

New Forest SAC Management Plan Version II

Annex A: Cultural Factors

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This Annex is a refresh of the cultural factors content from the original version of the SAC Plan Part 1 (Wright and Westerhoff, 2001).

Land use history: Crown Lands

Brief history of the New Forest

The New Forest as it is today has historical origins going back 5,000 years to the primitive farming methods of the Bronze Age. It is likely that the New Forest was always difficult land, ill-suited to arable use and unattractive for settlement. There is no evidence of intensive agricultural use and the present pattern of settlement is mostly post-Roman.

One of the most significant periods in the history of the New Forest was the Norman Conquest in 1066. William the Conqueror designated the area as a hunting preserve for himself and his licensees. The term 'forest' means an area set aside—it was not necessarily wooded and would typically contain large open areas. The traditional date for the New Forest being proclaimed a royal forest is 1079, although hard historical evidence for this is lacking.

The next significant change occurred in the Stuart period during the 17th century when a demand for timber led to land being enclosed for this purpose.

The Victorian period saw the attempted eradication of deer, increased demand from the navy for oak for shipbuilding, the introduction of conifer plantations and the opening of the Southampton to Dorchester Railway in 1845 which cut a swathe through the New Forest.

The 20th century saw the New Forest play a major part in the two world wars and the increasing understanding of the importance of the New Forest for wildlife.

The area originally known as the New Forest is likely to have stretched from Southampton Water in the east to the River Avon in the west and from the southern coastline to the geological change near the boundary with Wiltshire in the north. The perambulation of the New Forest was altered in the New Forest Act 1964.

Roughly 90% of the New Forest is still owned by the Crown. The Crown Lands have been managed by Forestry England and its predecessors since 1923 and most of the Crown Lands now fall inside the National Park.

Land use in the New Forest

Open Forest

The unenclosed forest is traditionally known as the Open Forest and is subject to certain rights of common attached to private enclosed lands within and outside the Forest's legal boundary. The boundary is known by the old Forest Law term — 'perambulation'. Rights of Common are essentially the right to take some part of the Forest's natural produce for private use. This is, in most cases, done through grazing and browsing animals. The rights were first registered by statute in the 1850s and their continued use is crucial to the survival of the Forest today.

Commoners of the New Forest are those who occupy land or property to which attaches one or more rights over the Forest. These rights are common of pasture, common of pasture for sheep, common of mast, estovers (fuelwood), common of marl (clay) and common of turbary (peat).

The heathlands

The open areas of the commonable lands of the New Forest which are neither Inclosure nor pasture woodland are commonly known as the heathlands of the New Forest. Throughout the life of the New Forest—and probably before—the heathland has been utilised by commoners by right or privilege, to supply them with many of the necessities of life and agriculture. The livestock are often referred to as the 'architects of the New Forest'.

The heathlands provided a wide variety of materials for domestic and agricultural purposes. Heather was used as the base course for thatched roofs and together with birch it provided the raw material for bessom making which was an important cottage industry in Redlynch. Marl was probably used in the construction of cob cottages. The Rights of Common Register of 1858 lists 15 'open and accustomed marl pits' in which the right could be exercised. With the exception of one pit in Mark Ash, all of them (like the rights to marl) are to be found in the south of the Forest. Furze (gorse) was cut for winter fuel—although this, like the cutting of heather, was a privilege and not a right and had to be paid for. Another privilege was the taking of plateau gravel, dug from hundreds of small pits across the Forest. The Crown also sold bracken for stock bedding. Turbary allows right holders to receive peat turf for burning. Nowadays, the most important right is the Common of Pasture. Those who wish to exercise this right must apply to the Verderers to confirm the existence of the right and pay the marking fee.

The origin of heathland is thought to have resulted from the clearance of land, probably already with poor soils, around 5,000 years ago. There is archaeological evidence of Bronze Age use of the New Forest, most notably for the construction of round barrows

across the heathland in all parts of the Forest. More recent evidence of occupation in the form of water heating sites (boiling mounds) has been found in the valleys and along spring lines. They are the most common archaeological feature of the Forest but do not necessarily imply permanent settlement.

With the survival of both the barrows and the boiling sites untouched in so many instances, it is likely that the heaths remained largely undisturbed until the expansion of silviculture in the 18th century. Even then they were not exploited on any scale until some years after the introduction of Scots pine in about 1770.

At the beginning of the 19th century unenclosed heathland adjoined the Forest almost everywhere except in the east and southeast. A hundred years later, only a narrow band of open country remains on the western side. The New Forest has seen a remarkable resistance to the national trends of widespread enclosure and improvement of heaths, but threats have continued through to the present day.

In 1845, the Southampton and Dorchester Railway Act provided for the construction of a line through the Forest and the associated compensation resulted in fairly widespread draining of the bogs and lawns.

At the end of the 19th century there was an expansion of self-sown Scots pine on the Open Forest from the Inclosures which continues today. The 1920s saw an increase in drainage of the Open Forest for grazing improvement with few streams and valley mires escaping damage from drainage activities. A program of restoration has been underway since 2000.

Large-scale military manoeuvres and construction including large airfields at Stoney Cross, Holmsley, Ibsley and Beaulieu Heath took place during the First and Second World Wars. Much of this has now been removed and restored back to heathland.

Ancient Ornamental Woodland

Within the Open Forest, the pasture woodlands are known as Ancient Ornamental Woodland, commonly abbreviated to 'A&O'. The New Forest Act of 1877 required that these woods, which had not been intensively managed since the 17th century—and which may in part be natural in origin—should be 'preserved'. Later Acts made further provision for their management (1949 and 1964).

Historic felling records show slowly rising levels of extraction of oak up to the beginning of the 17th century when supplies for the Navy became increasingly important. Selective cutting of oak at this time—and into the 18th century—is likely to have resulted in the beech dominance of much of the A&O woods today. Historic records indicate that the woods containing a high proportion of beech today were oak-dominated in the 16th century.

Throughout the 18th century the A&O woods still dominated the New Forest and were the main source of timber occupying much of the land which was to become the future Statutory Inclosures. A detailed survey of the New Forest from 1787 (known as the 'Richardson, King and Driver's Survey') together with supporting documents provide a record of the land cover of most parts of the New Forest at that time (Richardson et al, 1787).

Up until 1851 original pasture woodland was completely cleared and replanted or sown with trees as the Inclosures were created. After 1851 some areas of the original pasture woodland survived intact within Inclosures.

Veteran pollarded oaks and beeches are relatively common in the A&O woodlands and are generally assumed to date from before The New Forest Act of 1698.

The Inclosures and forestry

Approximately 8,000ha of the Crown Lands are silviculture Inclosures which were enclosed under the New Forest Acts of 1698, 1808 and 1851—now known as the Statutory Inclosures. They are free of common rights whilst they remain fenced but at least 12% must remain unenclosed at any one time. The most recent Inclosures were made under the New Forest Act of 1949. These are held on a lease granted by the Verderers Court and are generally known as the Verderers Inclosures. Small additional areas of plantation are held by Forestry England on lease from the National Trust and from private estates in the Forest.

There is a long history in the UK of human interaction with trees. Rackham (2003) makes the following distinctions:

- **Woods:** where the trees are of different ages, or different species, or both—and have not been intentionally planted (or not all been intentionally planted).
- **Wood pasture:** where the growing of trees is combined with grazing animals.
- **Plantation:** where the trees are all of one age and often of one species and have been deliberately planted.

In 1698 the first major Inclosure Act was passed. Very little of this early planting now survives, examples are Burley Old Inclosure and fragments of Puckpits and Woodfidley which are now considered equivalent to A&O woods.

There was no further enclosure until the 1750s when Etherise (now absorbed in Parkhill Inclosure), Black Bush (in Denny Lodge Inclosure) and Pignal (part of the Parkhill complex)

Inclosures were created. They all carry later plantings but can be identified by their old enclosure banks.

Significant areas of old growth woodland survive from five Inclosures created in 1768, now managed as A&O—the best examples are at Ocknell and Old Sloden Wood. A further phase of enclosure took place in about 1775—the only major survivals are in Long Beech and Ravens Nest.

In 1770 Scots pine is recorded as having been planted for the first time on Crown Lands leading eventually to the enclosure of heathland for this purpose.

From the early 19th century, a much larger programme of enclosure and re-enclosure took place and large blocks of oak and beech woodland survive from these 19th century plantings. The post 1851 Inclosures also contain large areas of conifer. Inclosures also began to include heathland.

In 1923 the management of the New Forest passed to the Forestry Commission under the Forestry (Transfer of Woods) Act and a period of commercial timber growing based upon modern intensive forestry techniques took off. In particular, a shift from broadleaf to conifer production ensued with serious impacts on forest ecology, both from the resulting monoculture stands themselves and also from the extensive ground preparation and forestry maintenance operations including ploughing, spraying and drainage—the latter having adverse effects well beyond the boundary of the Inclosures.

The New Forest Act 1949 authorised enclosure of a further 5,000 acres (2,000ha) following approval of the Verderers Court. These are known as the Verderers Inclosures and are held on a 150-year lease (as opposed to the Statutory Inclosures which remain in perpetuity) and have to be open to stock for much of the time.

Post-war forestry policy aimed to replace broadleaved trees with conifers in the Inclosures. Following objections, a mandate governing the management of the Inclosures was issued by the Minister of Agriculture in 1972 and updated in 2006. The 'Ministers mandate' stated that there would be no further replacement of broadleaves with conifer and that the old oak and beech woods would be managed on a rotation of at least 200 years. Plans to restore much of the Verderers Inclosures and to change the management of the earlier Inclosures are now underway through the New Forest Plan 2019-2029.

In the 1980s there was a growing awareness of the importance of nature conservation. The New Forest (including the Inclosures) was designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for both its biological and geological interest. In 1998 The Forestry Commission's UK Forestry Standard set out practices for the sustainable management of woodlands in the UK. In the New Forest nature conservation legislation (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), the Habitats Directive and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act

2000) resulted in the introduction of formal Forest Design Plans in which conservation, landscape, historic environment and recreation were key considerations. This has continued to develop through iterations of these plans—today a new version of the Inclosure plans (New Forest Plan 2019-2029) is in place to continue to shape these areas.

Land use history: the non-Crown Lands

The following content is largely based upon research and content provided by A. Pasmore and other contributors to the original 2001 SAC Management Plan (Wright and Westerhoff, 2001).

Beyond the Crown Lands, the SAC includes more than 25 additional parcels ranging from a few acres at Pennington Common to the relatively large National Trust and Hampshire County Council common land in the north and west of the forest. Different ownership, management policies and locations have ensured very different histories, but at one period or another, the greater part has possibly been subject to Rights of Common similar to those now exercised on the Open Forest. In the case of some of the lands in Wiltshire in particular, that use came to an end at some point in the past, while on the surviving ‘Adjacent Commons’ those rights persist to the present day. The term Adjacent Commons is used here to denote common land contiguous with or near to the New Forest. In the New Forest Act of 1964, much of the Adjacent Commons (together with a certain amount of enclosed land) was brought within the partial control of the Verderers of the New Forest. In the Act this is referred to as the ‘Added Areas’.

The non-Crown Lands may be divided into a number of broad categories—and the New Forest is, or was, a dominant influence because of an obscure common right known as ‘common because of vicinage’. It is essentially the right of a commoner on one common to depasture their animals on a contiguous unfenced common, without liability to an action for trespass. Vicinage locked together the use, if not the management, of many New Forest commons. Such rights survive to this day (in a modified form) in respect of the first and third categories below and the Crown Lands.

Category I: Present-day Adjacent Commons (within the perambulation)

Name of common		
Cadnam	Hightown	Plaitford
Furzley	Hyde	Rockford
Gorley	Ibsley	West Wellow

Name of common		
Hale Purlieu	Kingston Great	
Half Moon	Penn	

Category II: Former Adjacent Commons (external to perambulation)

Name of common		
Bisterne	Landford Bog (ex Landford Common)	Pound Bottom (ex-Downton Common)
Copythorne	Langley Wood small part only (ex-Downton Common)	Shirley
Franchise Wood (probably ex Downton Common)	North Ripley	

Category III: Minstead Manor Waste and land at The Grove

Name of common		
Minstead Manor Waste	Land at The Grove	

Category IV: lands with former management not directly related to the New Forest (external to perambulation)

Name of common		
Langley Wood (greater part)	Roydon Woods (but includes a former part of the Crown Lands)	Whiteparish Common
Loosehanger Woods	Upper Pennington Common	

The descriptions below of these main parcels of privately-owned SAC land rely on the varying degrees to which research on each has been carried out in the past. For example, a great deal is known about the archaeology (and to a lesser extent the history) of the National Trust's Adjacent Commons to the north and east of the Forest, largely because an archaeological and landscape survey was commissioned by the Trust in 1997. By contrast,

the commons on the west side of the Forest have not been studied in detail.

Category 1: The present-day Adjacent Commons of the New Forest

Around the west, north and northeastern margins of the New Forest lies the Adjacent Commons, which is common land contiguous with or near to the New Forest, comprising the waste of a number of manors. In terms of vegetation and landscape they are often indistinguishable from the heaths of the Crown Lands and their pre-history is shared. The commons contain similar Bronze Age round barrows, similar scatters of Mesolithic flint implements and waste and, where geological conditions permit, similar boiling sites as the Open Forest.

Land ownership and control marks the difference between the Open Forest and the Adjacent Commons. The former was almost completely the property of the Crown so far as its wastes were concerned and on the Adjacent Commons there was a variety of landowners. These, in recent centuries, were generally the owners of adjoining estates such as Paultons, Warrens, Hale Park and Somerley.

The commoners and Rights of Common of the Adjacent Commons

Each manor had, in theory, its own rights and customs in the administration of the wastes but little is known about the nature of these rights.

The relationship between the use of individual Adjacent Commons and between those commons and the Crown Lands of the New Forest, was expressed through the doctrine of common by reason of vicinage. Practically there was a universal mixing of stock between the Adjacent Commons and the Crown Lands, except perhaps at Hale in the 19th and early 20th centuries which had the effect of equalising grazing pressures to some extent, although from 1877 onwards the regulation and charging within the Crown Lands became more rigorous and the rights on the Adjacent Commons became relatively more valuable. Dairy cattle, the dominant business of the smallholder until post war years, are less inclined than ponies to wander over long distances, so that on commons such as those at Bramshaw, where no marking fees were payable, grazing pressures were probably higher than those in much of the adjacent Forest.

In 1949, by the New Forest Act of that year, the 'mutuality' of vicinage was effectively brought to an end. The Act laid down that the registers of Rights of Common prepared under Section 4 were to be 'conclusive for all purposes whether any and if so what, rights of common over the Forest are attached to any land shown on the plan'.

As part of the New Forest Act of 1964 the Verderers of the New Forest were given the right to collect marking fees and enforce health regulations on the Adjacent Commons. At the same time, the installation of a ring of cattle grids surrounding all the Forest's common lands bound the Adjacent Commons and the Crown Lands more closely together.

Unlike the Crown Lands, where six different types of right are statutorily registered, only pasture rights or a 'privilege' of pasture is registered in respect of the Adjacent Commons.

The following sections relate to individual parcels of heath and woodland which comprise the Adjacent Commons.

The Western Commons

Hyde Common

This is the most northerly of the Western Commons of the New Forest. It appears that the western part was subject to a large-scale enclosure of unknown date which failed or was later abandoned leaving the bank and ditch layout as evidence of its passing. By contrast, the eastern part of the common abutting on to the Crown Lands has been little disturbed. Several supposed Bronze Age boiling sites remain intact.

Small scale gravel extraction has taken place on the hill above Abbots Well and, in 1951, the whole common was acquired by a gravel operator with a view to utilising its mineral wealth.

In 1995 the common was sold to Hampshire County Council who now manage the land on behalf of the public.

Gorley Hill

This was formerly part of the Somerley Estate and was acquired by new owners in 1949. In four separate planning permissions between 1950 and 1957, the owners were authorised to dig away much of the top of the ridge, with the exception of small portions at the north and south ends.

After the pit was abandoned by its operators, a gradual re-colonisation by gorse and grass took place, re-creating in a degraded form and at a lower level, the original surface of the common. Hampshire County Council purchased the land in 1995 and now manage the land on behalf of the public.

Ibsley Common

This is by far the largest of the New Forest's Adjacent Commons. Apart from an area at Newtown which is largely a worked-out hoggin pit, it survives little damaged.

In 1978 the common was successfully protected against vehicular damage in a scheme promoted by the New Forest Association (now Friends of the New Forest) and financed by the Nature Conservancy Council (now Natural England).

In addition to its gravel reserves, Ibsley Common also contains ironstone deposits which are to be found at lower levels than the gravel. They have been quarried on a small scale at least from medieval times. During the Second World War an aerodrome was established in the Avon Valley at Ibsley. Remains of buildings associated with it are to be found on the common itself and within Newlands Plantation there is a control bunker. Ibsley Common's archaeology has not been studied in detail. The common is now in the ownership of the National Trust.

Rockford Common

This was the most southerly of the Somerley Estate commons where extensive gravel extraction took place in the 1950s to the 1970s.

Throughout the northwestern part of the common there existed an abandoned field system which is unique in the New Forest in that it was associated with a series of pillow mounds of regular form, some of which were aligned along one of the boundary banks. All were removed at some point in the past, although fortunately a plan was made of part of the system by the Archaeology Division of the Ordnance Survey. Other features (probably prehistoric) together with pottery and flint implements, were revealed on topsoil stripping.

Further pillow mounds, with random distribution, occur across the remainder of the common. There are also round barrows and boiling sites. Field systems from an unknown period occur south of Bigsburn Hill, with isolated abandoned Inclosures elsewhere on the common.

The common has been fragmented into several different ownerships. The greater parts are currently owned by the National Trust and Hampshire County Council.

Hightown Common

This tiny common (owned by the National Trust) was formerly part of the waste of the Manor of Ringwood. An award under the Ringwood Inclosure Act of 1807/8 was made in 1812. From this it appears that most of the common near to the A31 was sold (with other lands) by the commissioners under the Act, to cover the costs of the award. The remainder

of what is now the common was allotted in severalty. However, by the date of the tithe map (about 1844), the common appears to have adopted its present shape, with no indication of the individual parcels having been fenced. It is probable that the land was simply too poor to make enclosure worthwhile and in due course Rights of Common were re-established by prescription.

Part of the surface of the common has been subject to small-scale gravel digging. No archaeological features are known.

Kingston Great Common

This common has a similar history to Hightown, having been the subject of an award under the Ringwood Inclosure Act, but apparently never fenced in. Recent fieldwork suggests widespread field banks and other abandoned Inclosures of unknown date, but no comprehensive archaeological survey has been undertaken.

In recent decades, the existence of Rights of Common over Kingston Great Common have been questioned. Claims submitted under the New Forest Act of 1964 were objected to and an arbitration took place under the terms of the Act. Kingston Great Common was a National Nature Reserve (NNR) leased under a 30-year agreement with Natural England running from 1 October 1991 until 30 September 2021. Since the NNR was leased, there have been disagreements between Natural England and the landowners on the matters of public access and management of the habitat. The landowner was unwilling to renew the lease and the NNR was de-declared.

The Northern Commons

Hale Purlieu

This common comprises the remaining unenclosed waste of the Manor of Hale, together with that of North Charford and South Charford. The areas are collectively known as Hale Purlieu. The word ‘purlieu’ denotes land which was at one time within a forest, but which was subsequently disafforested. In 1947 the purlieu was given by its then owners to the National Trust together with the adjoining Millersford Plantation, which was then largely heathland, except for a small wood at the western end known as Millersford Copse. The National Trust leased the plantation to the Forestry Commission to convert to commercial forestry—it is being clear-felled and restored to heathland.

Hale Purlieu’s archaeology is particularly important, including a complex series of pillow mounds of varying forms, each of which seems to have been specially designed for its site. One of these is within the plantation and the remainder on the purlieu. Their date is uncertain but may be late 17th or early 18th century. There is also a large number of boiling

sites, including one with perhaps the best-preserved crescent-shaped waste mound in the New Forest. An important barrow group in Millersford was destroyed by forestry ploughing in the 1960s.

A valuable manuscript account of the purlieu, the adjacent woods and the estate in general, was prepared by the then-heir to the property in about 1896.

Portion of Hale Purlieu at Mays Firs

Not all of Hale Purlieu is owned by the National Trust. In the southeast corner is a portion of the common enclosed by an old bank and beyond that another few acres of heathland sometimes known as North Charford Common. The enclosed portion falls within an area which was known as Tithing Firs (otherwise Mays Firs) which is thought to have been embanked between 1825 and 1830. There is, in fact, no evidence that this southern portion of the Firs was ever effectively fenced, although it carried Scots pine (as did the remainder of the purlieu) at some time. Rights of Common have continued to be exercised over this land. The area southeast of the embanked land is undivided from the Crown Lands of the Forest.

There are several boiling sites on the southern margin of Mays Firs.

Plaitford Common

Plaitford was formerly part of the Earl of Ilchester's estates and was acquired by Briscoe Eyre in 1913, to preserve it from enclosure. His family later gave this common and other commons at Bramshaw to the National Trust.

A small portion of Plaitford was severed from the remainder when the perambulation of the Forest was fenced and gridded (1963-4) and the southern edge of the A36 was fenced. The small cut-off area of common to the north of the road has since become woodland due to lack of grazing and management.

There is little evidence of agricultural disturbance of the common in the distant past, apart from one or two isolated abandoned enclosures. Several round barrows survive and many (perhaps ancient) sunken trackways cross the heath. There is one bee garden of a type commonly found on Holmsley Ridge in the southwest of the Forest, but unknown elsewhere in the north.

Plaitford shares an undefined boundary with West Wellow Common and abuts on the Crown Lands of the Forest in the southwest. It includes a small portion of true 'ancient ornamental' woodland at Dazel, although of unclear origin and there are no known traces of coppice banks. In historical terms, the common may be thought of as the central portion of a vast extent of heath which, until the end of the 18th century, flanked the northeastern

boundary of the New Forest. This stretched unbroken from Hale Purlieu, through Downton and Landford Commons, across Plaitford and West Wellow and through to Half Moon. Downton Common was enclosed in 1822 and Landford probably between 1860 and 1870 leaving the present fragmented layout of the northern commons.

West Wellow Common

This common survived the Inclosure of West Wellow in 1811, with the existing rights preserved in the award of that year. It is now owned by the parish council and is used to a large extent by local commoners—chiefly through vicinage. A significant Mesolithic site is known to exist on the boundary with Plaitford and earthwork fragments have been recorded elsewhere, but no comprehensive programme of fieldwork is known to have been undertaken.

Half Moon Common

Half Moon takes its present name from a crescent-shaped earthwork which formed the termination of an 18th century landscaping scheme based on Paultons House. The avenue which led from the house to this skyline termination must have been on a vast scale. Tree planting mounds survive along its line within the common but have been destroyed beyond it to the east. The earthworks are unique in scale and form in the New Forest.

Other archaeological features include several boiling sites, two round barrows, some earthwork fragments and several abandoned enclosures which are probably the remains of ornamental tree planting in the early 19th century.

An abatement of an illegal enclosure of the common was obtained in 1880.

A small portion of the common known as Warren Plantation appears to be an illegal enclosure made between about 1812 and 1826 and then abandoned but the land is still subject to Rights of Common.

Cadnam and Furzley Commons

This group of commons comprises the wastes of Cadnam and Winsor Manor and of Bramshaw. All this land was inherited or purchased by Briscoe Eyre and was later given to the National Trust by his family.

There are two important barrow groups on these commons—at Stagbury Hill and Kewlake, together with some linear earthworks on Cadnam Common of unknown date and purpose. Several small, abandoned enclosures are to be found along the boundary of the Warrens Estate. Stagbury is a prominent landscape feature and there is an abandoned enclosure

around the hill, possibly dating from the beginning of the 19th century. A platform cut into the south side of the hill is reputed to be the site for mooring a barrage balloon and there is evidence of other wartime activity just to the south of the hill. Deeply sunken trackways pass Stagbury on its west side and are part of the route named by O.G.S. Crawford as 'the Cloven Way'—possibly of Saxon origin though evidence for this origin appears slender.

Category II: The former Adjacent Commons of the New Forest

Until the early part of the 19th century, the chain of privately owned common land adjoining the Forest stretched virtually unbroken from Copythorne, around the north and west boundary and back to Sway. A series of Inclosure Acts then fragmented this chain and along with illegal enclosure. By the beginning of the 20th century, some of the poorer land taken in this way was beginning to revert to common in character if not always in use.

Post war land pressures and improved technology allowing the 'reclamation' of heathland offered landowners the opportunity to profit from land once considered worthless. Rights of Common were an impediment to this however and attempts at enclosure were made in many places around the Forest where the history and status of open land was obscure. Some were recognised Adjacent Commons such as Bisterne, while others were parcels of heathland a little way from the Forest on which New Forest commoners' stock grazed and over which rights may or may not have been provable in law. When the perambulation was fenced and gridded in 1963, many of these pieces of land were excluded from the Forest's area and the rights, if they existed, were lost.

Bisterne Common

This large area of heathland was cut off from the Forest by the making of Dur Hill Inclosure in 1962.

The Baker Report of 1947 shows Bisterne Common extending westwards well beyond the line usually regarded as the boundary and including the small area of SAC land at North Ripley. The accuracy of this identification is uncertain.

Shirley Common

Shirley Common also is indicated in the Baker Report as an Adjacent Common of the New Forest, but no evidence is given in support of the claim. It is likely that it was grazed by Forest stock to some extent before the network of grids was closed in 1963.

Copythorne Common

Copythorne Common was, until 1963, an integral part of the Forest's Adjacent Commons, well grazed and open but it was not incorporated into the gridded perambulation. The end of grazing brought about a rapid conversion of short-cropped heather to scrub woodland and invasion from Scots pine.

The construction of the M27 across the common, alongside the A31, divided the common. The Pollards Moor land was reclaimed and turned into a field. The land to the north of the motorway is now in shared ownership of Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and the RSPB. Tavener, in 1957, described Copythorne Common as a turbary common in the ownership of St Mary's College, Winchester and set aside under the Eling Inclosure Award of 1814 to provide fuel for the tenants of Eling Manor. Such rights were then no longer exercised.

Langley Wood and Pound Bottom

Downton Common was one of the largest areas of heathland bordering the New Forest, stretching from Hale to Nomansland and northwards to Langley and the margin of the chalk downland around Redlynch. The Inclosure of 1822 split up the whole common into different private ownerships and included the southern part of Langley Wood (Moor Copse) and Pound Bottom. Sporadic grazing by straying Forest stock occurred on some of the poor, ill-fenced land such as Pound Bottom until 1963, but without the benefit of formal rights.

Franchise Wood

Franchise Wood borders the Forest's northeast perambulation and much of it has the character of A&O woodland. It has been acquired by the RSPB and forms part of a larger Franchises Wood Nature Reserve. Historically it appears to have been the property of the Bishops of Winchester who had considerable land holdings in Downton from before the Norman Conquest.

Franchise Wood fell within the limits of the former Royal Forest of Melchet but from the early 13th century appears to have been considered 'without the regard' of the Forest meaning that, while it lay within the boundaries of the royal forest, many of the restrictions of the Forest Law did not apply, although the deer within them remained the property of the Crown.

There appears to have been little published research into the Downton Inclosure Award, however it is probable that the SAC land, despite carrying ancient woodland, was part of the common and open to the Forest until about 1822. The various 'copse' and 'hat'

placenames could suggest an earlier management system similar to that of Langley Wood, but no fieldwork on boundary banks has been carried out.

Landford Bog

This is a tiny portion of Landford Common, enclosed (according to Tavener) in 1861 or (according to a Hamptworth history) in 1870 or thereabouts. Even after the Second World War, much of Landford Common remained heathland, but was then subjected to a large-scale reclamation programme, though the bog has survived.

Category III: Minstead Manor Waste and ‘The Grove’

Minstead Manor Waste is unique in comprising the only major area of common land within the 1801 perambulation of the New Forest which is not part of the Crown Lands. Tiny fragments of such ‘private’ commons exist elsewhere (as at Canterton where one of the traditional Forest drift pounds was located on manor waste). Minstead was effectively ‘without the regard’ of the Forest meaning that while it lay within the boundaries of the royal forest, many of the restrictions of the Forest Law did not apply.

Today the remaining waste is undivided from the Crown Lands and, in the open parts, indistinguishable from them. Archaeological sites include a scatter of small round barrows, one known boiling site and a well-preserved charcoal pit.

The status of Minstead Manor Waste affects the administration of Rights of Common as the Verderers’ byelaws do not apply there. A small number of commoners within Minstead possibly still exercise rights over the Manor Waste and the adjoining Forest.

In addition to the main area of Minstead common land, the New Forest SAC area also includes a parcel of woodland within The Grove. A part of this is privately owned, while part is Crown Land and planted with conifers.

Category IV: Lands with former management not directly related to the New Forest

Roydon Wood

Roydon Wood is a complex area with a diverse history which was gifted to Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and is managed as a nature reserve. Much of it has been enclosed for centuries and probably formed part of a 13th century grant to Netley Abbey. A

management plan for the site includes a set of maps covering the period from the mid-18th century to the present day. These show a complex pattern of field boundaries and land use including arable land in 1797, with a steady conversion to woodland thereafter, through the tithe map of 1848 and up to the present day. It is a picture repeated elsewhere in Forest villages, although loss of arable to pasture was more common.

The southern part of Roydon has remained largely heathland and includes a substantial area which was, until 1858, a part of the Open Waste of the Forest (at Sandy Down).

Apart from an important and exceptionally well-preserved boiling site in Dawkins Bottom, there is little published information on the archaeology of Roydon Woods.

Upper Pennington Common

This common lies about two miles south of the New Forest but was grazed sporadically by stock straying from the Forest until the perambulation was fenced and gridded in 1964. It is managed by the local authority. Only the northern part (Upper Pennington Common) forms part of the SAC.

Loosehanger Copse and Meadows

Loosehanger Copse and Meadows (otherwise Loosehanger or Lushinger Park) was, until the Inclosure of Downton Common in 1822, an island holding surrounded by heath. In common with Franchise Wood, it was part of the estates of the Bishops of Winchester, but seems not, at least in later times, to have been within the perambulation of the former Royal Forest of Melchet.

The original park boundary can be traced continuously and comprises a massive earth bank with external ditch. Internal ditches were more commonly used to contain deer. There are numerous subdivisions in the form of wood and field banks, suggesting reclamation and cultivation at various periods, although the present pattern of woodland is little altered from that shown on 18th century maps. The main exception is the wet meadows formed in the eastern corner of the park and known as 'The Lawns'. A lodge or farmhouse ('Loosehanger Park') serving the park survives (possibly of early 17th century origin), although the date of the park enclosure bank seems to be unknown.

Langley Wood

Langley Wood lies within the former Royal Forest of Melchet and was anciently part of the estates of the Bishops of Salisbury. Colt Hoare's *Modern History of Wiltshire* published in 1837, provides a detailed picture of its history and land use going back to the 15th century. As with several of the other woods considered above, Langley was 'without the regard' of

the Forest meaning that, while it lay within the boundaries of the Royal Forest, many of the restrictions of the Forest Law did not apply, although it lay within its perambulation.

There is a 17th century account of the management of the various copses which made up Langley Wood. There were then seven of these copses which seem to have been enclosed and felled in rotation. Four were kept enclosed 'in turn' and three were 'in turn left open'. It is not entirely clear what this means, but the period of enclosure was stated to be nine years and the felling period (presumably open) up to four years. During the open period the commoners of the tithing of Abbotstone were permitted to depasture their livestock, including pigs. They also enjoyed rights over an area in the northwest of the wood which was permanently left open and which was known as Outwood.

The wood banks which divide the copses and the placenames listed survive to the present day. It is not known when this management ceased to operate or when Rights of Common disappeared. Hoare's *History* records that by the time of writing (1837) the wood was divided into 12 copses (exclusive of Outwood), one of which was cut each year.

Langley Wood forms the main part of a National Nature Reserve managed by Natural England.

Whiteparish Common

There appears to be little published information on Whiteparish Common, although it is referred to indirectly in C. Taylor's history of the development of the village. He sees it as part of the waste of the former Royal Forest of Melchet—tree covered and steadily eroded by a series of assarts over the centuries. On the first edition One Inch Ordnance Survey map, the site is shown as lightly wooded.

Although the common is in part registered common land (the Commons Registration Act applied here as it is outside the New Forest perambulation), there is currently no material exercise of grazing rights.

Commoning

Common Rights

The exercise of Rights of Common is probably the only efficient and cost-effective way of managing such a large area of lowland heath such as the New Forest. The administrative body designed to control the exercise of rights is the Court of Verderers of the New Forest, despite an ancient title it is largely the product of a series of post-war Acts of Parliament.

The Rights of Common themselves are of ancient origin and many of the methods of livestock management have remained largely unaltered over the centuries but in this lies the origin of the New Forest today. It is acknowledged by ecologists and historians that the commoners' livestock has been a major influence in shaping the Forest's wildlife and landscape. Without it, the Open Forest would largely disappear rapidly to scrub and ultimately woodland.

On the commonable Crown Lands (those subject to Rights of Common from time to time), six separate rights are exercisable. Only pasture rights or a 'privilege' of pasture is registered in respect of the Adjacent Commons. The rights are:

Common of pasture for commonable animals (ponies, cattle, donkeys and mules)

Common of pasture for commonable animals is said to attach to about 26,500 hectares of private enclosed land in and around the New Forest. This figure was calculated from the 1858 Register of Claims during the 19th century and is the best estimate of extent available. Pasture (and all the other rights) is recorded in a series of large atlas volumes held at the office of the Clerk to the Verderers in Lyndhurst. Rights are to be found attaching to land from Millbrook in the east to the suburbs of Bournemouth and to Cranborne in the west. In the north, they extend almost to Salisbury.

Common of pasture for sheep

Although some of the large estates have this right, it is infrequently exercised other than on the Bramshaw Commons.

Common of mast

Common of mast is the right to turn out pigs in the autumn to eat acorns which provides food for the pigs and reduces the threat to ponies and cattle from the poisonous acorns. This right was extensively exercised especially in a good mast year but has shown a decline in recent years.

Common of turbary and common of marl

Common of turbary and common of marl, the right to cut peat turves and dig clay respectively, are no longer exercised.

Estovers

Estovers is the right to receive a free supply of a fixed quantity of firewood annually from the Forestry Commission. Less than one hundred houses now benefit from it.

Rights of Common are attached to land and are purchased or sold as that property changes hands. Rights of Common are exercised over the Open Forest and those portions of the Inclosures thrown open from time to time. A commoner is a person occupying land to which rights of common attach, whether a landowner of large hectarage or smallholders and other tenants renting property from such landowners or possessing pieces of land of their own. For practical purposes however, there are two further definitions of a commoner which are of importance—first a ‘practising’ commoner and second a commoner on the electoral register. The New Forest Act of 1879 allowed the Verderers to issue licences to depasture to persons who have no rights of common. Very few of these licences are issued today.

The New Forest Act of 1949 provided for the preparation of an atlas comprising 1/2500 Ordnance Survey maps onto which the information contained in the Register of Decisions on Claims was transcribed. This Atlas, together with the preamble to the Register, is now the record of what rights are exercisable over the Crown Lands of the New Forest.

The New Forest was excluded from the provisions of the Commons Registration Act 1965, which applied to most other parts of the country because an adequate Register already existed. A consequence of this is that, while under the 1965 Act most Rights of Common are limited in extent (e.g. the number of animals which may be turned out in respect of any right is specified), in the New Forest there are no such restraints until and unless the Verderers choose to impose a limit or the Crown seeks to enforce common law rules.

The practice of commoning

A practicing commoner is one who exercises their rights. Many practicing commoners are members of longstanding agricultural families.

The exercise of Rights of Common is in many cases not profitable. Commoners keeping livestock now do so because of tradition and personal interest. Commoners including those of the Adjacent Commons pay marking fees for turning ponies, cattle, donkeys, sheep and pigs out on the Open Forest.

The Verderers

Evidence from the 13th century indicates that the Verderers were originally a court within the Forest, authorised by the Crown and elected by the county. They sat to hear cases of offences within the Sovereign’s Forest. They could deal with minor offences directly (by fines), but more serious cases were referred to higher courts—ultimately the Forest Eyre.

Verderers’ powers were extended in the 17th and 18th centuries to address offences undermining the planting and preservation of oak for shipbuilding (such as breaking

Inclosure fences and encroachments on Crown Land). Powers to deal with trespassers and abuses by Forest officers were also strengthened. In 1877, the Verderers Court was reconstituted by a New Forest Act of Parliament and the New Forest Act of 1949 gave the Verderers Court new and clarified powers. The Verderers website provides more information.

The Verderers Court comprises five members appointed by public authorities (including the chairman with a casting vote) who hold majority control. There are also five Verderers elected by the commoners. Commoners who vote for the Verderers are not confined to individuals who exercise rights. The electoral register comprises persons who have completed the appropriate form and occupy not less than one acre to which rights of common attach.

The Verderers employ six agisters whose job is to assist in the management of commoners' stock in the Forest including the requirements in respect of health and welfare regulations, collection of marking fees and to supervise the management of stock generally.

The Verderers Court meets in public once a month (except August) and thereafter in committee. The public may address the Verderers on any matter relevant to the management of the New Forest. The Verderers also control development on the commonable lands.

Issues affecting commoning

The exercise of Rights of Common in the New Forest today is regarded as unstable chiefly because it has little economic base. The commoners are also under much pressure from various sources. Some of their animals are killed by traffic on unfenced roads through the Forest. There can be a conflict of interest between the increasing demands for recreation and commoning including dogs worrying and, on occasion, attacking stock. Pressures on stock management include difficulties 'drifting' or rounding-up stock due to numbers of visitors and concerns for public safety. Commoners can feel misunderstood and undervalued despite their crucial contribution to the maintenance of the fabric of the Forest. Through their society, the New Forest Commoners Defence Association and through the elected Verderers, their case is argued—but not always with success.

The Commoners Defence Association (CDA) has identified a number of issues affecting commoning. If commoners were ever to stop turning out animals, this could be potentially disastrous for the ecology of the New Forest, as there is no acceptable alternative to the commoners' animals. Some of the problems are as follows:

- Lack of affordable housing and land to either rent or purchase.

- Poor return for New Forest ponies.
- No viable means of disposing of poorer quality animals.
- Lack of understanding of the role the commoners' animals perform in maintaining the habitat of the New Forest. The CDA website provides information on the CDA's interests, advice and actions.

Access and recreation in the New Forest

Definition and access

Recreation allows for the refreshment of people's health or spirits by relaxation and enjoyment. In the New Forest SAC, there are a wide variety of activities that provide for such enjoyment, ranging from traditional countryside pursuits to modern sports and from informal activities for individuals to formalised group events.

Various freedoms of access exist within the New Forest SAC. The majority of the area has a permissive 'freedom of access on foot' with other more specialist pursuits permitted by agreement of the landowner. Elsewhere statutory access exists along public rights of way.

The New Forest SAC is unusual in the extent of access and recreation opportunities that exist within the area and its surrounds.

Brief history

Throughout history the New Forest has been used by people for recreation, but it was its creation as a royal hunting ground by William the Conqueror that formed the origins of recreation in the New Forest today. The 11th century act of declaring the area as Royal Forest caused all other considerations to become secondary and only a chosen few could enjoy the Forest as a recreational pastime. With the decline of hunting in the 15th century, the main interest of the Crown became timber production and the conflict between these two uses formed the main strand of the Forest's history up until the 19th century.

The building of the railways in the 19th century made the New Forest accessible to the wider population for the first time. Butterfly collecting was one popular recreational pastime at this time and at certain times of year the lodging houses of Lyndhurst would not have a bed to spare as collectors descended upon the area. However, it was the explosion of

leisure in the 1950s and 1960s, associated with the growth of car ownership, that led to the Forest becoming widely accessible and used for recreation on a scale never seen before. It was at this time that the first policies designed specifically to manage recreation were introduced.

Probably the most far-reaching initiatives to manage recreation in the area were the measures contained in the report *Conservation of the New Forest* (New Forest Joint Steering Committee, 1971). Up until this time recreational access had been largely unrestricted on the Crown Lands of the Forest. This report recognised that such access was causing long term damage to the fabric of the Forest and as a result recommended a series of measures to restrict and direct access. The measures, which were implemented by the Forestry Commission in the 1970s were based on a strategy to disperse people over the whole Forest by:

- Limiting vehicle access to certain areas of the Forest and the creation of car parks to restrict parking
- Making some areas of the Forest more attractive by the provision of facilities such as toilets or self-guided trails
- The restriction of camping to designated sites.

This dispersal strategy has formed the core of recreation management on the Crown Lands until the present day. In the early 1990s a 40mph limit on unfenced roads within the perambulation was introduced to help reduce the incidents of road accidents involving commoners' livestock.

Trends

Visitors

50 years ago, it was estimated that 3.5 million day visits were made to the New Forest each year (of which the SAC is a significant part). In 1992 it was estimated that the number of day visits were in the region of 7 million (Ecotec, 1992), while further survey work from 2005 (Tourism Southeast Research Services & Geoff Broom Associates) estimated 13.5 million visitor days to the New Forest National Park and at that time 15 million people lived within 90 minutes' drive of the Forest. More recent work (RJS Associates Ltd., 2018) estimated that in 2017 this figure had increased to 15.2 million visitor days and estimated it could rise to 17.6 million visitor days by 2037.

There are many reasons for the increasing number of visitors to the New Forest each year. Most significant is the increase in the local population around the periphery of the Forest and the increase in available time and resources to seek out recreation opportunities.

Increasing levels of new housing development are planned in and around the New Forest National Park. Footprint Ecology (2020) undertook research on behalf of local planning authorities focusing on understanding the impacts of recreation arising from this development on the New Forest's international nature conservation designations and the potential for mitigation. The resulting [six reports](#) were published in May 2020 with the recommendation that a strategic, proportionate and co-ordinated approach is developed which will require partnership working across a range of local authorities and stakeholders.

As part of this project, a comprehensive visitor survey from 2018-19 (Footprint Ecology, 2020) conducted over 5,000 interviews of visitors across the Forest and through the seasons. From the summary, some of the most salient findings are as follows:

- 83% of interviewees were on a short visit directly from home that day.
- During the summer there were relatively more holiday makers (22%) and fewer day visitors (76%), compared to the spring (12% and 85% respectively) and the winter (11% and 86%).
- For most interviewees the main activity was given as either dog walking (55%) or walking (26%).
- Dog walking was very much focussed around the peripheral areas of the SPA/SAC, while walking (without a dog) was the most common main activity at the more central survey locations.
- Overall, 61% of interviewees were accompanied by at least one dog.
- 26% of interviewees tended to visit the New Forest SPA/SAC/Ramsar site on a daily basis.
- Dog walkers were the most regular visitors, with 41% of dog walkers indicating they visited on a daily basis and a further 14% of dog walkers indicating they visited more than once per day.
- 64% visited equally all year round and did not tend to visit at a particular time of year.
- 90% had arrived by car/van or other motor vehicle.

This invaluable snapshot from 2018-19 provides a fascinating insight into the nature of visitor 'visits' including their purpose/motivation, location, duration, time of year, route, as well as recording the visitors' frequency of visits to the Forest. Surveys such as this provide quantitative evidence of peoples' behaviour which informs management today as well as planning for future change (most notably growth of the local population and the availability of space for recreation).

Importance of tourism to the local economy

In tandem with trends in visitor usage of the New Forest it is essential to consider the local tourism industry which underpins much of the New Forest economy.

In 2001 tourism brought over £100 million per year into the local economy and provided over 3,000 local jobs. In 2005 this was estimated to be £107 million (Tourism Southeast Research Services & Geoff Broom Associates). In 2015 it was estimated that the value of local tourism related activities generated over £528 million annually and provided nearly 20% of all local jobs (New Forest Business Partnership, source unknown).

Recent and current management by individual landowners/managers

Within the Crown Lands, recreation has been managed by Forestry England, which licences activities conducted on an organised basis and regulates those undertaken on an individual basis. A wide range of activities are pursued, some of which make use of the extensive open nature of the New Forest, unrivalled in southern England. The pattern of recreational usage seen on the Crown Lands provides a picture that is reasonably representative of recreation across the whole area.

Beyond the Crown Lands individual landowners have managed recreation through a combination of permissions and charging systems.

Strategic management of recreation

Within the New Forest SAC, managing recreation is a complex and shared responsibility between the New Forest National Park Authority and adjacent local authorities, landowners/managers, Natural England and the Verderers. In addition to these organisations there are a substantial number of interested parties representing a diversity of interests including various recreational user groups, the local business community, local community groups, the commoning community and various conservation groups (brought

together through the New Forest Access Forum. Co-operation between these bodies is essential to creating a coherent approach to the management of recreation in the SAC.

The Recreation Management Strategy Steering Group has agreed [actions](#) to manage recreation across the New Forest and beyond. These actions are of relevance to the SAC area within the National Park. All organisations on the Recreation Management Strategy Steering Group are jointly committed to delivering the work in partnership with each other and with other organisations. The Steering Group will ensure there are clear delivery plans for each area of work to ensure progress is made as quickly as possible.

