his government's resignation on August 23, 1931. The new Minister of Health, Sir Edward Hilton Young, while sympathetic to the ideas of the Addison Committee, determined that it was futile to ask the Treasury to approve any expenditure for national parks.<sup>111</sup>

Disappointed that no action was taken on the recommendations from the Report of the Addison Committee, the Councils for the Preservation of Rural England and Rural Wales established a Standing Committee on National Parks in 1936. The Committee was

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

<sup>110</sup> Mair and Delafons, "The Policy Origins of Britain's National Parks," 303.

<sup>111</sup> Sheail, *Rural Conservation in Inter-War Britain*, 116.

formed, under the leadership of Norman Birkett, a prominent KC, to keep the national park movement alive. Committee members included representatives of the Association for the Preservation of Rural Scotland; the National Trust; the Ramblers Association; the Society for the Protection of Birds; the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves; the Youth Hostels Association; the Zoological Society; the Automobile Association; and the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society.<sup>112</sup>

The Standing Committee was the coalescence of multiple diverse movements and sought to influence government policy through a direct campaign explicitly for the creation of national parks. Cherry writes that “The Standing Committee’s policy was essentially that put forward in the Addison Report, but the views were to be expressed more forcefully, with a single-mindedness of purpose, and in a way designed to secure popular support.”<sup>113</sup> Ann MacEwen and Malcolm MacEwen wrote that the Standing Committee’s strength was found in its “social and political breadth.”<sup>114</sup> It had connections both to the countryside - where the CPRE and Friends of the Lake District held considerable sway with landowners - and in urban areas where the Rambler’s Association had connections to the working class and the Labour Party.

The Standing Committee’s public campaign included the publication of a pamphlet, *The Case for National Parks in Great Britain* in July 1938. Historian G.M. Trevelyan wrote in the introduction that:

The Government is at present engaged on a Health Campaign. It undertakes to assist the health of the nation and to find playing fields for the dwellers in the vast cities to play cricket and football. But it is no less essential, for any national health scheme, to preserve for the nation walking grounds and regions where young and old can enjoy the sight of unspoiled nature. And

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<sup>112</sup> Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 27.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>114</sup> MacEwen and MacEwen, *National Parks: conservation or cosmetics?*, 7.

it is not a question of physical exercise only, it is also a question of spiritual exercise and enjoyment. It is a question of spiritual values. Without vision the people perish and without sight of the beauty of nature the spiritual power of the British people will be atrophied.<sup>115</sup>

Over 40 000 copies of the pamphlet were distributed in 1938; in addition to a series of public meetings and a press campaign.<sup>116</sup> The pamphlet stated its support for the creation of a national parks authority because local authorities at that time had no means or mandate to preserve the countryside and wildlife and offer recreational opportunities to the public.<sup>117</sup> The Standing Committee on National Parks also appears to have been active in the late 1930s advocating for the protection of natural landscapes in Britain which it envisioned as part of a future national park system, as well as ensuring public access to picturesque areas of scenery.<sup>118</sup>

In July 1937, Liberal MP for Wolverhampton Geoffrey Mander introduced the sixth Access to Mountains Bill of the inter-war period as a Private Member's Bill.<sup>119</sup> The Bill

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<sup>115</sup> Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 15.

G.M. Trevelyan was an ardent supporter and donor of the National Trust and President of the Youth Hostels Association for England and Wales, which supported increased public access to the countryside and the national park movement more broadly.

<sup>116</sup> John Sheail, *An Environmental History of Twentieth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 117.

<sup>117</sup> Sheail, *Rural Conservation in Inter-War Britain*, 121.

<sup>118</sup> The *Times* reported in April 1938 that the Standing Committee on National Parks had written to the War Office explaining its objections to a proposed tank school on the Pembrokeshire coast. The area the Department proposed to acquire includes "some of the finest coast scenery in Wales" and public access rights without compensation had already been granted by the land's private owner. The Standing Committee stated that, while recognising the importance of the Government's scheme for defense purposes, the establishment of a tank school "will ruin any chance of the creation of a coastal National Park on a sufficient scale in Pembrokeshire." The letter asked the War Office to consider an alternate location, so that the coastline would be "allowed to remain in its unspoilt condition."

"Tank School On The Welsh Coast," *Times* (London) 7 April 1938, 19.

Despite the Standing Committee's protestations, the tank range was constructed during the war.

<sup>119</sup> Hansard lists Bill as being introduced July 8, 1937 and the *Times* reported it July 9, 1937. Sheail "Access to Mountain Act 1939" says it was introduced in September 1937 pg. 61, while Cherry says October 1937. Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 16.

was immediately opposed by the Central Landowner's Association on the grounds that it did not specify which areas of the countryside would be affected and that it did not protect fishing rights, provide closed seasons or contain stipulations to regulate public behaviour.<sup>120</sup> Mander's Bill was voted down at the instigation of government whips for what Sheail writes was "essentially its failure to take cognisance of all the relevant interest-groups."<sup>121</sup> The Bill's demise convinced its supporters that any future Access to Mountains legislation would need to be negotiated in advance with landowners. In the autumn of 1938, the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society, under the leadership of its secretary Sir Lawrence Chubb, approached landowners' organisations including four branches of the Central Landowners' Association and the Land Union, to discuss possible compromises between that would permit certain open access agreements.<sup>122</sup>

In November 1938, Arthur Creech Jones, Labour MP for Shipley, introduced a new Access to Mountains Bill containing five clauses extending the rights of the public to walk on uncultivated mountain areas or moorland for the purposes of recreation, scientific or artistic study, provided that there was no damage done to the property.<sup>123</sup> In an attempt to appease landowners, the Bill also contained a provision for a fine not exceeding forty shillings for contravening any regulations such as littering or trespassing on land for purposes others than those allowed by the Bill. In defending the necessity of the Bill, Creech Jones highlighted the Peak District as a particular focus of interest, saying in debate "The Peak District would be ideal for a national park, and such a national park would be

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<sup>120</sup> Sheail, "The Access to Mountains Act 1939," 61.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

<sup>122</sup> Sheail, "The Access to Mountains Act 1939," 61.

<sup>123</sup> Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 17.

valuable to the health and happiness of thousands of people in Manchester, Sheffield, Oldham and other towns. That is a region of 215 square miles having only 12 footpaths two miles in length. There are 32 moors over which there are no paths.”<sup>124</sup> Creech Jones said that he was appealing to:

The gentlemen of Britain, and to their sporting spirit, on behalf of those who are debarred from that loveliness which they themselves can enjoy. I appeal for those who have to endure the squalor of our cities and the noise of industry, for those who would seek recreation and spiritual refreshment in the wild grandeur of the mountains and the vivid colours of the moors.<sup>125</sup>

Creech Jones argued that the restrictions on public access to moors and mountains is “peculiar to the British,” and that it is now time that Britons can enjoy the outdoors as they can on the European continent.<sup>126</sup>

As in previous attempts to pass public access legislation, the Bill was strongly opposed by various landed bodies. Captain Frank Heilgers, President of the Gamekeepers’ Society and Conservative MP for Bury St. Edmonds, moved to stop the passage of the Bill. Heiglers viewed the Bill as “an attack on the whole principle of owning land.”<sup>127</sup> He accused the bill of failing to provide adequate compensation or “any safeguards for the owner, for the shooting industry, and for the countryside.”<sup>128</sup> In particular, it was felt the fine of twenty shillings (£2) was far from sufficient for any damage caused to private

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<sup>124</sup> Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 342 (2 December 1938), col. 751.

This mention of the possibility of creating national parks in a debate on public land access indicates that the desire for national parks did not decrease, but was perhaps viewed as impractical given the economic and political situation in Europe at the time.

<sup>125</sup> Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 342 (2 December 1938), col. 754.

<sup>126</sup> Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 342 (2 December 1938), col. 754.

<sup>127</sup> Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 342 (2 December 1938), col. 765.

<sup>128</sup> Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 342 (2 December 1938), col. 770.

property. It was also pointed out in debate that grouse moors “provide employment to the amount of about £3,500,000 a year” including between 20,000 to 30,000 gamekeepers.<sup>129</sup>

However, the Creech Jones’ Bill was supported by the government at its Second Reading. Government support was due to its interest in improving national fitness. At his speech at the Second Reading, Creech Jones said it was an “opportune moment for passing the Bill, because we want a healthy and intelligent people to serve the nation in war and peace.”<sup>130</sup> With the increasing likelihood of war in Europe, physical fitness had become a national priority in the 1930s for military aged men and women.<sup>131</sup> The Government had implemented a national fitness campaign in earlier in 1938, investing £2 million and extended paid holiday rights with the Holidays with Pay Act of 1938.<sup>132</sup> Ensuring people’s access to the countryside to partake in recreational and fitness activities was seen by the Government as a way not only to improve the health of citizens, but also as a way to foster national pride.<sup>133</sup>

Landowner’s associations did not concede to the proposals of the Bill and lobbied extensively. They succeeded in their lobby to have “right of access” replaced with “disciplined access” with the permission of the landowner, and have trespassing elsewhere be an illegal offense.<sup>134</sup> Eight pages of amendments and new clauses were added to the Bill before it was discussed by a Standing Committee of the House of Commons.<sup>135</sup> The Bill required interested parties, whether landowner, local authority or rambling organisation, to

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<sup>129</sup> Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 342 (2 December 1938), col. 766.

<sup>130</sup> Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 342 (2 December 1938), col. 748.

<sup>131</sup> Harker, “‘The Manchester Rambler’: Ewan MacColl and the 1932 Mass Trespass,” 224.

<sup>132</sup> Sheail, “The Access to Mountains Act 1939,” 65.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 62-3.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, 66-7.

<sup>135</sup> “Public Access to Mountains,” *Times* (London), 27 February 1939, 18.

submit an application for public access to the land with the fee of £10.<sup>136</sup> The number of penalisable offences was expanded considerably from the original bill.<sup>137</sup> The Ramblers' Association campaigned vigorously against the amendments to the bill, but Stephenson writes "the memoranda, demonstrations and resolutions, the innumerable letters to MPs and the persistent lobbying had failed to move Parliament."<sup>138</sup> Rambling associations were ultimately disappointed by the concessions made by Parliament to the landowning elite and felt the Act would do little to ensure public access.<sup>139</sup> The watered-down Bill received Royal Assent in July 1939, fifty-five years after the first Access to Mountains Bill was introduced in Parliament, and came into operation on January 1, 1940.<sup>140</sup> After the Act's Statutory Rules and Orders were published on May 15, 1940 (five days into the Battle of France), it was agreed that due to the "present emergency," no applications for Orders of access would be considered unless all parties agreed. However, no application for Orders of access was ever received and the Bill was put aside because of the war.<sup>141</sup>

The 1939 Access to Mountains Act ultimately disappointed all those who advocated for the establishment of national parks and public access to the countryside. While the Act did not propose national parks, only expanding public access, in even that endeavour it was less than successful. It therefore demonstrated the difficulty any national park legislation would face in passing through Parliament – at least in the pre-war environment. The failure of the 1939 Access to Mountains Act to take a meaningful step forward in the fight for

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<sup>136</sup> Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 178.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>138</sup> Stephenson, *Forbidden Land*, 178.

<sup>139</sup> Sheail, "The Access to Mountains Act 1939," 68.

<sup>140</sup> Sheail, "The Access to Mountains Act 1939," 70.

<sup>141</sup> Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 25.

national parks and access to the countryside disheartened the national park movement but did not break their resolve.

Despite the determination and work of national park activists throughout the 1930s, the correct conditions through which meaningful national park legislation could be passed never materialised. Economic troubles, lack of political motivation, and resistance from landed and sporting interests prevented any substantial progress towards developing a national park system in Britain. However, the next few years of war would drastically change British economically, politically, and socially. In the new wartime environment new opportunities would arise not merely to continue but to expand the fight for the establishment of national parks in England and Wales.

### *Chapter Three – Perseverance, Determination, & Success in the 1940s*

The Second World War brought a new government to Britain in May 1940 – a Conservative-led National Coalition of Conservative, Labour and Liberal members of Parliament. Prime Minister Churchill appointed several leading figures of the Labour Party to important ministries including Labour leader Clement Attlee as deputy Prime Minister, Ernest Bevin to the Ministry of Labour, Arthur Greenwood to the Reconstruction Committee, Hugh Dalton to the Board of Trade, and Herbert Morrison to the Ministry of Supply and then the Home Office. As has been discussed in many works beyond the scope of this thesis,<sup>1</sup> Labour capitalised on its time in domestic ministries by gaining invaluable experience in government and the opportunity to shape domestic policy during the war, and prepared for a post-war period in government.

While Churchill and the Conservative ministers focused on the ‘Grand Strategy’ of the war effort, the governance of the Home Front was dominated by Labour party members.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the war, Labour worked on reconstruction planning and Attlee, in particular, conveyed a message that the war brought an opportunity for economic and social improvement.<sup>3</sup> The Labour party leadership was strongly in favour of the recommendations of the Beveridge Report on social policy published in December 1942 which called for a wide range of social and economic reforms.

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<sup>1</sup> See among others: Stephen Brooke, *Labour’s War: The Labour Party during the Second World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London: Cape, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Adelman, *Britain: Domestic Politics 1939-64* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1994), 16.

<sup>3</sup> Brooke, *Labour’s War*, 40-1.

During the war, the Labour Party fine-tuned its five year plan, a program known as *Let Us Face the Future*, which it had been designing since the party's annihilation in the election of October 1931. That program formed the cornerstone of their 1945 General Election campaign. The Labour Party based their 1945 election platform around the idea that "victory in war must be followed by a prosperous peace."<sup>4</sup> Labour's ambitious 1945 manifesto, which built upon ideas of public ownership and improved social services, promised the nation a plan "which will win the Peace for the People."<sup>5</sup> The platform appealed to the desires of the British public for a continuation of the elevated levels of economic control that had been in place during the war, but is also strongly emphasised planning, and the substantial reform that had been fermenting during the war.

The General Election of July 1945 gave the Labour Party its first majority government. Their next five years in government saw a deluge of ambitious progressive and socially reformist domestic legislation intended to improve the everyday lives of the British people. Among these programs were the National Health Service Act and the National Insurance Act pension program in 1946; the nationalisation of the coal industry in 1946; nationalisation of the electricity utilities, the railways, and long distance haulage in 1947; and the Children Act of 1948 which expanded state care of orphans and deprived children. The post-war Labour government also introduced a far more managed approach to urban growth and development through the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947. Despite some movement during the war, it was in this atmosphere of social improvement

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<sup>4</sup> Labour Party National Executive Committee, *Let Us Face the Future: A Declaration of Labour Policy for the Consideration of the Nation* (London, 1945), 1, accessed February 18, 2016, <http://collections.mun.ca/PDFs/radical/LetUsFacetheFuture.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

and increased management and planning of society that national park legislation finally advanced.

The Second World War led to a reconsideration by the government of improving land utilisation in Britain. Much of the government discussion concerning land use was undertaken within the context of its plans for post-war reconstruction in rural and urban areas and rebuilding blitzed areas. There was also a growing desire to control land utilisation in the national interest and preserve a particular idealised, even romanticised, view of the countryside.<sup>6</sup> Maintaining agricultural production was of primary importance to government discussions concerning rural areas. The first of the major wartime reports into rural land utilisation was the Report of the Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population, known as the Barlow Report. The Commission predates the war as it was originally struck in 1937, but its final report was not published until January 1940.<sup>7</sup> It made no mention of national parks, but did advocate the creation of a Central Authority to “formulate the policy or plan to be adopted in relation to decentralisation or dispersal from congested rural areas” of population and industry, thus setting the groundwork for postwar town planning.<sup>8</sup> The Report advocated that there needed to be a clear divide between urban and rural management, with the former a place for development and the latter as a place to be conserved.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Tichelar, “The Scott Report and the Labour Party: The Protection of the Countryside during the Second World War,” *Rural History* 15, no. 2 (October 2004), 167; David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London: Reaktion, 1998), 179-200. An idealised view of the countryside and its importance had been promoted in wartime propaganda concerning British national identity.

<sup>7</sup> Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population. *Report*. Cmd. 6153. (London: HMSO, 1940).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 202.

<sup>9</sup> Cheever, “British National Parks for North Americans,” 272; Blunden and Curry, *A People’s Charter?*, 41.

As part of planning for post-war reconstruction, Lord Reith, Minister of Works and Planning appointed a Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas chaired by Lord Justice Scott in October 1941. The Committee's terms of reference were "to consider the conditions which should govern building and other constructional development in country areas consistently with the maintenance of agriculture, and in particular the factors affecting the location of industry, having regard to economic operation, part-time and seasonal employment, the well-being of rural communities and the preservation of rural amenities."<sup>10</sup> Over one hundred witnesses provided testimony to the committee. Among the national park advocates who submitted written evidence or memoranda were the Standing Committee on National Parks, Friends of the Lake District, the Ramblers' Association, the Youth Hostels Association of England and Wales, and the Camping Club of Great Britain and Ireland.<sup>11</sup> The National Trust also testified in favour of preserving the countryside landscape.

The Committee's report, commonly known as the Scott Report, was published in August 1942 and proposed a national system of planning to preserve rural areas from urban expansion.<sup>12</sup> While the majority of the report focused on agriculture, the preservation of the countryside landscape was also acknowledged to be a necessity in peacetime. The report's introduction discussed "a deep love for our countryside," quoting H.G. Wells's statement of "there is no countryside like the English countryside."<sup>13</sup> The authors of the

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<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Works & Planning, *Report of The Committee on Land Utilisation In Rural Areas*, Cmd. 6378 (London: H.M. Stationery Off., 1942), iv.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 128.

<sup>12</sup> Tichelar, "The Scott Report and the Labour Party," 167.

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Works & Planning, *Report of The Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas*, v.

The committee also quoted G.M. Trevelyan's belief that "without natural beauty the English people will perish in the spiritual sense".

report stated that they believed “there is an innate love of nature implanted in the heart of man” and that urbanisation has been fueled by “economic inequalities” between town and country, rather than by “urban joys.”<sup>14</sup> The Scott Report stated that, “We regard the countryside as the heritage of the whole nation and, furthermore, we consider that the citizens of this country are the custodians of a heritage they share with all those of British descent and that it is a duty incumbent upon the nation to take proper care of that which it holds in trust.”<sup>15</sup> The Committee endorsed expanding public rights of access to the countryside. The Scott Report also recommended establishing national parks in Britain, noting that it is “long overdue.”<sup>16</sup> It suggested the creation of an administrative body for national parks and that “delimitation of the parks be undertaken nationally” with particular attention given to the coasts of England and Wales.<sup>17</sup> The report noted that it may be necessary to create “nature reserves” as separate entities from national parks.<sup>18</sup>

The Scott Report was followed by *The Report of the Expert Committee on Compensation and Betterment* or the Uthwatt Report in September 1942. The Uthwatt Report proved to be much more controversial as it suggested the nationalisation of development rights in land.<sup>19</sup> It was strongly opposed by the Land Union which saw the document as “destructive of the rights of property and freedom of enterprise.”<sup>20</sup> The Land Union had broadly accepted the Scott Report’s recommendations which had avoided the

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<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Works & Planning, *Report of The Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas*, v.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 47.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

<sup>19</sup> Tichelar, “The Scott Report and the Labour Party,” 174.

<sup>20</sup> “Landowners' View of Uthwatt Report.” *Times* (London). 15 April 1943, 2.

issue of landownership in the countryside, supporting preserving the traditional landscape.<sup>21</sup>

Despite being “an urban political force,” the Labour Party reconstruction policy planners quickly responded to the findings of the Scott Report and to those of the two other wartime rural reports.<sup>22</sup> Michael Tichelar writes that the party saw the reports’ recommendations as further evidence for the necessity of a Central Planning Authority and better management of land use in Britain.<sup>23</sup> The Central Planning Authority would be responsible for defining land-use for industry, recreation, housing, preservation and transportation, all in the best interests of the nation. The Labour Party had already supported the creation of national parks in Britain in the late 1930s, but had never acted upon the idea since the early tentative steps of the MacDonald government. A 1937 party publication entitled *Labour’s Immediate Programme* stated that “The land should belong to the people, and national planning requires that the use of land shall be controlled in the public interest... National parks must be provided. The beauty of our countryside must be preserved.”<sup>24</sup> However, the war attached new significance to the concept of national parks and countryside planning as a whole for the Labour Party. Lord Addison, Labour Leader in the House of Lords and former chair of the National Parks Committee under Ramsay MacDonald from 1929-1931, was asked to prepare a pamphlet, tentatively to be called *The Land in the Service of the People* on post-war land use that would bring together recommendations from the Barlow, Uthwatt, and Scott reports, for the consumption of a

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<sup>21</sup> Tichelar, “The Scott Report and the Labour Party,” 174.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 177.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 177.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Tichelar, “The Labour Party and Land Reform in the Inter-War Period,” *Rural History* 13, no. 1 (April 2002): 92.

wider audience. The pamphlet was ultimately published by Arthur Greenwood under the title *Never Again* in January 1943. The pamphlet proposed the preservation of rural areas for agricultural purposes, transport, housing, public amenities, and national parks.<sup>25</sup>

Forces external to the government also continued to push for the creation of national parks. While greatly affected by a sharp decline in activities caused by the war, the Ramblers' Association did continue its campaign for public access. Stephenson writes that in May 1943, leaders of the Association voted to recommend "an all-out campaign for new access to mountains legislation," thus effectively ending any hope of using the mechanisms of the 1939 Access to Mountains Act.<sup>26</sup> The Scott Report's recommendations were well received by the Ramblers' Association, particularly its acknowledgement that there was no conflict between the nation caring for the countryside, and the population having access to it.<sup>27</sup> Rather, it was possible to preserve the countryside while permitting public access for recreational purposes. Stephenson credits the Ramblers' Association as having inspired some of the Scott Report's proposals, although the Association had only submitted one "lengthy memorandum" in favour of national parks and access to all uncultivated areas.<sup>28</sup> However, many ramblers were disappointed that the Scott Report did not call for access to all areas of the countryside provided it did not interfere with land utilisation in the national interest, instead leaving access rights restricted to parks and public pathways.<sup>29</sup>

The Standing Committee on National Parks remained an active campaigner for national parks during the war. The Standing Committee focused on lobbying the

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<sup>25</sup> Tichelar, "The Scott Report and the Labour Party," 177.

<sup>26</sup> Stephenson, *Forbidden Land*, 189.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 197.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 196.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 196.

government for national park creation and also protecting lands which it deemed potential national park locations. In November 1941, the Standing Committee presented a summary of the required provisions for a national park scheme in Britain to Lord Reith at the Ministry of Works and Planning, and recommended it to be included in “preparations for post-war planning.”<sup>30</sup> Lord Reith met with members of the Standing Committee in January 1942, where the Committee stressed national parks would be a three-fold objective: “continuation of agricultural use, natural recreation for the public, and preservation in flora and fauna.”<sup>31</sup> The Committee also firmly argued that national parks would need to be put in a place by a national planning scheme, since local authorities did not have the incentive nor the funds to do it.<sup>32</sup> Local authorities possessed neither the power nor authority to confront opponents of national park creation including statutory undertakers, private landowners, and industrial interests. While Lord Reith expressed his support for the objectives of the Standing Committee, he still held reservations and questions concerning the feasibility of national parks of Britain.<sup>33</sup> At the time of the meeting, Lord Reith had already established the Scott Committee to look into land utilisation in rural areas and took no further action with the Standing Committee’s recommendations. The Standing Committee did, however, continue to lobby in government circles throughout the war.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Norman Birkett letter to Lord Reith, quoted in Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 28.

The committee members present at the meeting included: Norman Birkett; Patrick Abercrombie, Chair of the CPRE and Professor of Town Planning at the University of London; renowned conservationist Rev. H. H. Symonds representing the Youth Hostels Association; and the Earl of Onslow, President of the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves.

<sup>31</sup> Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 29.

Cherry notes that Lord Reith was also approached by the National Trust in December 1941 and by the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves several times.

<sup>32</sup> Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 29.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

The Committee, as in its pre-war role, advocated for the protection of stretches of land which could be preserved in anticipation of the creation of future national parks. In 1943, the Committee fought against the construction of hydro-electric facilities in the Scottish Highlands in areas which it desired to have reserved by the state for national parks.<sup>35</sup> In a letter to *The Times* in January 1945, in opposition to some provisions of the Requisitioned Land and War Works Act which extended government powers to acquire land to support the war effort, the chair of the Committee Sir Norman Birkett wrote that the national interest is composed of many elements beyond the war effort. He stated that “National parks have a great contribution to make to the true national interest, and, more and more, are coming to be regarded as a ‘social’ need.”<sup>36</sup> Birkett asked that in all national policy questions considering the use of land the possibility of the creation of national parks should be deliberated.

Most important, perhaps, for the Standing Committee’s campaign was the invitation to Birkett to deliver the annual Rede Lecture at the University of Cambridge in 1945. The Rede Lecture signified the Committee’s ability to appeal to the establishment in a way that many other national parks campaigners could not. Birkett’s speech entitled “National Parks and the Countryside” summarised many of the arguments used by the national park movement over the previous decades. In the lecture Birkett argued that a National Parks Commission must be created and appointed by an Act of Parliament, and in control of funds allocated specifically for national parks, “with a continuity of policy and power

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<sup>35</sup> "Scottish Hydro-Electric Scheme." *Times* (London) 20 February 1943, 2.  
This campaign notably attracted the support of evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley.

<sup>36</sup> Norman Birkett. "Requisitioned Land." *Times* (London) 24 January 1945, 5.

unaffected by the changes of political life.”<sup>37</sup> The Commissioners would be accountable to the Minister of Town and Country Planning, who in turn would be accountable to Parliament. Birkett asked that at least six national parks be created “the moment the war ends” and three more added each year until all the available land was included.<sup>38</sup>

Birkett’s lecture adhered to the Romantic view of the British countryside, and works of literature concerning the countryside are referenced heavily throughout the speech. Indeed, Birkett ends his lecture by reciting a substantial passage of William Wordsworth’s 1798 poem “Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey” to explain the perceived spiritual benefit and tranquility that one receives from visiting the countryside. In the lecture, he went as far as to say that the countryside is an “essential part of what is vaguely called ‘The English Tradition’ that many men held before them during six years of war, and it was with some picture of that same countryside before them that many of them died.”<sup>39</sup> Birkett claimed that “the creation of national parks is, in some measure, bound up with the claim of the countryside to contribute to the full and harmonious national life.”<sup>40</sup>

In the lecture, Birkett addressed the frustration and exasperation of many preservationists and national park advocates at the lack of progress being made in the campaign. Birkett stated

The work of preservation has always been hard, and at times a little thankless, but latterly it has become quite heart-breaking. To save a footpath or a lonely moor or a piece of common land from destruction, or to preserve some historic and beautiful spot, the voluntary societies established for this purpose, have had to toil and sweat, to cajole and implore, to plead and beseech, lead deputations to Ministers, waylay Members of Parliament, write letters to *The Times* and *The Manchester*

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<sup>37</sup> Norman Birkett, *National Parks and the Countryside*, The Rede Lecture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945), 13.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

*Guardian*, raise Defence Funds, and, in sheer desperation, employ counsel.<sup>41</sup>

As it was a public lecture, Birkett claimed that what the national park movement was missing was public support and there needed to be a continued to push from the public for national parks after the end of the war.

Throughout the lecture, Birkett emphasised that national parks are not “merely work of preservation” but are places dedicated to “public service” and “used in the best possible way for the advantage of the people.”<sup>42</sup> Thus the Standing Committee envisioned national parks not only as areas people could visit for recreation and landscape preservation, but as agricultural regions and as locales where people would continue to live and work. Birkett concluded the lecture by saying that there were no obstacles that could not be easily overcome to create national parks and they could be built into existing patterns of land ownership and public acquisition of land would not be essential.<sup>43</sup> The public lecture therefore encompassed many wartime ideas of national planning and using land for the good of the nation.

While preservation of more wild tracts of countryside was discussed during the war as part of the plans for postwar reconstruction, the preservation of countryside stately homes advanced considerably. The economic turmoil of the 1930s caused great concern that the upkeep of vast hereditary country estates could not be maintained, thus risking the collapse of a particular characteristic of the British countryside. The National Trust Acts of 1937 and 1939 created the Country Houses Scheme program which allowed proprietors of country estates to transfer ownership to the National Trust, permanently and inalienably,

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

while remaining in occupation in exchange for an exemption from escalating death duties and allowing public visitors on a certain number of days per year.<sup>44</sup> The original owner was also required to provide some endowment for the maintenance of the property.<sup>45</sup> Under the scheme, the area owned by the Trust expanded from 46,500 acres in 1938 to 110,000 acres in 1944.<sup>46</sup> While the role of the National Trust in preserving the countryside increased substantially during the war, it also became somewhat controversial as public perception questioned the value of preserving the aristocratic countryside; critics of the policy saw the Trust's involvement as perpetuating the privileged lifestyle within stately homes. Peter Mandler writes that the Country Houses Scheme came under scrutiny in newspapers as it expanded to include more houses and "public sensitivity to the disposition of property increased."<sup>47</sup> By the end of the war, however, opinion had shifted to favour government playing a larger role in preserving the countryside. In 1945, even the Secretary of the National Trust recognised that land-utilisation in rural areas could be most effectively controlled by the state.<sup>48</sup> Public opinion favoured preservation schemes of the countryside that opened it up for the benefit of the nation, rather than preserving the old aristocratic exclusivity of estates.

Lord Portal, who succeeded Lord Reith as Minister of Works and Planning in April of 1942, remarked in Parliament that, "It is clear that no national planning of land would

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<sup>44</sup> John Delafons, *Politics and Preservation: A Policy History of the Built Heritage, 1882-1996* (London: E & FN Spon, 1997), 71.

In 1904 estate duties were at 8 percent, which rose to 40 percent by 1919 and 50 percent in 1930. In parallel, estate revenues declined considerably due to the agricultural depression.

<sup>45</sup> Delafons, *Politics and Preservation*, 71.

<sup>46</sup> Tichelar, "The Scott Report and the Labour Party," 173.

<sup>47</sup> Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 323.

<sup>48</sup> Tichelar, "The Scott Report and the Labour Party," 173.

satisfy the country if it did not provide for the preservation of extensive areas of great natural beauty and of the coast line. The question of National Parks and of the protection of our coast from ill-considered building development will be carefully examined and we fully realize the importance of this.”<sup>49</sup> In 1943, the responsibility for land utilisation switched from the Ministry of Agriculture to the Ministry of Town and Country Planning which was established in 1943 out of the Ministry of Work and Planning to execute national policy with respect to the use and development of land in England and Wales.

In the same month the Scott Report was published (August 1942), John Dower, a self-taught architect and planner, was employed by the Ministry of Works and Planning to look into the practicality of national parks in Britain, which entailed surveying possible national park areas.<sup>50</sup> Dower had been involved in the national park movement as the Secretary of the Standing Committee on National Parks since its inception in 1936, and he was a member of both the Friends of the Lake District and the CPRE. He also had a personal connection to the movement as his wife’s father, Liberal turned Labour politician and Baronet Charles Trevelyan, and her uncle, the well-known public intellectual historian G. M. Trevelyan, had been involved in the land access campaign and other preservation movements for some time.<sup>51</sup> One of the leading public planners during the war in Britain, Dower also wrote articles for *The Dalesman* journal on ‘Reconstruction on the Yorkshire Dales.’<sup>52</sup> While the majority of Britain was concentrating on the immediate task of winning the war, Dower believed it was an opportune time to dream of ‘a *forward-looking* and far

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<sup>49</sup> Parliamentary Debates (Lords), vol. 122 (21 April 1942), col. 670.

*Hansard refers to Lord Portal as the Minister of Works and Buildings.*

<sup>50</sup> Sheail, *An Environmental History of Twentieth-Century Britain* 117; Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 36.

<sup>51</sup> Sheail, *An Environmental History of Twentieth-Century Britain*, 116.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

bigger' vision of society, than reverting to old pre-war ways.<sup>53</sup> Dower was also representative of the growing importance and influence of civil servants during the Second World War whose policies were not driven merely by political conviction, but by rationality.

Dower continued to study the feasibility of national parks in Britain for the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, after its transformation from the Ministry of Works and Planning. He was commissioned to present his conclusions in a report intended "to study the problems relating to the establishment of National Parks in England and Wales."<sup>54</sup> The publication of the report was delayed due by political factors, notably the Treasury's concern over the cost although Dower's report contained "too many unknowns for a reliable estimate."<sup>55</sup> Gordon Cherry has argued that as a relatively new government department, the Ministry of Town and Country Planning had little experience and political clout when facing resistance from more established ministries.<sup>56</sup> The Minister of Town and Country Planning, W. S. Morrison, was subjected to increasing pressure from national park advocates, including fellow members of Parliament, over Dower's report. Morrison was questioned in Parliament in October 1944 and March 1945 on when the report on national parks would be made available to Parliament and the public, but in neither case did he commit to a publication schedule.<sup>57</sup> In March 1945, Morrison affirmed that "It is

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

<sup>54</sup> Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *National Parks in England and Wales*, Report by John Dower, Cmd. 6628 (London: HMSO, May 1945), 4.

<sup>55</sup> Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 46.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 47.

<sup>57</sup> Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 403 (18 October 1944), col. 2381-2; Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 409 (20 March 1945) col. 774-82.

*In both instances, the question concerning national parks was raised by Geoffrey Mander, MP, who had introduced an unsuccessful Access to Mountains Bill in 1937.*

our desire that those areas of special beauty in the country should be preserved for ever as the heritage of our people, as a place to which townsfolk can go and enjoy the unspoiled beauties of nature.”<sup>58</sup> However, he stated that Dower’s report was being considered by the various relevant departments and that there were still many obstacles to national park creation.<sup>59</sup> Morrison successfully applied to the Cabinet’s Reconstruction Committee for consent to publish Dower’s recommendations in early May 1945 during the last weeks of the wartime Coalition Government.<sup>60</sup>

Dower’s White Paper, *National Parks in England and Wales*, was eventually published on May 16, 1945, eight days after VE Day.<sup>61</sup> The Reconstruction Committee only permitted its publication provided its introduction explained it was intended to serve merely “as a basis for discussion” and stressed that the government was “not committed to acceptance of the recommendations and conclusion of this Report.”<sup>62</sup> Yet, Dower claimed in the introduction to his report that it was “needless to embark on any general argument of the ‘case’ for National Parks. It may be assumed that the case, in broad principle has already been made and won; but all the details remain to be filled in.”<sup>63</sup> The report was a timely publication as there had been continuous pressure from park lobbyists over the previous three years, since the publication of the Scott Report, to which the government replied with “cautious, but increasingly positive... statements.”<sup>64</sup> The Report was a

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<sup>58</sup> Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 409 (20 March 1945) col. 780.

<sup>59</sup> Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 409 (20 March 1945) col. 780.

<sup>60</sup> Sheail, *An Environmental History of Twentieth-Century Britain*, 120.

<sup>61</sup> "National Parks," *Times* (London), 17 May 1945, 2.

<sup>62</sup> Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *National Parks in England and Wales*, Report by John Dower, 4; Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 48.

<sup>63</sup> Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *National Parks in England and Wales*, Report by John Dower, 5-6.

<sup>64</sup> Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 38.

summary of Dower's own views and opinions of the feasibility of national park creation and gives no mention of other individuals or organisations involved in its writing or providing witness statements. Dower stated that "National Parks, as one of the major objectives of post-war town and country planning, rest on a firm basis of popular desire, informed opinion and Ministerial approval."<sup>65</sup>

Dower defined a national park, in application to Britain, "as an extensive area of beautiful and relatively wild country in which, for the nation's benefit and by appropriate national decision and action, (a) the characteristic landscape beauty is strictly preserved, (b) access and facilities for open-air enjoyment are amply provided, (c) wild life and buildings and places of architectural and historic interest are suitably protected while (d) established farming use is effectively maintained."<sup>66</sup> He did, however, place more importance on the first two clauses as being the dominant purposes of national parks. In the report Dower discussed ten possible areas of national park creation, stating his suggestions were based purely on personal judgement. His first four choices were the Lake District, Snowdonia, Dartmoor, and the Peak District and Dovedale.<sup>67</sup> Additionally, Dower also identified other areas of Britain to be reserves that could transition to national park status in the more distant future.

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<sup>65</sup> Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *National Parks in England and Wales*, Report by John Dower, 5.

Dower cites the support of national parks in Britain expressed by the Minister of Works and Planning Lord Portal; the Joint Parliamentary Secretary of Works and Planning Henry Strauss, M.P.; Paymaster General Sir W. Jowitt, M.P.; and the Minister of Town and Country Planning W.S. Morrison, M.P. between 1942 and 1943.

<sup>66</sup> Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *National Parks in England and Wales*, Report by John Dower, 6.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*,

Dower emphasised that National Parks “should be in a true and full sense *national*.”<sup>68</sup> While he stated that local interests and populations would be considered, he argued that national parks should be “for people – and especially young people – of every class and kind and from every part of the country, indeed the world. National Parks are not for any privileged or otherwise restricted section of the population, but for all who care to refresh their minds and spirits and to exercise their bodies in a peaceful setting of natural beauty.”<sup>69</sup> Dower also thought that the cost of national parks should be met from national funds, and that these should extend to cover landscape improvement and amenity construction costs. Dower did not, however, attempt an estimate of the likely costs of such national park ventures.

Dower’s report also considered the key question of land access and ownership within parks. Dower predicted that “it will, to a large extent be by their success or failure in securing ample provision of rambling access that the National Parks authority will be judged by most of the younger generation, and by no small part of the older generation, of ‘country-holiday-minded’ visitors.”<sup>70</sup> The report addressed the issues of access to grouse moors and water-supply catchment areas that had been central to the inter-war land access debate, but Dower thought that in both cases a compromise could be easily reached for little to no compensation costs.<sup>71</sup> The Report urged that it must be “an early post-war

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

<sup>71</sup> Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *National Parks in England and Wales*, Report by John Dower, 32-33. An example of Dower’s predilection for compromise can be seen, for example, in his discussion of grouse moors, which could be dealt with most comprehensively if the government would “buy out and extinguish the shooting values.” He then pointed out immediately that a better, quicker, and less-costly solution would be to grant full public access to the moors with the exception of a limited number of shooting days. In this case, compensation to landowners and shooters would only be required in case of proven reductions in bags and

concern of Government, to take up the access issue at the distinct, though far from satisfactory, point to which Parliament had carried it, just before the outbreak of war, by the passage of the Access to Mountains Act.”<sup>72</sup> Bolstered by the combined effect of “holidays with pay,” interest in the countryside, and the possibility of national parks, Dower was predicted that peacetime would bring large numbers of people to the countryside for whom amenities and access would have to be ensured.<sup>73</sup>

Regarding the issue confronting national park activists for decades – land ownership, Dower contended “the future of rural land ownership, in its relation to planning, agriculture, and other aspects of public policy, is a politically controversial issue on which I express no opinion and make no assumption – *except* that the system of ownership, whatever it is, will nowhere be allowed to stand in the way of a democratically determined allocation of the land to its best use in the public interest.”<sup>74</sup> However, Dower wrote, “I do not regard the public acquisition of all or any great part of land in National Parks as in any way *essential*... I should be opposed to the public acquisition of all or most land in National Parks, as certain to entail in practice a crippling limitation on the number and size of Parks to be secured.”<sup>75</sup> Dower recognised that resolving the issue of landownership would lessen a lot of the disquiet held by locals in the identified areas who were concerned that national parks could severely impact their livelihood and property ownership. He clearly refrained

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shooting values of the grouse moor. He also thought that appropriate precautions regarding access in the immediate vicinities of reservoirs and municipal water intakes, combined with “appropriate ‘treatment’” of water would be sufficient to allay any fears concerning the impact on water quality as a result of public access rights.

<sup>72</sup> Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *National Parks in England and Wales*, Report by John Dower, 35.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

from recommending the employment of Eminent Domain to appropriate land from local landowners for the parks' establishment, thus showing a commitment to allow daily lives to continue normally within the parks. However, the report stated that public acquisition of land should be used to secure certain areas if other measures such as compensation were proven inadequate or prohibitively expensive.<sup>76</sup> The report also proposed that the National Trust and National Parks would work well alongside one another, as both would be committed to the preservation of landscape beauty and opening it to public enjoyment. Similarly to the Addison Report of 1931, Dower's report also acknowledged that a separate category nature reserves would be required, in addition to the creation of national parks, to focus exclusively on the conservation of particular flora and fauna.

Dower's report was a theoretical envisioning of national park creation in Britain. It lacked detail on the mechanisms that would be needed to create national parks and ensuring land access and made no actual estimates of the amount of financial provision required to create a national park system. The report strongly endorsed the feasibility of national parks in Britain and claimed that any obstacle to creating parks could easily be overcome for little cost. Dower's conclusion encapsulated the main message of his report: "There can be few national purposes which, at so modest a cost, offer so large a prospect of health-giving happiness for the people."<sup>77</sup> Ann and Malcolm MacEwen write that the Dower Report was the work "not of a civil servant weighing pros and cons, but of an articulate and perceptive partisan."<sup>78</sup> In John Sheail's opinion the report marked "the culmination of inter-war attempts to combine preservation with modernity."<sup>79</sup> Despite a positive

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

<sup>78</sup> MacEwen and MacEwen, *National Parks: conservation or cosmetics?*, 9.

<sup>79</sup> Sheail, *An Environmental History of Twentieth-Century Britain*, 120.

response to the Report among national park advocates, Dower's proposal for a preparatory National Parks Commission was rejected by the Reconstruction Committee soon after its publication to focus on more pressing matters, but suggested that the report be submitted to an advisory committee for further consideration.<sup>80</sup> Government ministries also voiced their opposition, stating that it was the responsibility of the government, not an ad hoc Commission, to set policy.<sup>81</sup> It was opposed particularly by both the Ministry of Agriculture and the Forestry Commission as it threatened to encroach on their respective responsibilities.<sup>82</sup> However, in July of the same year, the Labour Party, which was particularly enthusiastic about the idea of national parks, entered Government with a resounding victory in the General Election.

One of the new Labour Government's first tasks was to implement the reconstruction ideas concerning land utilisation formed during the war. Barry Cullingworth writes that the control of land use was "the centerpiece of postwar planning policy."<sup>83</sup> The widespread war-related damage and destruction of urban and rural areas presented an unprecedented opportunity for the government to shape development. The Labour Government frequently referred to the three main wartime land use reports in enacting its post-war planning policies, which Blunden and Curry write "conferred a legitimacy on policies that might otherwise have been castigated as left wing and socialist."<sup>84</sup> Public opinion had also shifted during the war towards an acceptance and

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 121; Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 48.

<sup>81</sup> Sheail, *An Environmental History of Twentieth-Century Britain*, 122.

<sup>82</sup> Blunden and Curry, *A People's Charter?*, 47.

<sup>83</sup> Barry Cullingworth, "Introduction and Overview," in *British Planning: 50 Years of Urban and Regional Planning*, edited by Barry Cullingworth (London: Athlone Press, 1999), 1.

<sup>84</sup> John Blunden and Nigel Curry, eds., *The Changing Countryside* (Beckenham: The Open University/London: Croom Helm, 1985), 83.

desire of increasing government management. With the rise of Labour in the 1920s the common response from both Conservative and Liberal politicians was that the traditional and successful “hands-off” approach to the economy and society more generally, pursued by successive governments for many decades would be reversed by Labour in power, with disastrous results. But the deeply interventionist policies of the National Government had put the lie to that argument: many people believed that Britain had emerged victorious against Nazi Germany precisely because of the efficient transformation of the economy to a war footing, and the majority accepted that government intervention had been a positive rather than negative force in national life. After the war the public therefore embraced the idea that had been fermenting during the war that “the New Britain must be better planned.”<sup>85</sup> Their ready acceptance found an eager and willing partner in a Labour government whose philosophy was that effective planning, effective management, and a coherent vision of social security would vastly improve the lives of postwar Britons.

As one of the key elements of their post-war development policy framework, the Labour government passed the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act which created procedures to manage and constrain urban sprawl into rural areas. Among its regulations, the Act required all landowners proposing development to apply for planning permission to the local authority.<sup>86</sup> Importantly, this Act created a system of mechanism for the government to manage urban and rural development, primarily through the establishment of green belt lands. The Act also provided county councils with the staff and resources necessary to safeguard potential national park areas. National park advocates, notably the Standing Committee on National Parks, were disappointed by this clause because it limited

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<sup>85</sup> David Kynaston. *Austerity Britain, 1945-51* (New York: Walker & Company, 2008), 20.

<sup>86</sup> Blunden and Curry, *The Changing Countryside*, 84.

the possibility of transferring land control over park areas to a non-elected but centralised National Commission on National Parks.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act was a seminal document of the post-war Labour government and confirmed its interest in governing countryside policy.

The problem with the 1947 Act, however, was that intention – the limitation or at the very least careful management of urban encroachment into the countryside – was not in fact in accord with the desires of national park advocates, who wanted something quite different. However, the limitation of urban encroachment in the countryside did not respond to the desires of national park advocates. Managed penetration of the countryside meant in their view that the essential character of rural England could and would still be attenuated by urban expansion. What they wanted was absolute protection of key areas of the countryside, which would require government policy of a different sort. Among the Labour government’s most senior political members were the enthusiastic ramblers, Lewis Silkin (Minister of Town and Country Planning), James Chuter Ede (Home Secretary), and Hugh Dalton (Chancellor of the Exchequer) who proved to be instrumental advocates for national parks and public access within the corridors of Whitehall.<sup>88</sup> As a party that drew its support from a primarily urban base, it was argued Labour would benefit from ensuring urban dwellers received better opportunities for recreation in the countryside; the party was therefore motivated to create a better alternative to the disappointing 1939 Access to Mountains Act. Silkin’s interest in national parks overrode reservations concerning the

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<sup>87</sup> Sheail, “The Concept of National Parks in Great Britain 1900-1950,” 49.

<sup>88</sup> Silkin, Chuter Ede, and Dalton were formally involved in some capacity with the Ramblers’ Association. Chuter Ede served as President of the Southern Area of Ramblers’ Association. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 250.

Dower Report.<sup>89</sup> Within days of taking office, he appointed a National Parks Committee, chaired by Sir Arthur Hobhouse, a landowner from the south-west of England and chair of the County Council's Association.<sup>90</sup> Other members of the 10-person Committee included John Dower and Julian Huxley of the Zoological Society, who along with several others on the Committee were members of the Standing Committee on National Parks.<sup>91</sup>

The *Report of the National Parks Committee* was presented to Parliament by Silkin, in July 1947. The report contained far more specificity than any previous national park report, and was the first to offer concrete and specific policies to be adopted in the creation of national parks. The work of the committee was comprehensive: over a two year period it met eighty times and conducted seventeen survey tours of areas under consideration as sites for national parks. It also received written or oral evidence from sixty organisations or individuals. The Hobhouse Committee used Dower's Report of 1945 as the starting point for its enquiry, but extended or modified many of his proposals.<sup>92</sup> The new report

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<sup>89</sup> Blunden and Curry, *A People's Charter?*, 47.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*; Sheail, *An Environmental History of Twentieth-Century Britain*, 120.

Dower had been the intended choice to chair the Committee, however his ill-health prevented him from taking the leadership role. Dower died of tuberculosis in September 1947, two months after the publication of the Hobhouse Report.

<sup>92</sup> Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *Report of the National Parks Committee (England and Wales)*, Cmd. 7121 (London: HMSO, July 1947), 1.

The Hobhouse Committee was appointed with the following terms of reference: "(a) To consider the proposals in the Report on National Parks in England and Wales (Cmd. 6628) of May 1945, as to the areas which should be selected as National Parks; and make recommendations in regard to the special requirements and appropriate boundaries of those areas which, in the view of the Committee, should be first selected. (b) To consider and report on the proposals made in that Report as to the measures necessary to secure the objects of National Parks, and on any additional measures which in the view of the Committee are necessary to secure those objects; and (c) To consider and make recommendations on such other matters affecting the establishment of National Parks and the Conservation of Wild Life as may be referred by the Minister to the Committee."

was intended “to present a detailed scheme for the selection, planning and management of National Parks.”<sup>93</sup>

The Hobhouse Committee accepted Dower’s four clause definition of a national park, and reinforced Dower’s argument that national parks were both timely and essential:

We are dealing with a closely populated and highly developed country, where almost every acre of land is used in some degree for the economic needs of man... yet it is just because this is a densely populated and highly industrial country that the need for National Parks is so pressing. Four-fifths of the population dwell in urban areas... They need the refreshment which is obtainable from the beauty and quietness of the unspoilt country... It is all the more urgent to ensure that some at least of the extensive areas of beautiful and wild country in England and Wales are specially protected as part of the national heritage... and that their aesthetic and educational values are recognised by the State and carry due weight in the inevitable competition with more utilitarian, and sometimes more powerful, claims to the development of land.<sup>94</sup>

Crucially, in recognition of the broad movement that had coalesced around the necessity of immediate or near-immediate establishment of national parks, the report’s introduction also acknowledged the large number of voluntary organisations that had been part of the National Parks movement in England and Wales including the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Ramblers’ Association, the National Trust, the CPRE and CPRW, and the Standing Committee on National Parks.

The report proposed twelve areas for parks that would be created in instalments of four over a three year period subsequent to the passing of national parks legislation. Each proposed location was analysed in the report with consideration taken of its benefits, problems, requirements, and justification for its proposed status. The Hobhouse

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<sup>93</sup> Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *Report of the National Parks Committee (England and Wales)*, 3.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 7-8.

Committee paid particular attention to the distance of large centres of population from the borders of proposed national parks, in order to ensure that national parks would be established in areas easily accessible to the majority of the population.<sup>95</sup>

It also proposed the creation of 52 conservation areas which would be designated as a result of their landscape beauty, or scientific or recreational interest, but which did not meet the desired requirements of national parks. In parallel to the main Hobhouse Committee, Julian Huxley chaired the Wild Life Conservation Special Committee to investigate the specific issue of nature conservation in England and Wales. While Dower had been in favour of uniting nature reserves and national parks, Huxley's sub-committee argued they that needed to be administered separately.<sup>96</sup> Naturalists and conservationists were concerned that nature reserves dedicated to scientific research or the protection of endangered species would not prosper if public access were allowed. The Committee's Report, *The Conservation of Nature in England and Wales* recommended the establishment of National Natures Reserves under the direction of the proposed Biological Service to study wildlife and its management.<sup>97</sup>

The Hobhouse Committee attempted to allay concerns about the over-nationalisation of land use planning by proposing that each park have its own committee, with broader oversight activities handled by a National Parks Commission. The report stated that "each National Park should be treated as a single geographical unit, to be

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<sup>95</sup> The Hobhouse Report included a map of Britain showing the borders of proposed national parks and conversation areas and population dispersal throughout the country.

<sup>96</sup> Evans, *A History of Conservation in Britain*, 70.

<sup>97</sup> Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *Report of the National Parks Committee (England and Wales)*, 59; Evans, *A History of Conservation in Britain*, 70.

planned in accordance with the Commission's policy."<sup>98</sup> Within this structure local park committees would be responsible for ensuring that individual park policy "fits with the least possible dislocation into the general pattern of local planning authorities."<sup>99</sup> To appease the Department of Agriculture's previously-stated opposition to national parks management impeding agricultural activities, the Committee remained silent on the subject of limitations or restrictions on agriculture within park boundaries.<sup>100</sup> The Hobhouse Report also addressed the issue of expenditures that would be required in the establishment of national parks, a subject which Dower had discussed. It estimated a cost of £9.25 million over a ten year period.<sup>101</sup> The cost would be drawn from the £50 million National Land Fund, which had been announced by Hugh Dalton in April 1946. In response to the inevitable questions of access, the Hobhouse Committee contended that "the freedom to wander over mountain, moorland, rough grazing and other uncultivated land will be of the utmost importance to the enjoyment of National Parks."<sup>102</sup> The Hobhouse Report concluded with the statement:

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<sup>98</sup> Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *Report of the National Parks Committee (England and Wales)*, 18.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>100</sup> Sheail, "The Concept of National Parks in Great Britain 1900-1950," 50.

<sup>101</sup> Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *Report of the National Parks Committee (England and Wales)*, 71.

The predicted capital expenditure required for National Parks was identified in the report as (1) Construction or Adaption of National Park Buildings and Centres: £250, 000; (2) Acquisition and Improvement of Land: £5,000,000; (3) Removal or Mitigation of Disfigurements in National Parks and Conservation Areas: £3,000,000; (4) Provision of Holiday Accommodation: £1,000,000.

<sup>102</sup> Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *Report of the National Parks Committee (England and Wales)*, 2.

In June 1946, the Committee was informed that "it was intended to include in protective legislation provisions for footpaths and access to the countryside which would apply not merely to National Parks, but to the whole of England and Wales." A Footpaths and Access Special Committee was established the next month under the leadership of Hobhouse to address the issue of access beyond national park borders.

We believe we have set out a scheme for the protection of landscape beauty and the encouragement of open-air recreation in the wild and unspoilt country of England and Wales which will be a great national investment, yielding unlimited returns in health and happiness... and in a new growth of understanding between town and country. Although our enquiry concludes during a period of economic readjustment, we are yet confident that this scheme is of immediate and abiding importance and should be instituted without delay... If this country is to rely to a greater extent for the future on its own assets, it is all the more desirable to preserve and enjoy those values, both spiritual and material, which are part of its national heritage.<sup>103</sup>

As Ann and Malcolm MacEwen have written, neither the Dower nor the Hobhouse Reports questioned whether the twin aims of countryside preservation and public enjoyment could be achieved through means other than national parks.<sup>104</sup> Both Reports assumed that national parks were the only logical advancement which could be taken to meet these objectives. The extensive discussion in the Hobhouse Report of the history and state of national parks elsewhere in the world, indicates that national park advocates and politicians from relevant departments were aware that Britain in the 1940s was lagging behind in a global trend.

After the Hobhouse Committee advocated strongly for the policy of creating national parks in Britain, it was simply a matter of political will to craft the necessary legislation. While the Ministry of Town and Country Planning strongly desired to advance the issue and Silkin was personally committed to it, it was opposed by other departments, most importantly by the Treasury. It questioned the financial arrangements proposed in the Hobhouse Report; there was no support at the Treasury for the funding of a National Parks Commission, particularly if it would require the dissemination of funds to local

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<sup>103</sup> Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *Report of the National Parks Committee (England and Wales)*, 73.

<sup>104</sup> MacEwen and MacEwen, *National Parks: Conservation or Cosmetics?*, 9.

authorities for national parks management.<sup>105</sup> The Treasury felt that there was already a proliferation of bodies responsible for the government ownership of amenity lands, including the Forestry Commission, the Agricultural Land Commission, Commissioners of Crown Lands, the Central Land Board, and the Ministry of Works (for Ancient Monuments).<sup>106</sup> Questions were also raised in government discussions of whether national parks legislation or a commission was really necessary, as opponents of a formal policy felt that the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act had given enough power and resources to county councils to meet the goals of countryside conservation and the establishment of recreation amenities. National Park legislation was also opposed by rural land users including the National Farmers Union, the Forestry Commission, the Central Landowners Association and the British Field Sports Society.<sup>107</sup>

As it was facing opposition from reluctant civil servants and politicians, the Ministry of Town and Country Planning was also subjected to intense lobbying from national park advocates following the publication of the Hobhouse Report to ensure that the momentum for national park legislation continued. The Standing Committee on National Parks, and the Councils for the Preservation and Rural England and Wales sent memoranda and held meetings with government officials, including Silkin, and mounted letter-writing campaigns to news agencies throughout 1947 and 1948. *The Times* itself also came out in support of Hobhouse's vision of a national park scheme. An editorial in May 1948 stated that "legislation is indispensable" to create a successful national park system in Britain.<sup>108</sup> The major organisations advocating park creation legislation were

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<sup>105</sup> Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 85, 87.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 85.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

<sup>108</sup> "National Parks," *Times* (London), 10 May 1948, 5.

particularly concerned with ensuring that the parks were “national parks” rather than a local authority’s concern.<sup>109</sup>

The Ramblers’ Association also maintained pressure on the government for national park and public access legislation. The Association launched a public campaign to advance the legislative process, which included the distribution of leaflets and pamphlets, writing to MPs, and holding a series of public meetings in Manchester, Bradford, Leeds, Newcastle, and Liverpool.<sup>110</sup> *The Times* reported that the Ramblers’ Association and the London branch of the Youth Hostels Association organised a public meeting on February 12, 1948 at London’s Kingsway Hall, which was attended by 1,600 people including the Home Secretary, James Chuter Ede.<sup>111</sup> The meeting’s resolution called on the government “to introduce at the next Parliamentary session legislation for the establishment of national parks, revision of the law relating to rights of way and provision for public access to uncultivated mountains and moorlands.”<sup>112</sup> The Home Secretary assured the committee that the Hobhouse Report’s recommendations were being analysed by the government and would soon be “put into active operation.”<sup>113</sup>

Pressure had been building from other sources too: demonstrations, similar to but (less radical than) the trespass movement of the prewar era, in potential national park areas

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<sup>109</sup> Cherry, *Environmental Planning 1939-1969 Volume II*, 92.

This view was expressed in communications with the government, as well as in letters to *The Times* by representatives of the CPRE, the Standing Committee on National Parks, the National Trust, and the Ramblers’ Association, among members of the public in 1948.

Patrick Abercrombie, Crawford, Norman Birkett, "National Parks," *Times* (London), 3 March 1948, 5.

Reginald Lennard., and W. S. Tysoe, "National Parks," *Times* (London), 27 August 1948, 5.

<sup>110</sup> Hill, *Freedom to Roam*, 88.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 89.

<sup>112</sup> "National Parks and Rights Of Way," *Times* (London), 13 February 1948, 7.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

were restarted in 1946. Howard Hill claims that 5,000 ramblers attended a rally in Cave Dale, Castleton in the Peak on June 30, 1946. Tom Stephenson, in his capacity as a senior member of the Ramblers' Association, also led a number of prominent Labour government ministers, including Hugh Dalton, on a three-day rambling trip on the Pennine Way in 1948.<sup>114</sup> At the end of the trip, Dalton said "After renewing acquaintance with this beautiful party of the country I am sure that we must in the lifetime of the Parliament place on the Statute Book a great measure of liberation, freeing for the health and enjoyment of all our people, what for so long has been monopolised by a few. National Parks so long talked about must be brought into being."<sup>115</sup>

Throughout this period of intense lobbying as national park campaigners grew increasingly frustrated at the seeming lack of progress, the government, especially Silkin, maintained that it was the government's goal to pass legislation within their term in office.<sup>116</sup> Confirmation of this arrived in the King's Speech of October 26, 1948 which stated that: "legislation will be introduced to establish national parks in England and Wales; to improve the law relating to footpaths and access to the countryside; and to ensure the better conservation of wild life."<sup>117</sup>

After multiple drafts and heated negotiations between various government departments, during which Silkin was forced to concede much of the intended powers of the National Parks Commission to local authorities, the National Parks and Access to the

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<sup>114</sup> Hill, *Freedom to Roam*, 89. Tom Stephenson became Secretary of the Rambler's Association in this same year. Other Labour members on the walk were MPs Barbara Castle, Arthur Blenkinsop, George Chetwynd, Geoffrey de Freitas, and Fred Willey.

<sup>115</sup> Hugh Dalton, quoted in Hill, *Freedom to Roam*, 89.

<sup>116</sup> "News in Brief," *Times* (London), 23 February 1948, 3.

<sup>117</sup> "The King's Speech," *Times* (London), 27 October 1948, 2.

Countryside Bill was first presented to Parliament on March 17, 1949.<sup>118</sup> In the bill, the Commission's position was therefore reduced to an advisory role.<sup>119</sup> In order to contend with the power of local landowners, Hugh Dalton, no longer Chancellor of the Exchequer but Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and President of the Ramblers' Association, dictated that the Minister should be able to appoint at least twenty-five per cent of each park's committee.<sup>120</sup> Blunden and Curry write that the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Bill "was not quite that which had been lobbied for outside, nor that which enthusiasts for the Hobhouse Report would have wanted."<sup>121</sup> Despite dedicated advocacy by conservationists and recreationists, the ambitious goals of the Hobhouse and Dower Reports were somewhat muted by the financial and political constraints of the postwar era. The Bill was met with some opposition from Members of Parliament, notably Conservative members concerned about the negative effects on land-owning interests.<sup>122</sup> However, these concerns were by no means universal among the Opposition. Silkin's predecessor as Minister of Town and Country Planning, the conservative W.S. Morrison voiced his support for the Bill and acknowledged the decades long work of "enthusiastic private persons [who] had long agitated for something of this kind."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 462 (17 March 1949) col. 2302.

<sup>119</sup> Blunden and Curry, *A People's Charter?*, 76.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

<sup>123</sup> Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 463 (31 March 1949) col. 1486. *Morrison's support of the bill was enthusiastic in the House, where he stated that, "We all rejoice in anything which will make an understanding of the countryside a more general possession of our people. I agree with all the right hon. Gentleman said about the value, to body and mind, of encouraging proper access to our open spaces. He was good enough to mention my own contribution on this question during my term of office but, of course, much work was done before I came on the scene. Enthusiastic private persons had long agitated for something of this kind and have done, in the meantime, invaluable work in preserving from depredation many of the areas which they one day hope to see made national parks."*

While introducing the Bill for its second reading on March 31, 1949, Silkin stated:

I am particularly proud to introduce this Bill because it represents something which men and women have wanted for a long time and have struggled for, often with little hope of success. Now at last we shall be able to see that the mountains of Snowdonia, the Lakes, and the waters of the Broads, the moors and dales of the Peak, the South Downs and the tors of the West Country belong to the people as a right and not as a concession. This is not just a Bill. It is a people's charter—a people's charter for the open air, for the hikers and the ramblers, for everyone who loves to get out into the open air and enjoy the countryside... With it the countryside is theirs to preserve, to cherish, to enjoy and to make their own.<sup>124</sup>

Although a rather florid statement, Silkin's enthusiasm and justification for the Bill helped ensure its support in the House of Commons. There were few amendments of any substance until the Bill reached the House of Lords within which there was a stronger representation of land owning interests. Notably, the Bill was amended by the Lords to state that the National Parks Commission was required to pay "due regard to the needs of agriculture and forestry."<sup>125</sup>

The *National Parks and Countryside Act* received Royal Assent on December 16, 1949. The Act authorised the creation of national parks and the establishment of National Parks Commission as well as the Nature Conservancy, nature reserves and areas of outstanding natural beauty in England and Wales. The Act explains that National Parks were to be created "for the purpose of preserving and enhancing the natural beauty [of the area] and for the purpose of promoting their enjoyment by the public."<sup>126</sup> The parks themselves were to be selected for "(a) their natural beauty, and (b) the opportunities they afford for open-air recreation having regard to both their character and to their position in

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<sup>124</sup> Parliamentary Debates (Commons), vol. 463 (31 March 1949) col. 1485.

<sup>125</sup> Blunden and Curry, *A People's Charter?*, 88; *National Parks and Access to Countryside Act*, 1949, 14 Geo. 6, c. 97, 84.

<sup>126</sup> *National Parks and Access to Countryside Act*, 1949, 14 Geo. 6, c. 97, 5.1.

relation to centres of population.”<sup>127</sup> The Act emphasised that the designation of National Parks would be done by the Commission in consultation with local planning authorities. It was further stipulated that national parks should seek to educate visitors about “the history, natural features, flora and fauna of National Parks, and the objects of architectural or historical interest therein and the opportunities for recreation available therein.”<sup>128</sup> Additionally, the Act also made provisions for the guarantee of access to the countryside, both within and outside park borders.

The eventual passage of the *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act* in 1949 marked the culmination of a decades-long movement for national parks in England and Wales. Although the Act failed to meet all the demands of national park advocates, it reflected a compromise between wide-ranging concerns of both supporters and opponents of national parks. What is striking about the success of the process is that the most prominent national park advocates of the 1940s were the same organisations and individuals who had promoted the cause in the inter-war period. The movement’s success in the late 1940s arrived as a result of change in the political, economic, and social atmosphere in the post-war period which had been building during the Second World War. National parks were well-suited to the Labour Party’s bold ambitions to create an improved society for the entire British population. While it expanded the palatability of government intervention that in part made parks legislation possible, the war had also drastically reduced the position of the landed aristocracy in the countryside, and Labour, as an urban, predominantly working class, political force, had little to lose from challenging land owning rights. The national park movement of the 1940s should therefore be seen as the

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<sup>127</sup> *National Parks and Access to Countryside Act*, 1949, 14 Geo. 6, c. 97, 5.2.

<sup>128</sup> *National Parks and Access to Countryside Act*, 1949, 14 Geo. 6, c. 97, 86.1.

final link in an unbroken continuation of work that had been laid in the 1920s and 1930s, and even earlier. What allowed it to achieve ultimate success was the new atmosphere and conditions of postwar reconstruction. National park development in Britain was made possible only in the 1940s when the right political, social, and economic conditions coalesced into an environment within which meaningful national parks legislation was feasible.

## *Conclusion*

After the passing of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act in 1949, two years would pass before the establishment of any national parks in Britain. The Peak District National Park was officially opened on April 17, 1951.<sup>1</sup> In their respective reports, both Dower and Hobhouse had proposed the Peak District on north-central England to be one of the areas of the country most in need of official national park designation, for both its intrinsic natural beauty and also for its proximity on all sides to populous industrial conurbations. The creation of the Peak District National Park, encompassing a vast area of 1,404 square kilometres including Kinder Scout, was a significant reward for the many ramblers and organisations who had campaigned for decades for public access to the area's moors and mountains, which in turn had been the site of many trespasses.<sup>2</sup> The Peak District park was followed by the Lake District National Park, officially designated in May 1951 and opened on August 13 of that year, preserving the area of England that had inspired Wordsworth to ask that such countryside be recognised as “a sort of national property.”<sup>3</sup> Eight more national parks were created in the 1950s in England and Wales, and three others were designated in the following decades.<sup>4</sup> These thirteen national parks, together with two national parks in Scotland, attest to the dedication of a movement over more than a century.

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, *The Peak National Park*, 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>3</sup> John Wyatt. *The Lake District National Park*, Countryside Commission Official Guide (Exeter: Webb & Bower, 1987) 12.

<sup>4</sup> Brecon Beacons, Dartmoor, Exmoor, North Yorkshire Moors, Northumberland, Pembrokeshire Coast, Snowdonia, and Yorkshire Dales were officially opened in the 1950s. The Broads, the New Forest and the South Downs were designated between 1988 and 2009. Scotland's two national parks, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and Cairngorms were created in 2002 and 2003.

Although the official campaign for national parks really began in the 1920s, it built upon traditions of small endeavours of environmental conservation, as well as a growing trend towards the preservation of certain aspects of town and country life in the late nineteenth century. The writings of the Romantics played an influential role in reshaping the public's view of the natural environment, notably its wild moors, heathlands and mountains, as places to be idealised, cherished, and preserved. Nineteenth and early-twentieth century naturalists who were interested in the preservation of nature for its scientific and ecological value, brought science-based conservation ideas to public prominence and contributed to the movement for national parks.

The campaign led by ramblers for access to enclosed lands which began in the mid-nineteenth century drew attention to the issue of the marked lack of recreational opportunities in Britain for those outside of the landed elite. A succession of failed Access to Mountains Bills between the 1880s and the 1930s demonstrated the power of the upper class country landowners in Parliament and showed the formidable force which national park advocates would need to overcome in their campaign. The Kinder Scout Trespass was the most infamous event in a series of mass trespass and rallies in the 1930s that drew attention to the need for public access to Britain's wild lands, and brought national exposure in the press to the issue.

Since its founding in 1926, the Council for the Preservation of Rural England was at the forefront of the campaign to protect the countryside from urban expansion. Through its government lobbying and public campaigns, it maintained pressure on the government to commit to the idea of national parks. This pressure, alongside the lobbying of private individuals like Lord Bledisloe, led Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald to create a

National Park Committee in 1929. While the recommendations in favour of national parks presented in the Committee's 1931 report were not adopted by the government due to the economic crisis of the Great Depression, the report outlined the benefits and even confirmed the necessity of creating a national park system in Britain to respond to demands for countryside preservation and public access to mountains and moorlands. After government discussions on national parks were abandoned, the Standing Committee on National Parks was formed in 1936 to maintain the pressure on the government; in pursuit of this policy the Committee brought together multiple diverse movements for preservation and recreation. The momentum of the campaign in the 1930s culminated in a final attempt to legislate public access to the countryside. Although the Access to Mountains Act of 1939 was eventually passed, its purpose had been so thoroughly attenuated and distorted by the interests of elite country landowners that it brought no gain to its supporters. What was not apparent then, however, was that this was the last time that the old landowning elite would be successful in blocking the movement for public access to the nation's countryside.

National park advocates continued their campaign through the Second World War and were rewarded to see the issue of countryside land use raised and sincerely addressed in multiple wartime government reports. The war brought about a change in the public's attitudes concerning the political, social, and economic roles that government could play in society. The Labour Party's decisive victory in the 1945 general election both reflected and confirmed the public's desire for substantial social reform as well as the continuation of government management of public life. The Attlee Government proved to be the most receptive to the creation of a national park scheme, but it must be emphasised that this was magnified by the presence of several ministers who possessed strong ties to the rambling

movement. National park policy was considered and partially formulated in the Dower Report of 1945 and the Hobhouse Report in 1947. National park advocates including the Standing Committee on National Parks and the Ramblers' Association lobbied intensely in government circles and in public campaigns, to ensure that the government turned the recommendations of the Hobhouse Report into actual legalisation. Despite resistance from various government departments and the landed interests which led to several amendments to the legislation, the National Parks and Countryside Act was enacted in December, 1949. Unlike previous legislative efforts the 1949 Act's amendments did not meaningfully water down the bill, and consequently it formed the foundation of a robust and long-lasting national parks system in England and Wales.

This study has emphasised that the national park campaign was a continuous movement over decades, from the first seeds of conservationist thought and the Romantic era to the post- Second World War. It was not, as others have suggested, a series of small tentative but ultimately failed steps towards legislation in the inter-war period, before swiftly gaining in popularity after the war. National parks in Britain did not come into being simply because of a receptive Labour government in the late 1940s. The campaign for national parks directly continued from the 1920s through the Second World War until the passing of the 1949 Act, led by many of the same actors in the inter-war, wartime, and post-war periods.

The campaign for national parks in England and Wales was long and often arduous. Advocates of national parks sought to align the protection of the environment with progressive ideas and an appeal to modernity.<sup>5</sup> Their intention was not to lead a movement

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<sup>5</sup> Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 16; Sheail, *An Environmental History of Twentieth-Century Britain*, 115.

against change and industrial progress, but rather to secure a “landscape that was simultaneously historic *and* modern.”<sup>6</sup> Faced with formidable opposition, government apathy, and exhaustive work which appeared often at times to be futile, advocates for national parks continued to push for their cause over two decades, inspired by their love of the British landscape and driven by the conviction that it should be available to all people to enjoy and cherish, and not just for the privileged few. As the Addison Committee had predicted, promoters of the national park idea were prepared to take “a long view,” fighting for something which would be enjoyed by future generations.

It would be mistaken to say that the campaign for national parks ended in Britain with the passage of the National Park and Access to the Countryside Act in 1949, for the movement remains vibrant to this day. The actions of national parks campaigners have been vindicated and rewarded over the past sixty-seven years, as Britain’s national parks have proved to be popular with the public and ensured the protection and conservation of some of Britain’s most remarkable landscapes. The campaign continues to ensure that national parks continue to meet the purpose for which they were created: to allow all of Britain, present and future generations alike, to preserve, cherish, and enjoy the countryside.

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<sup>6</sup> Sheail, *An Environmental History of Twentieth-Century Britain*, 115. Emphasis added.

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