

History of National Parks in the UK

National Parks were designated in order to protect beautiful areas for the nation. The key points are highlighted in this timeline.

Early 19th century

Poets inspired by countryside

The romantic poets such as Byron, Coleridge and Wordsworth writes about the inspirational beauty of the 'untamed' countryside. Wordsworth famously claims the Lake District 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".

Late 19th century

First freedom to roam bill fails

James Bryce MP starts a campaign for public access to the countryside by introducing the first freedom to roam bill to parliament in 1884. The bill fails but the campaign, which was to last for over 100 years, had begun.

Early 20th century

Public demands access to the countryside

There is a growing appreciation of the great outdoors, the benefits of physical exercise, and the feeling of freedom and of spiritual renewal gained from open-air recreation. It is a response to widespread industrialisation, the expansion of towns and cities and the ongoing enclosure of land by landowners for farming or sporting reasons. Conflicts emerge between landowners and public interest groups as the latter demand greater access to the countryside.

1930s

Mass trespass on Kinder Scout increases pressure for National Parks designations

A 1931 government inquiry recommends the creation of a 'National Park Authority' to select areas for designation as National Parks. However no action is taken and public discontent grows, leading to the 1932 mass trespasses on Kinder Scout in the Peak District. Five men are imprisoned.

Groups of leisure activity enthusiasts and nature conservationists, including the Rambler's Association, the Youth Hostels' Association (YHA), the Council for the Preservation for Rural England (CPRE) and the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales (CPRW) rally together to lobby the Government for measures to protect, and allow access to the countryside, for the benefit of the nation. In 1936, they form a voluntary sector Standing Committee on National Parks (SCNP) which argues the case for National Parks and urges the Government to act.

The Council for the protection for Rural England (CPRE) made a film, which was shown in cinemas during the 1930's.

1940s

Landmark Act of Parliament establishes National Parks principle

This pressure culminates in the 1945 White Paper on National Parks, produced as part of the Labour Party's planned post-war reconstruction. The government sets up a committee under Sir Arthur Hobhouse, to prepare for National Park legislation, whilst the SCNP and Ramblers' Association keep up public pressure for National Parks.

1949 is a landmark year as the government passes an Act of Parliament to establish National Parks to preserve and enhance their natural beauty and provide recreational opportunities for the public. Lewis Silkin, Minister for Town and Country Planning, describes it as "... the most exciting Act of the post-war Parliament."

1950s

A decade of new National Parks for the nation

The first ten National Parks are designated starting with the Peak District in 1951. By the end of the decade the Lake District, Snowdonia, Dartmoor, Pembrokeshire Coast, North York Moors, Yorkshire Dales, Exmoor, Northumberland and Brecon Beacons National Parks have been established.

1977

Creation of Campaign for National Parks

The SCNP became the Council for National Parks (CNP), now called the Campaign for National Parks, a charity which continues to campaign for the protection and enhancement of National Parks.

1988

Broads Authority gains equivalent National Park status

A special Act of Parliament gives the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads equivalent National Park status.

1995

Environment Act

This 1995 Act updates National Park purposes and gives National Park Authorities the duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities. National Park Authorities become independent bodies within local government.

2000 - 2005

New additions to the family

The new millennium brings two Scottish National Parks, the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, created by the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000.

In 2005, the New Forest finally joins the National Park 'family'. Of the original 12 proposed English and Welsh National Parks, only one remained: the South Downs.

2010

South Downs

In 2009 the government announced that the South Downs would become a National Park, formally designated on 31 March 2010.

Today all the National Parks are represented by the Association of National Park Authorities

Order of National Parks designation, confirmation dates:

- Peak District - 17 April 1951
- Lake District - 9 May 1951
- Snowdonia - 18 October 1951
- Dartmoor - 30 October 1951
- Pembrokeshire Coast - 29 February 1952
- North York Moors - 29 November 1952
- Yorkshire Dales - 16 November 1954
- Exmoor - 19 October 1954
- Northumberland - 6 April 1956
- Brecon Beacons - 17 April 1957
- The Broads - 1 April 1989
- Loch Lomond & The Trossachs - 24 April 2002
- Cairngorms - 6 January 2003
- The New Forest - 1 March 2005
- The South Downs - 12 November 2009