

# Protected areas and peaceful protest

## Trident and the new Scottish National Park system

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### 1) Introduction - direct action and protected landscapes

This paper responds to the invitation by the organisers of this seminar for academics to recognise an obligation to popularise and make knowledge more widely available, to make connections between disciplines, and, above all, as citizens, to engage with critical issues of the day and to help make the world a better place. If this is the case it is not enough simply to repeat the generic moral, economic or strategic case against the possession and maintenance of nuclear weapons. As academics we also need to bring our subject expertise to bear in whatever way is possible. For example, the Faslane Naval Base directly employs some 6,500 people and is a major contributor to the local economy. Arguments for nuclear disarmament carry greater conviction (and may secure more local support) where it can be demonstrated convincingly that alternative, socially useful employment can be created, within a similar lead time (15 years) and at a comparable cost (£30bn or so) to that projected for the renewal of the Trident system.

It is not clear what an ecologist/ geographer with a special interest in protected areas (nature reserves, national parks, and similar areas) can contribute here, yet there are links. Faslane Naval Base is in the middle of an area of extraordinary natural beauty and at the centre *of* – but not included *in* – one of Britain's newest national parks. The base is sandwiched between areas of high biodiversity and recreational value, typified by Argyll Forest Park to the west, and Loch Lomond and (beyond this) Queen Elizabeth Forest Park to the east. Since 2002, the whole area, apart from the 'wedge' of Faslane, Gare Loch and the adjoining sea lochs, has been designated the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park.

This paper tries to make the connection between *why* 'Faslane 365' is here and the wider physical landscape of which 'here' is part. An appropriate starting point is the well recognised role of non-violent direct action in the formation of public policy on UK protected landscapes. Perhaps best known of these is the 1932 Mass Trespass of Kinder Scout. Three-quarters of a century ago, on a spring Sunday, some 400 men and women walked in line up Kinder Scout – a private moorland estate in the Peak District. After refusing a keeper's order to turn back, their leaders were imprisoned for up to six months. The Mass Trespass was, then, merely the latest of a long tradition (from John Ball, through the Diggers, to innumerable actions against the 19<sup>th</sup> century enclosures and clearances) – of direct action to secure what Benny Rothman, one of its leaders, called "*the rights of ordinary people to walk on land stolen from them in earlier times*" (1). Its initial consequences were limited, but the action – and others like it – contributed in a significant way to the passing of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (2). The 1949 Act set up Britain's system of protected areas – conservation 'sites' such as National Nature Reserves and 'protected landscapes' such as National

Parks – the first was, appropriately, the Peak District, scene of the mass trespass, formally declared in 1951. It also created the nature conservation and landscape and recreation agencies to look after these areas and it set the pattern for rural environmental policy for the next 50 years.

When they were established, it was assumed that the principal protection required by national parks was against inappropriate development, which could spoil their ‘natural beauty’, and that active management should be directed to manifesting their major potential benefit to a largely urbanised population – the opportunity for outdoor recreation. By the early 1970s it became clear that inappropriate ‘management’ (in particular intensive agriculture, or the abandonment of traditional farming practices) was, if anything, a greater threat than ‘development’ and also that recreational pressures – in particular car-based tourism – could conflict with natural beauty. National Park authorities were given powers – inadequate, but in advance of those later introduced in the wider countryside – to prevent inappropriate agricultural intensification and forestry practice. Legislation provided that where there were conflicts between the first (conservation) and second (recreation) purposes of National Parks, conservation should be given precedence. It stated that all public bodies should “have regard” to these purposes when carrying out their work; and it added a new, third objective in the form of a duty on national park authorities to “*seek to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities*” (3) within their areas.

Continued pressure ‘from below’ has been a major and continuing influence in the progressive refinement of provisions for protected areas in particular and in the development of UK rural policy in general. Direct action – represented by activities of bodies such as the Ramblers’ Association (on access) or Friends of the Earth (in the protection of wildlife sites from development, or on environmental issues more generally) has always been an important component. More recent legislation (4) established, south of the border, the ‘right to roam’ in certain restricted categories of open countryside, bringing the rest of Britain closer to Scots tradition in this respect. The same Act also closed major loopholes in England’s conservation legislation. It also considerably strengthened protection for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) – the ‘second tier’ protected landscapes of England and Wales.

## **2) Sustainable development and the Scottish rural environment**

All these developments have significantly raised the profile of protected landscapes not just as a conservation tool, or as a place for popular recreation, but as a focus for integrated management and ‘sustainable rural development’. Once seen as ‘Cinderellas’ of the international protected area system, UK national parks and other protected landscapes are increasingly hailed as beacons of good practice, working towards the ‘*harmonious interaction*’ of people and land, a locus for innovation in environmental governance.

Until recently, however, there were no national parks in Scotland. Scotland was excluded from the national park and AONB provisions of the 1949 Act, following arguments that the whole of the landscape was of ‘outstanding’ quality (and could thus qualify as national park) and that its low population density, the structure of land ownership, lesser development threat, and long-standing traditions of public access, made them unnecessary. All this has now changed, in part as a

consequence of challenges to the Scots system of land ownership, of increased recreational and development pressure, and of the recognition that protected landscapes can deliver socioeconomic, as well as conservation and recreational objectives. In addition, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH, the national successor agency to the UK-wide bodies established by the 1949 Act) has the objective of securing 'sustainability' written in to its charter – the first UK legislation to do this.

The establishment in 2002 (50 years after the Peak District) of Scotland's first National Park - which has 'sustainability' at the core of its purpose, rather than a later add-on - is one manifestation of this. Now, in 2006, the Scottish Executive, through its rural agency, Scottish Natural Heritage, is canvassing proposals for the establishment of a new, marine park, in Scotland. When it is established, this will be the UK's first coastal and marine national park. Coming from behind, the Scots now lead from the front. Gare Loch and its associated sea lochs - Loch Long, Loch Goil and Holy Loch (all intensively used for military activity) - are included in one of the ten candidate areas for the new marine park. Although unlikely to make it through to the final, this nevertheless adds a new dimension to the long standing debate over the appropriateness of military activity in protected landscapes. Unlike land-based parks, affected areas cannot be conveniently excluded from the Park boundaries on grounds of 'development'. Nor can military use be justified by the argument (used for the continued military occupation of large parts of Dartmoor and Northumberland National Parks which have been military training grounds since the early 1800s) that it is 'traditional' in the area.

The location of Faslane at the centre of (though outside) one of the newest of Britain's protected landscapes, and of Gare Loch in one of the candidate areas for Britain's first marine National Park prompts questions about the relation between our nuclear 'defense' installations and our environment, recreation and local socioeconomic well-being.

### **3) Faslane365 for a peaceful world and a sustainable countryside?**

There is a self-evident and intimate relationship between landscape and human activity. Physical and biological factors significantly influence what people do in any place; in turn what is done in anyplace, modifies those physical and biological conditions. Landscape results from the interaction of nature with people over time. It is probable that local historians have already written histories of the area, including an account of how the Faslane naval facility came to be located here, and why it was chosen as the base for Trident. Looking ahead, and taking what we must hope is an extreme scenario, it is equally clear that, were the weapon systems based here ever to be used, the 'landscape' of the countries against which they were used (and probably ours as well) would be changed forever.

There is also an *institutional* connection between landscape and people, in particular with respect to our most valued landscapes. Our national parks and other protected landscapes have been protected, made accessible to people, and, increasingly, offer models for environmental governance of the wider countryside precisely as an outcome of the visionary, but determined, action of individuals acting in consort. Some of these actions have at times been seen to be in conflict with the law, but have later been applauded as advancing both the law and society as a whole. Direct

action to rid Britain – and the world – of Trident’s threat to peace and security is part of a parallel and equally long and honourable tradition of action for peace.

The existence of national and international protected area systems has been described as one of the most significant positive achievements of modern times. Protected landscapes are a major means for conserving wildlife, protecting the wider environmental, providing recreational opportunity to visitors, and fostering social and economic well-being of local communities; they provide a model for sustainable integrated management of the countryside. Each element reinforces the other. Natural and cultural heritage is conserved not just for its intrinsic value but because it is the resource base for recreation and tourism, which in turn provide a significant contribution to the economic and social well-being of local inhabitants, who themselves become significant ‘stakeholders’ in conservation. However, whilst tourism and land-based activities can be significant generators of jobs and income (5) their overall contribution is relatively small compared to industrial and defence activity.

CND’s ‘Alternative White Paper’ (6) argues that in place of Trident, we need a major defence diversification programme to redeploy the engineering and manufacturing skills currently locked in the nuclear weapons sector, into a programme of decommissioning, secure disposal of nuclear waste, and appropriate technology programmes. Much of this could continue to provide local investment and jobs. Conspicuously absent from the government’s own White Paper’s ‘responses to counter-arguments’ (7) is any reply to the argument that such a programme would be of much greater benefit than Trident to the strength and security of the UK. It would not be without conflicts however. Decommissioning and storage (*not* ‘disposal’) of intermediate level radioactive waste is already a critical issue in the area (8). This would also doubtless be the case with ‘alternative’ technologies such as wind power (and, in the context of a new Scots marine park, wave power). In some ways a decision *not* to replace Trident would present even more of a practical – and intellectual – challenge to integrated local management and environmental governance; ‘business as usual’ is as so often, the easier short-term option.

But if the challenges are greater, so are the potential benefits. Faslane 365 invites participants to “make their visions for a just and peaceful future visible” (9). The protected landscape within which Faslane is sandwiched is one element of such a vision, and its purposes present one context in which debates around alternative, sustainable, peaceful futures can take place. Faslane365 is part not just of a long tradition of direct action for peace, but also of another tradition of direct action, that for the rural conservation and sustainability.

75 years on, the Mass Trespass of Kinder Scout - and similar action elsewhere - is seen as courageous and visionary. Its products – our present system of protected landscapes – are at the centre of rural conservation, recreational opportunity and sustainable development. We can dare to hope that the Faslane base will, eventually, be dismantled, or converted to a more acceptable function and when this happens, it will be easier for it to be seen as compatible - perhaps, even, integrated - with the surrounding landscape rather than, as presently, incongruous and abhorrent. 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, within the British countryside, as well as for the wider World.

## 4) References

1. Rothman B. The 1932 Kinder Trespass. Altrincham, Cheshire: Willow Publishing; 1982.
2. Protected areas were of course not invented in 1949. Yellowstone National Park was established in 1872, however the north American 'wilderness ethic' (which until recently dominated international thinking) is very different from the more recent European tradition of protected landscapes
3. Section 5 (2) Environment Act 1995
4. Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
5. SQW Ltd, Land Use Consultants. The Economic Value of Protected Landscapes in the North East of England - a report to One North-East. Leeds: SQW Ltd; 2004 July.
6. CND. Safer Britain, Safer World. The decision not to replace Trident. London: Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament; 2006.
7. H M Government. The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent. London: HMSO; 2006. Report No.: Cm 6994.
8. 11 of the Ministry of Defence's 27 nuclear powered submarines have already been taken out of our service. Although their spent nuclear fuel has been removed, this leaves the reactor compartment, which contains radioactive materials and other toxic substances remains. Current policy is to 'store' the submarines intact, afloat. However Babcock, the commercial operator of the Rosyth shipyard where seven of the submarines are stored, sees no profit in this. It argues that the reactor compartments be removed and 'packaged' for storage on land. One of the locations suggested is the Coulport naval facility, on the west side of Loch Long - a suggestion bitterly opposed by residents of Ardentenny Strone and Blairmore on opposite side of the loch. See, e.g. Alan Reid (MP for Argyll and Bute) in Hansard, 6 Jan 2004
9. "Invitation to the Academics' Trident Seminar Blockade" November 2006