

Protected areas and peaceful protest

Trident and the new Scottish National Park system

Richard Clarke, Centre for Protected Area Research, Birkbeck, University of London, 26 Russell Square, London WC1B 5DQ. Email r.clarke@bbk.ac.uk.

Abstract

This paper begins by asserting the well-established role of non-violent direct action in the formation of public policy on UK protected landscapes. Best known of these is the 1932 Mass Trespass of Kinder Scout. This contributed significantly to the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act which initiated Britain's system of National Parks and other protected landscapes. Continued pressure 'from below' has been a major and continuing influence in the development of UK rural policy. A recent example is the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, which has established, south of the border, the 'right to roam' in open countryside, bringing the rest of Britain in line with Scots tradition in this respect. One consequence of the development of UK policy is that National Parks, initially conceived as a means of delivering recreational opportunity to a largely urbanised population, are now seen as a model for sustainable rural development, characterised by 'harmonious interaction' of people with their environment. This adds a new dimension to the long standing debate over the appropriateness of military activity in such protected landscapes. Faslane is sandwiched between biologically recreationally important areas, typified by Argyll Forest Park to the west, and Loch Lomond and (beyond this) Queen Elizabeth Forest Park to the east. Yet Faslane and its surrounding area are excluded from the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park designated in 2002 – implicit recognition of their incompatibility with the principles of environmental, economic and social sustainability. The Scottish Executive is currently consulting on what, when it is established, will be the UK's first coastal and marine national park. Gare Loch and its associated sea lochs – all intensively used for military activity - form part of one of the ten candidate areas for the new park, although unlikely to make it through to the final. If protected areas prefigure a vision for a peaceful and sustainable future, the protests at Faslane can be seen as part of the effort to achieve it in the British countryside, as well as in the wider World.