

East Devon Area of
Outstanding Natural Beauty



A Designation History





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1963
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Acknowledgements

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Ray Woolmore has painstakingly compiled designation histories for a number of protected landscapes across England and Wales and his commitment to the AONBs was rightly recognised in his “Bowland Trophy Award” award by the National Association for AONBs in 2002.

Ray wishes to acknowledge the valuable help given to him in searching out facts for this history by Chris Woodruff, the East Devon AONB Team Manager and by Richard Butler (until retirement in 2006 at Devon County Council). He also wishes to acknowledge the unstinting help given to him by his typist Jasia Krabbe; Records Management Officer, John Bohdanec, and Rachael Mills, the Designation History Series Project Officer, all based at John Dower House, Natural England’s Cheltenham office. Also Bob Monks as cartographer.



Donald Campbell,
Chairman, East Devon AONB Partnership

The origins of AONBs

Origins

The Government first considered the setting up of National Parks and other similar areas in England and Wales when, in 1929, the first Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, established a National Park Committee¹, chaired by the Rt. Hon. Christopher Addison* MP, MD.

The “Addison “Committee reported to Government in 1931, and surprisingly no witnesses specifically mentioned the fine coastal and inland landscapes of East Devon as suitable for future designation. The



Christopher Addison
(1869–1951)

National Trust (NT), however, did consider the coastline of North and South Devon as suitable, but no indication was given as to whether or not the NT included the coastline of Devon east of the Exe Estuary in their definition of the South Devon Coast. The main recommendation of the Addison Committee was for a “National Authority” to select national park or similar areas, to formulate national policies and to stimulate the involvement of local authorities and others in the management of these areas.

* When appointed as Chairman of the National Park Committee, Christopher Addison was Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, but by 1930 he had become Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries. He had a varied and distinguished career in medicine and in government, becoming Viscount Addison of Stallingborough in 1945. In 1949, given his Chairmanship twenty years before of the first Government Committee on National Parks, it was most apposite that as leader of the House of Lords he took part in the passage of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Bill through Parliament. He died in 1951.

No National (Park) Authority was established, nor National Parks or similar areas created as a result of the Addison Committee's 1931 report, which, unfortunately, was made at a time when the Government was preoccupied with the major financial crisis and economic depression then afflicting the country.

The public awareness of the need to preserve open space and access was heightened during the 1930's by events such as the 1932 mass trespasses on Kinder Scout in the Peak District and the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) film* to promote the idea of National Parks for the nation, which was shown in cinemas during the period. By 1935 the Ramblers Association had been established through the amalgamation of local clubs across the country.



Kinder Scout

* CPRE film of the censors approval www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fd2cCKISBA

Sensing a need to apply pressure, groups of leisure activity enthusiasts and nature conservationists, including the recently established Rambler's Association, the Youth Hostels' Association (YHA), the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) and the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales (CPRW) rallied to lobby the Government for measures to protect, and allow access to the countryside, for the benefit of the nation. By 1936, no doubt spurred by the lack of government action, these organisations had formed a voluntary sector Standing Committee on National Parks (SCNP) which argued the case for National Parks and urged the Government to act.



John Dower

SCNP put a well-argued case for the creation of National Parks in its publication², 'The Case for National Parks in Great Britain' addressed to Government in 1938, and, significantly, for the future, drafted by the architect/planner, John Dower.*

**John Dower was a civil servant and architect, who, as secretary of the Standing Committee on National Parks, produced in 1945 the first post-war official report which set out what National Parks in England and Wales should be like. This report, and a subsequent one by Arthur Hobhouse, laid the foundations for the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 which created the National Park system. The headquarters building of the former Countryside Agency was named John Dower House in his honour.*

The Wartime Coalition Government and its Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas (1942), chaired by Lord Justice Scott, adopted SCNP's 1938 campaign as part of a desire for a 'Better Britain' emerging after the trauma of War, and requested John Dower to prepare an official report on National Parks in England and Wales.

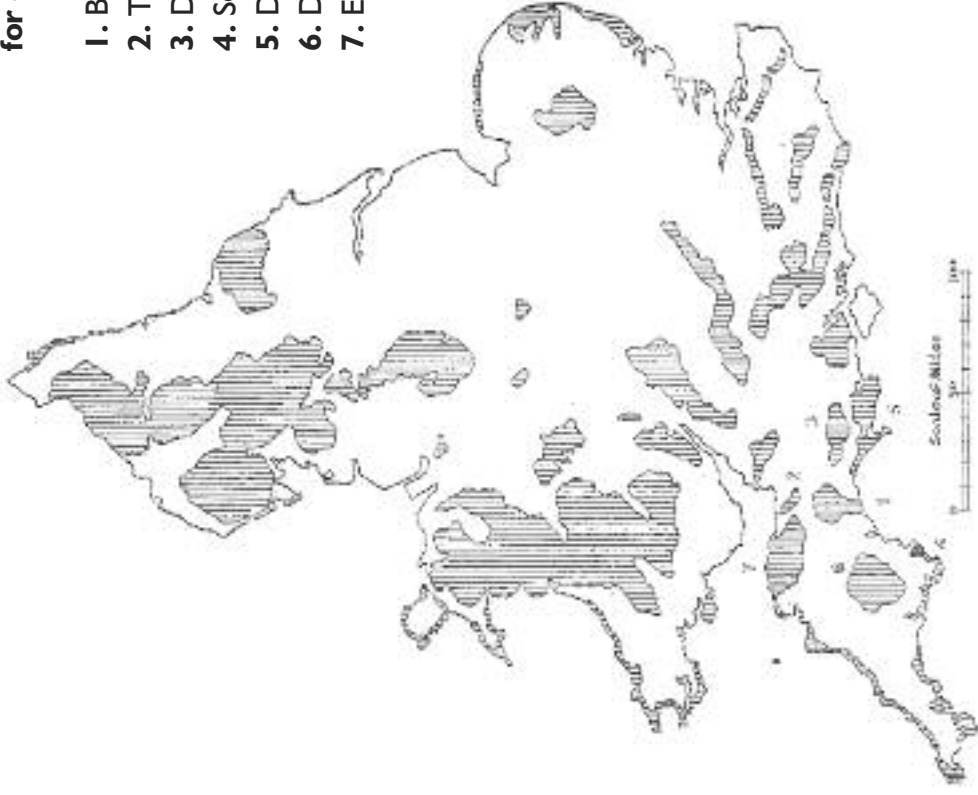
In this Report 'National Parks in England and Wales' ³, which appeared in May 1945, Dower redressed, partly, the earlier omission of any apparent recognition of the fine landscapes of East Devon in the Addison Report, and included the far eastern coastlands of Devon with the Blackdown Hills, as one of his 'Division C' areas i.e. Other Amenity Areas not suggested as National Parks. He choose to call the whole area the 'Blackdown Hills Amenity Area', with parts of Somerset and Devon; but his map (on the follow page) shows that the area also took in some of the coastlands of East Devon, though not the area between the Exe Estuary and Sidmouth, nor that between Seaton and the Dorset border.



Pony trekking near Farway

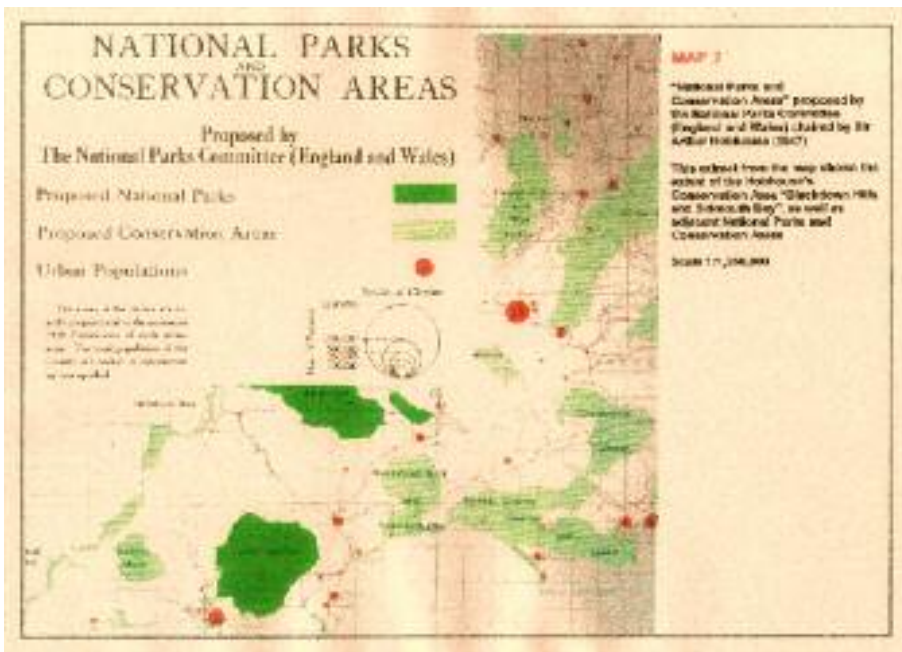
Map I - From the "Dower" Report (1945) showing areas for consideration for designation

1. Blackdown Hills Amenity Area and adjacent amenity areas
2. The Quantocks
3. Dorset Downs
4. South Devon Coast
5. Dorset Coast and Heaths
6. Dartmoor
7. Exmoor and North Devon Coast

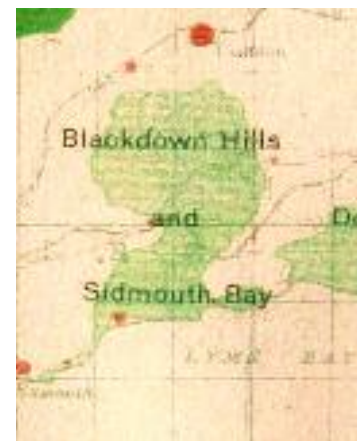


Acting almost immediately after the publication of the Dower Report the newly elected Labour Government established its National Parks Committee (England and Wales) chaired by Sir Arthur Hobhouse*, in July 1945, to consider Dower’s proposals in more detail. Significantly, the renamed ‘Blackdown Hills and Sidmouth Bay’ were included in the Committee’s list of 52 Conservation Areas, largely based on Dower’s ‘Other Amenity Areas’ and defined in the Committee’s Report⁴ as areas of ‘high landscape quality, scientific interest and recreational value’.

As Map 2 below shows, the Blackdown Hills and Sidmouth Bay Conservation Area was very similar in extent to Dower’s Blackdown Hills Amenity Area, except for its inclusion of a narrow coastal strips from Sidmouth westwards to Exmouth, and from Seaton eastwards to Lyme Regis.



Map 2 – A section of the Hobhouse Report map, defining Conservation Areas and National Parks



Detail of the Blackdown Hills and Sidmouth Bay

* Before being appointed Chairman of the National Parks Committee, Sir Arthur Hobhouse had a long political career as a county councillor in Somerset (he had also briefly been MP for Wells 1923-24), being Chairman of the County Council from 1940-47. He became Chairman of the County Council’s Association (England and Wales) from 1947-50, and then President of that body from 1951-53.

Hobhouse’s Blackdown Hills and Sidmouth Bay ‘Conservation Area’ covered 212 square miles (549 square kilometres) of Devon and Somerset. In choosing this area the Hobhouse Committee were clearly impressed, as Dower had been before them, with the landscape beauty of the incised Upper Greensand plateau of the Blackdown Hills, and the extension of their ridge and vale topography into East Devon between the Axe and Sid Valleys.



Farway

On the coast of Lyme Bay the Conservation Area included all of the striking and varied coastal scenery between Exmouth to the west, and the Dorset boundary to the east, taking in the Undercliff between Seaton and Lyme Regis, England’s westernmost chalk cliffs at Beer Head and Branscombe, the wooded coombe of Branscombe Mouth and the varied greensand, red sandstone and marl cliff architecture further west.

Included within the Conservation Area were all the rural villages and small towns in the area, as well as the larger coastal resorts of Budleigh Salterton, Sidmouth and Seaton.



Sidbury – Saxon village

As a Hobhouse Conservation Area, the Blackdown Hills and Sidmouth Bay area was included in the list of areas, on which, as had been made clear during the passage of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Bill through Parliament in 1949*, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) would be largely, though **not entirely**, based.

** The official notes on the Clauses of the 1949 Bill indicate that the Government did not expect that the AONBs would be as numerous and extensive as the 52 Hobhouse Conservation Areas.*

England & Wales

AONB	Confirmation Date
Gower	1956
Quantock Hills	1957
Lleyn	1957
Northumberland Coast	1958
Surrey Hills	1958
Cannock Chase	1958
Shropshire Hills	1959
Dorset	1959
Malvern Hills	1959
Cornwall	1959
North Devon	1960
South Devon	1960
East Hampshire	1962
East Devon	1963
Isle of Wight	1963
Chichester Harbour	1964
Forest of Bowland	1964
Solway Coast	1964
Chilterns	1965
Sussex Downs	1966
Cotswolds	1966
Anglesey	1967
South Hampshire Coast	1967
Norfolk Coast	1968
Kent Downs	1968
Suffolk Coast and Heaths	1970
Dedham Vale	1970
Wye Valley	1971
North Wessex Downs	1972
Mendip Hills	1972
Arnside and Silverdale	1972
Lincolnshire Wolds	1973
Isles of Scilly	1976
High Weald	1983
Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs	1983
Clwydian Range	1985
Howardian Hills	1987
North Pennines	1988
Blackdown Hills	1991
Nidderdale	1994
Tamar Valley	1995

Northern Ireland

AONB	Confirmation Date
Lagan Valley	1965
North Derry	1966
Lecale Coast	1967
Sperrin	1968
Strangford Lough	1972
Mourne	1986
Antrim Coast and Glens	1988
Causeway Coast	1989
Ring of Gullion	1991

Early Steps towards designation

The priority of the National Parks Commission (NPC) established under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (the 1949 Act), was to designate the National Parks in its programme, adopted from the Hobhouse Report of proposed National Parks. The first reference to the practical consideration of the area of Sidmouth Bay as a possible AONB came in a paper (NPC/G/118) on AONBs written by the NPC's first Chairman, Sir Patrick Duff*, in March 1953⁵, following an earlier paper (NPC/G/110) in which he reviewed the NPC's overall programme for 1953, and highlighted the need for the NPC to prepare a list of possible AONB candidates for future attention. Sidmouth Bay appeared in both the Chairman's second list of twelve (areas chosen for their **beauty**) and third list of twelve (chosen for their **recreation** value).

No immediate action followed from the Chairman's March 1953 paper, but on 16 March 1954, when the NPC discussed a request from their Committee B to investigate setting up a future AONB programme, reference was then made to the Chairman's earlier paper. The NPC's Committee B was established in February 1953, succeeding the NPC's Southern Committee. Like its predecessor it dealt with the detail of the National Park designation programme in the south of the country, and, later, with AONB designations. It also dealt with other matters affecting "natural beauty", reporting to the NPC on these matters.

In February 1954 Committee B had received a letter from the Gower Society requesting the protection of Gower by either National Park or AONB designation. The Committee had decided that this was an appropriate occasion to raise the question of an AONB programme at the next meeting (March 1954) of the NPC.

* Patrick Duff had had a distinguished and long career as a Senior Civil Servant (including being Personal Secretary to three successive Prime Ministers). Knighted in 1932, he entered the Diplomatic Service in 1941, serving at High Commissioner level in Canada and New Zealand. He became the NPC's first Chairman in 1949.

The NPC⁶, by then led by Lord Strang* , Sir Patrick Duff's successor, requested their officers to prepare a paper on a possible AONB programme. This paper⁷ 'Note on AONBs' (NPC/G/178) was prepared almost immediately and considered by the NPC at their meeting on 13 April 1954. Looking first at the Hobhouse Conservation Areas, the paper suggested twelve areas as possible "first choices", but the Blackdown Hills and Sidmouth Bay Area did not appear on this list. The NPC⁸, in their consideration of the paper, agreed that the time had come for the Commission to give practical consideration to the designation of some AONBs, requesting their Secretary, Harold Abrahams**, to prepare a further paper considering the various points influencing the choice of areas for a future programme.

Harold Abrahams' paper⁹, 'Further Notes on AONBs' (NPC/G/184) argued that although the Blackdown Hills and Sidmouth Bay Area did not qualify for inclusion in the list of five areas to be in the first programme, the larger parts of the north and south coasts of Devon should be considered for inclusion in the programme at an early date. This paper was considered by the NPC at their meeting on 15 June 1954, and with regard to the choice of areas for designation the Commission¹⁰ decided



Harold Abrahams

that as a first step they should adopt for preliminary consideration three areas – The Gower, the Surrey Hills and the Llyn Peninsula. The Quantock Hills were added as a fourth initial designation a few months later.

* Like his predecessor, William Strang had had a long and distinguished career in Government Service, and also had been a diplomat. Knighted in 1943, his last post before retirement in 1953 was Permanent under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office. He became Baron Strang in 1954, and was appointed the second Chairman of the National Parks Commission in March of that year, and remained Chairman till 1966 when he was succeeded by Baroness Wootton.

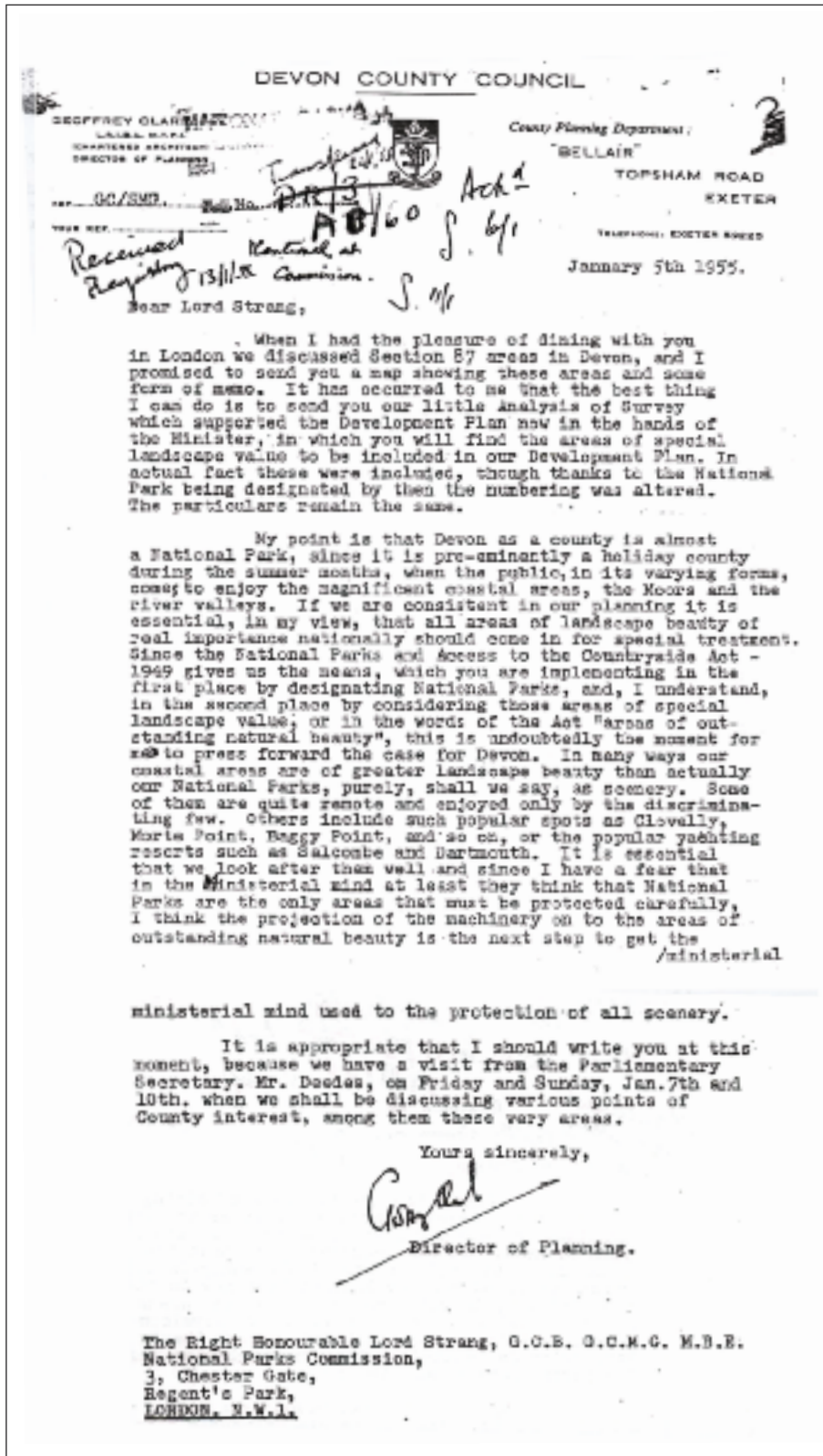
** Harold Abrahams, 1924 Olympic Gold Medallist (in the 100 metres track event) Senior Civil Servant and Athletics Correspondent for the Sunday Times, had been appointed the Secretary of the National Parks Commission in 1950, continuing until his retirement in 1963.

Despite not being included in the first choice of areas for designation, the fine coastlines of Devon were, indeed, given early consideration, as Harold Abrahams had argued in his paper (NPC/G/184), when Lord Strang, the NPC Chairman, informally discussed the question of AONB designation for parts of the Devon coastline with Geoffrey Clark, the Devon CC Director of Planning, in December 1954. Geoffrey Clark had then suggested¹¹ that the Areas of Special Landscape Value (ASLV) in the County Development Plan would provide a starting point (see copy of letter on following page). In East Devon¹², the ASLV covered an extensive area called “The East Devon Plateau”, including all of the Devon section of the Blackdown Hills, and the remainder of “The Blackdown Hills and Sidmouth Bay” Hobhouse Conservation Area, plus extensive areas of Common and heathland between the Exe Valley and Sidmouth (Pebblebed Heaths) and an area of incised plateau to the north-west of Lyme Regis.

However, consideration of the designation of various parts of the Devon coastline was not formally addressed by the NPC until September¹³ 1955, when they considered Lord Strang’s paper (NPC/255) setting out the possibilities for a Cornwall AONB, following Cornwall CC’s earlier rejection of the NPC’s Cornwall National Park proposal. In authorising the commencement of discussions to consider the designation of much of the Cornwall coastline as an AONB, the NPC also decided that, with the objective of safeguarding simultaneously, the fine coastlines of the whole of the South-West Peninsula, parallel discussions should be started with Devon and Dorset CC’s.



East Devon Pebblebed Heaths



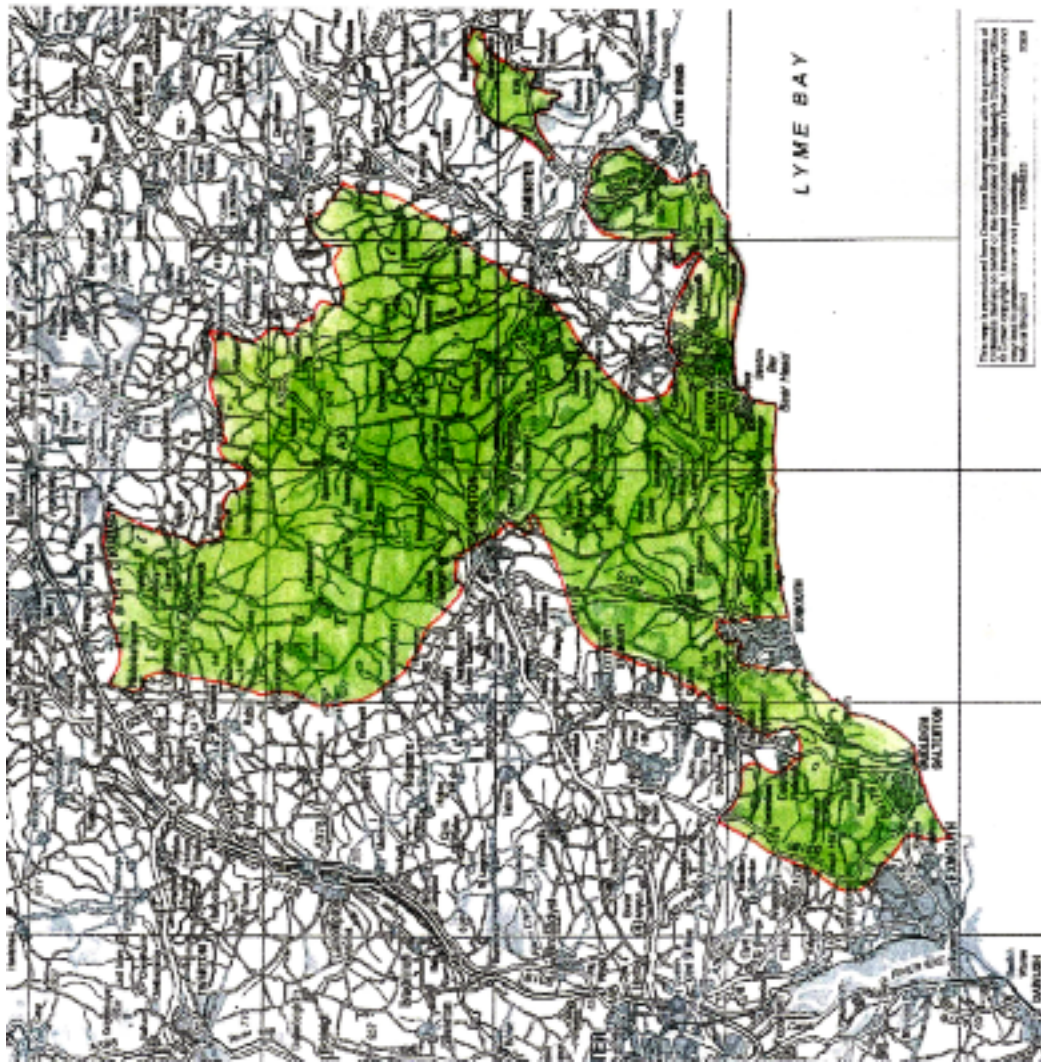
Geoffrey Clark's letter to Lord Strang in 1955

MAP 3

Map showing the Devon County Development Plan ASLV area (with approximate boundaries) called "The East Devon Plateau"

ASLV area "The East Devon Plateau" is shown in light green enclosed by red boundaries

Scale 1:250,000



Map 3 Devon County Development Plan ASLV – The East Devon Plateau (1954)

The NPC also agreed that they should be represented in discussions with the County Councils by Francis Ritchie*, a Commissioner, and by Harold Abrahams, the NPC Secretary. Following from this NPC decision, a meeting between the NPC representatives and Geoffrey Clark took place in Exeter on 17 January 1956, to discuss the possible AONB proposals in Devon.

Mr. Ritchie reported¹⁴ to the NPC at their meeting on 25 January 1956 indicating that parts of North and South Devon, not East Devon, would be considered first, and work then proceeded on finding preliminary boundaries for the proposed North and South Devon AONBs.

Further consideration was not given to East Devon until later that year at the NPC's Committee¹⁵ B meeting on 26 June 1956, when after the Committee's consideration of the preliminary boundaries proposed for the North and South Devon AONBs, Brigadier Acland**, an NPC member living in Devon suggested that East Devon also merited inspection of possible boundaries for early designation as an AONB. At the full NPC meeting the following day (27 June 1956) the Commission decided¹⁶ that formal consultation on the proposed North and South Devon AONBs should follow designation of the Cornwall AONB, and, significantly, for the purpose of this history, also agreed that the possibility of designating part of East Devon as an AONB at the same time should be investigated.

* Francis Ritchie was one of the original members of the NPC, appointed in December 1949; he remained a member till 1966; and also achieved high office in the Council for National Parks (CNP), CPRE, the Open Spaces Society, and the RA.

** Brigadier P. B. Acland, 1902-93, after an early career in the Sudan Political Service, and distinguished service in the Second World War, became a Deputy Lord Lieutenant for Devon, and then a member of the NPC, from 1953-60. He was Vice-Lord Lieutenant for Devon from 1962-78.

Brigadier Acland prepared a paper¹⁷ (B/G/227) which not only contained his comments on the preliminary boundaries proposed for the North Devon AONB, but also elaborated his views on the need for East Devon to be designated as an AONB. He believed that the scenic value of the East Devon coast and its hinterland was as great, if not greater than that of North and South Devon. He argued that the East Devon was in as much need of protection, feeling that the County Council and local opinion would want all Devon AONBs to be dealt with at the same time.

B/G/227

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NATIONAL PARKS COMMISSION

Proposed Devon areas of outstanding natural beauty.

Comments by Brigadier Acland on proposed boundary

- (a) North Devon. I think that the Combe Martin area should be included. The village and the Market Garden Holdings are not lovely but the surrounding slopes are very good.

The proposed boundary makes an unnecessary re-entrant between the A.O.N.B. and the Park and might appear deliberately to withdraw protection from an area which needs it.

I suggest that the boundary be altered to continue along road B3M3 eastwards from the road junction at NR37/A441 to Wytown on the National Park Boundary MR620117.

- (b) East Devon - I feel that essentially the value of the East Devon Coast and hinterland is as great if not greater than that of S. and N. Devon - it certainly is in as much need of protection. I also feel that the County Council and Local opinion would take more kindly all Devon A.O.N.B.'s being dealt with at one time. I would like, if possible, to see it included now.

I have talked to the Director of Planning about both the above points and he is in agreement with me and believes that local opinion would also be in support.

*Brigadier Acland's
paper to the National Park
Commission*

H.F.D.

Paper B/G/227 was considered by the NPC's Committee B at its meeting¹⁸ on 24 July 1956, and, inter alia, the Committee agreed with Brigadier Acland's suggestion that East Devon should be dealt with at the same time as North and South Devon. They recommended that a Commission party, consisting of Brigadier Acland, Francis Ritchie and L. J. Watson*, the NPC's Senior Field Officer, should visit the area, to consider possible boundaries, and should report to the next Committee B meeting.

Francis Ritchie reported on the visit to the NPC Committee B meeting¹⁹ on 23 October 1956. He indicated that the party had concluded that the designation of the area would be incomplete if the section of the Blackdown Hills in Somerset, an integral part of the whole Blackdown Hills topographic unit, part of which was in East Devon, was excluded from the proposed designation. The Committee agreed with the views expressed by Mr. Ritchie, and also decided that this should be explained informally to the Devon and Somerset County Councils. Finally the Committee recommended that the designation of East Devon with the Blackdown Hills in Somerset should follow the designation of the coastal areas in North and South Devon. At their meeting²⁰ the next day (24 October 1956) the NPC endorsed their Committee's recommendations.

Following the NPC October meeting Harold Abrahams sent a letter²¹ (dated 31 October 1956) to the Devon Director of Planning, Geoffrey Clark, informing him of the NPC decisions on the three Devon AONB proposals, and explaining that the NPC decision to include Somerset section of the Blackdown Hills with the proposed East Devon area meant that the designation of this area would need to await the completion of the designation process for North and South Devon.

However, further work on delimiting possible boundaries of an AONB covering part of East Devon and the section of the Blackdown Hills in

** L. J. Watson, a landscape architect and artist, had been employed by MTCP as a Technical Officer, but had been "borrowed" by the National Park Committee from 1945-47, as their landscape adviser. Subsequently he became the Senior Field Officer for the National Parks Commission, and worked for the Countryside Commission as a landscape consultant until 1973. Uniquely he provided continuity and consistency in giving advice on landscape designations from 1945-73; His influential role often understated.*

Somerset did continue in 1957. At their meeting on 28 May 1957, the NPC Committee B agreed that a survey party should visit the area from 12-14 July to consider boundaries. Mr. B. W. Watkin*, an NPC Field Officer, conducted a party of three Commissioners, Pauline Dower**, Brigadier Acland, and Sir Herbert Griffin***, around the area on 12 July.

While an itinerary for the trip indicated that the party travelled round the whole area of the Blackdown Hills and East Devon, there is, unfortunately, no map showing the boundaries eventually proposed by the inspecting party. It seems likely that the boundaries proposed were those eventually used for informal consultation with the County Councils (see Map 4). Only Brigadier Acland's proposed amendment to take in the villages of Colyton and Whitford, in the Coly and Axe Valleys, was referred to in the minutes of the NPC Committee B meeting on 24 September 1957. The NPC meeting on 25 September 1957 agreed the Committee's recommendation to approve the inspecting party's proposed boundaries **with** Brigadier Acland's amendment, and to undertake informal consultations with Devon and Somerset CCs when the programme allowed.

AREAS OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY.

1290. East Devon and Somerset. (Minute 1233.)

The Committee considered the proposed boundaries of this area which had been inspected by the Deputy Chairman, Sir Herbert Griffin and Brigadier Acland. They recommended that the boundary be approved.

Amended 11/8/57

-7-

subject to an amendment suggested by Brigadier Acland that, on the eastern side, the line should follow the river Axe so as to bring within the area the villages of Colyton and Whitford. The next step would be informal consultations with the Devon and Somerset County Councils when the programme allowed.

At their meeting on September 25, 1957, the Commission agreed - Commission Minute 1182 refers.

(AR/52)

* B. W. Watkin, as an NPC Field Officer, shared the role of advising Commissioners on the delineating of National Park and AONB boundaries with L. J. Watson (see footnote to para 11 above). He left the staff of the NPC at the end of 1958 to become Deputy Secretary of the Royal Fine Arts Commission.

** Pauline Dower was the widow of John Dower, the author of the 1945 Seminal Report on National Parks (see ref 3), and was a founder member of the NPC, and one of its longest serving members (along with Francis Ritchie) relinquishing that role in June 1966. As a Commissioner she played a major role in the formulation, through site visits and reports, of the boundaries of several National Parks and AONBs.

*** Herbert Griffin was the Secretary of CPRE from its founding, in 1926, to 1969. He was appointed a member of the NPC in 1955 and remained in that role till 1966, during which time he was knighted (1957).

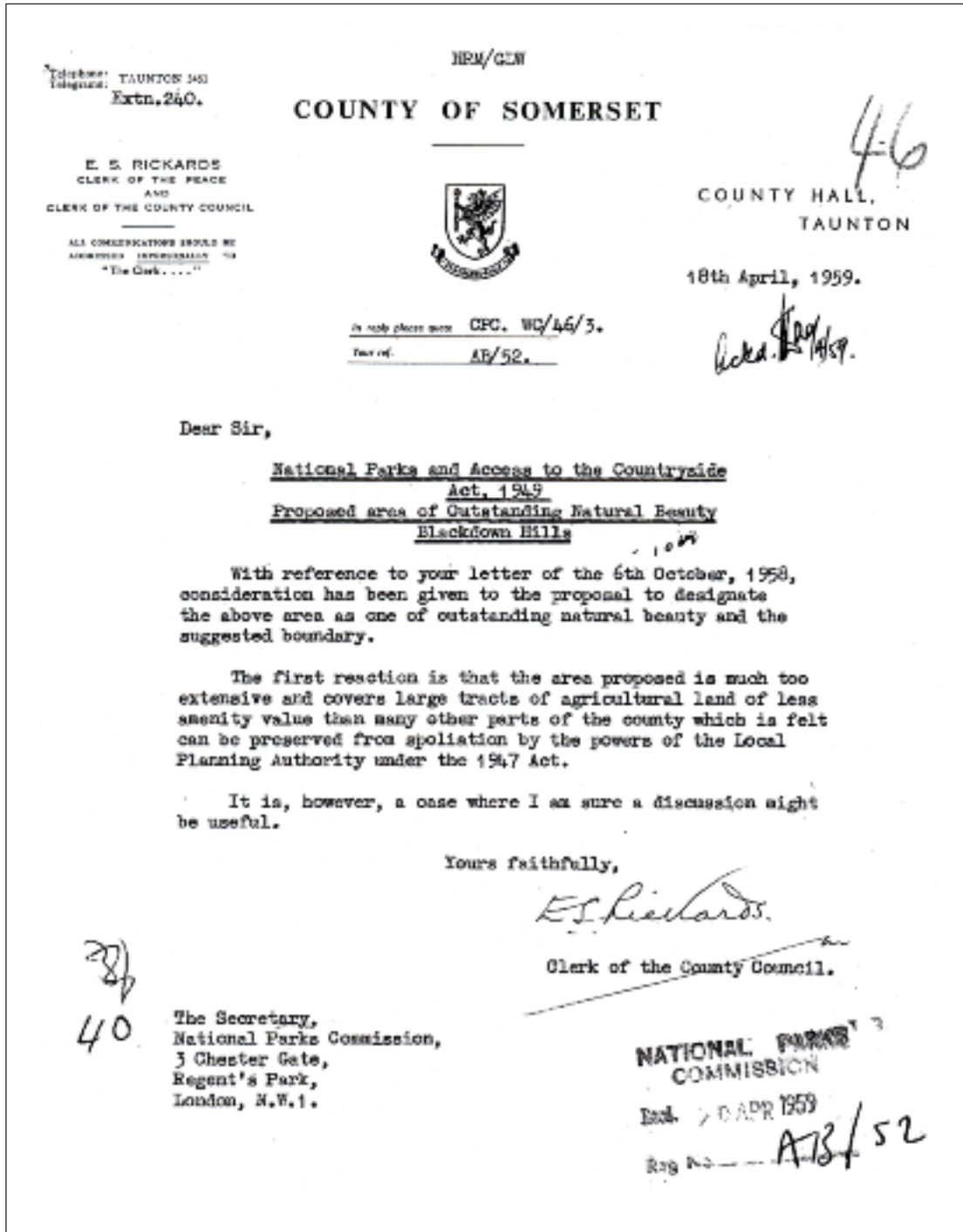
Informal consultation on the proposed boundaries



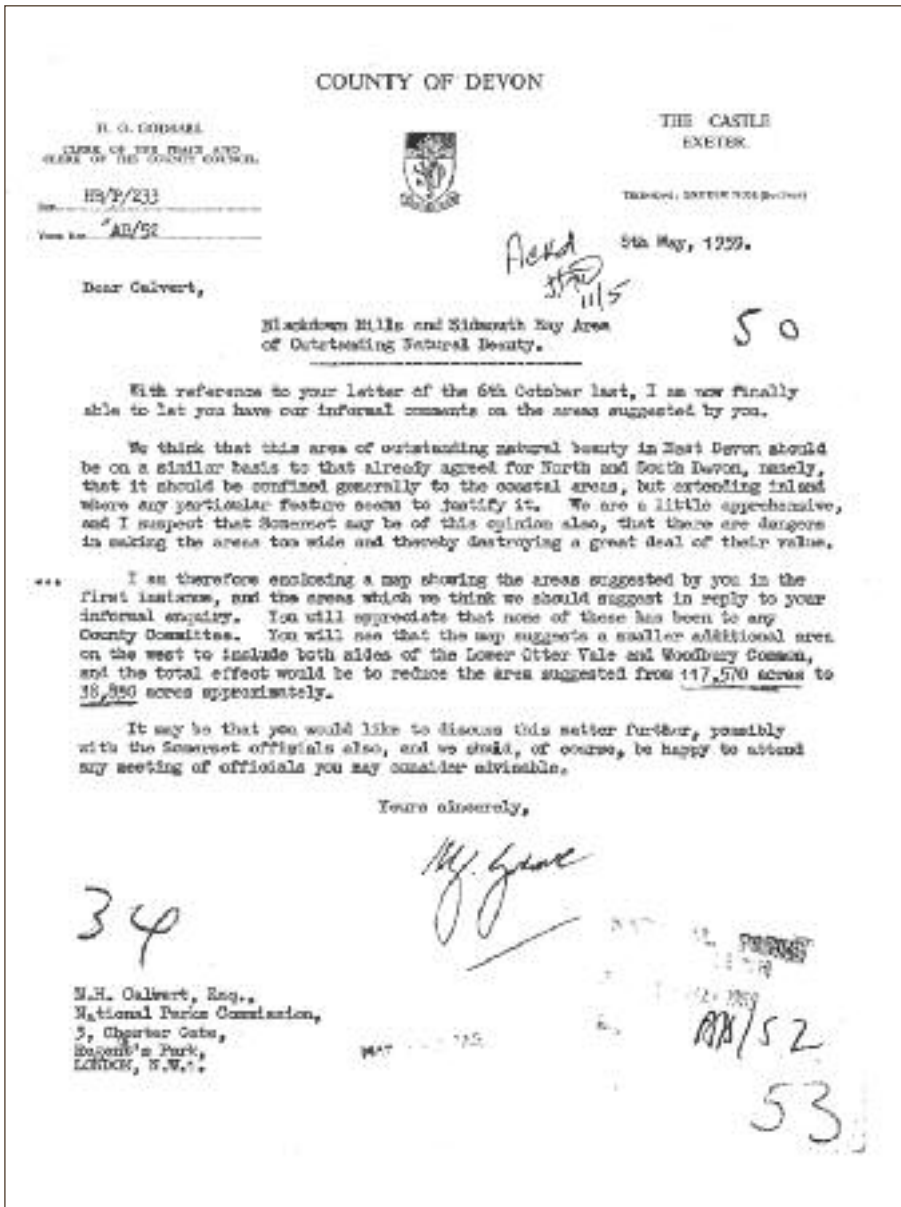
Colyford Goose Fayre

In the event the NPC Secretariat waited a year until autumn of 1958 before informally consulting the Clerks of the two County Councils on the NPC's possible boundaries for an AONB based on the Blackdown Hills and Sidmouth Bay Hobhouse Conservation Area. In his letters of 6 October 1958²² Mr. Calvert of the NPC Secretariat wrote to Mr. Godsall, the Devon CC Clerk, and Mr. Rickards, the Somerset CC Clerk, seeking their informal views on the boundaries shown on the enclosed map (Map 4 in this history on page 23).

The letters also suggested that a meeting of officers from the NPC and the two County Councils would be useful. Both County Councils took some time to respond, with a first reply from the Somerset Clerk²³, dated 18 April 1959, suggesting that the area proposed was too extensive and covered large tracts of agricultural land of less amenity value than many other parts of the County. Also it was suggested that 1947 Act planning powers would preserve the areas from spoilation. The NPC's proposal for an officer meeting was considered useful. Devon CC's response was equally problematic, with Mr. Godsall, in his letter²⁴ of 8 May 1959 arguing that Devon CC believed that any East Devon AONB should be similar to those already agreed for North and South Devon and thus generally confined to the coastal areas, though extending inland where any particular feature seemed to justify it.

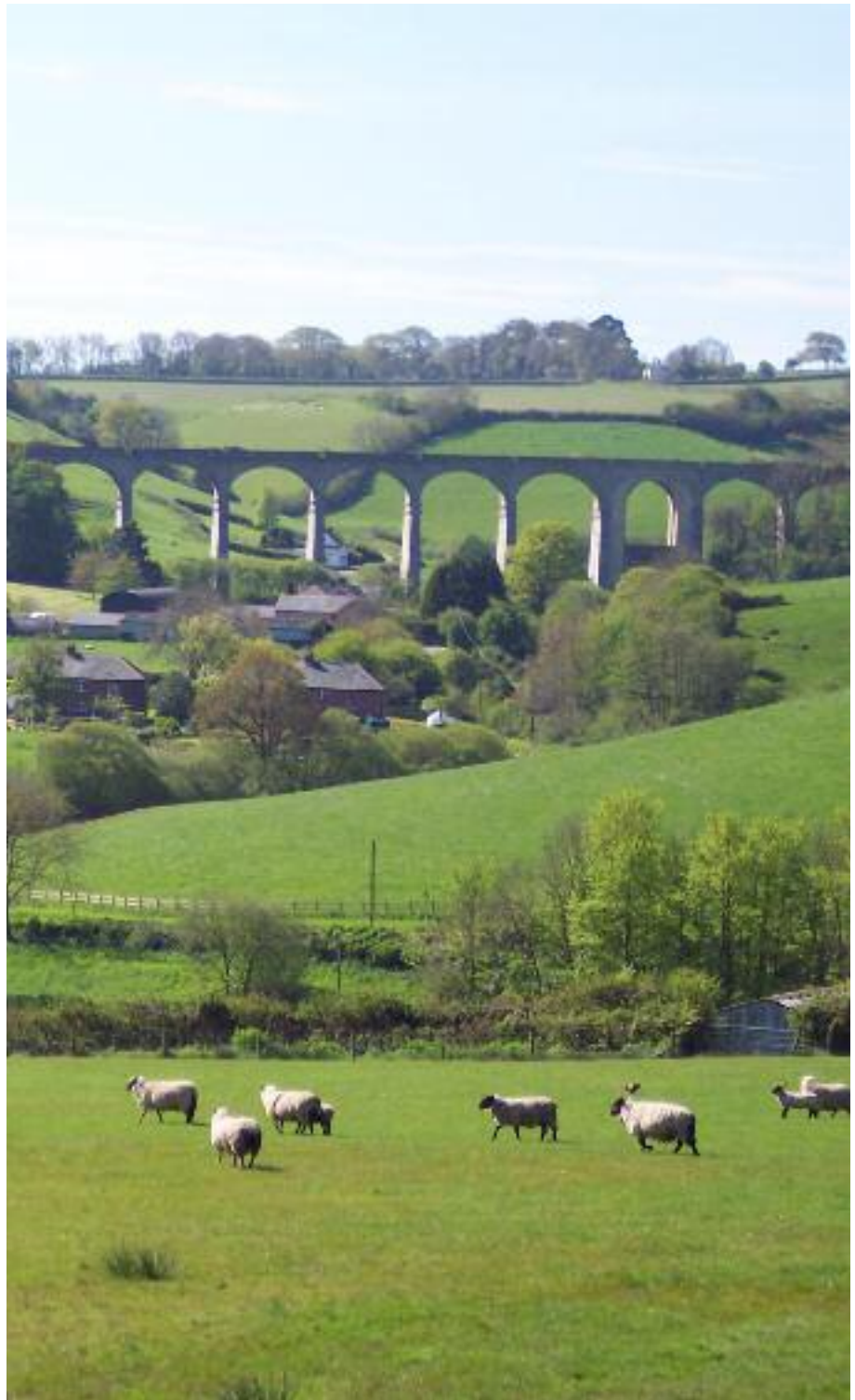


Somerset County Council's reply to the National Park Commission's informal proposals

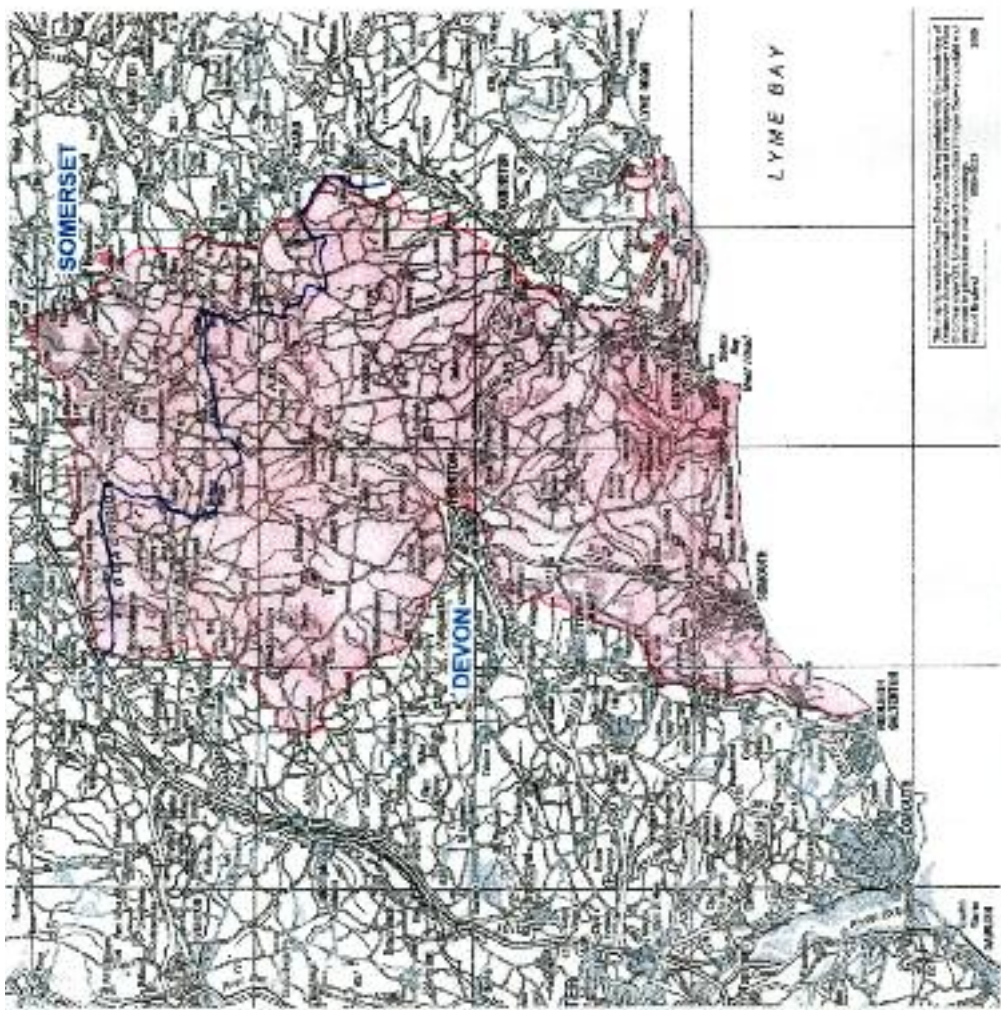


Devon County Council's reply to the National Park Commission's informal proposals

Like Somerset CC, Devon CC also feared the area becoming too extensive and thus devaluing the designation. A map (Map 5) enclosed with the letter indicated the much smaller area for the AONB as suggested by Devon CC from 184 square miles to 61 square miles, though this map also added an additional area on the western side of Otter Vale, including Woodbury Common.



Viaduct near Uplyme



MAP 4

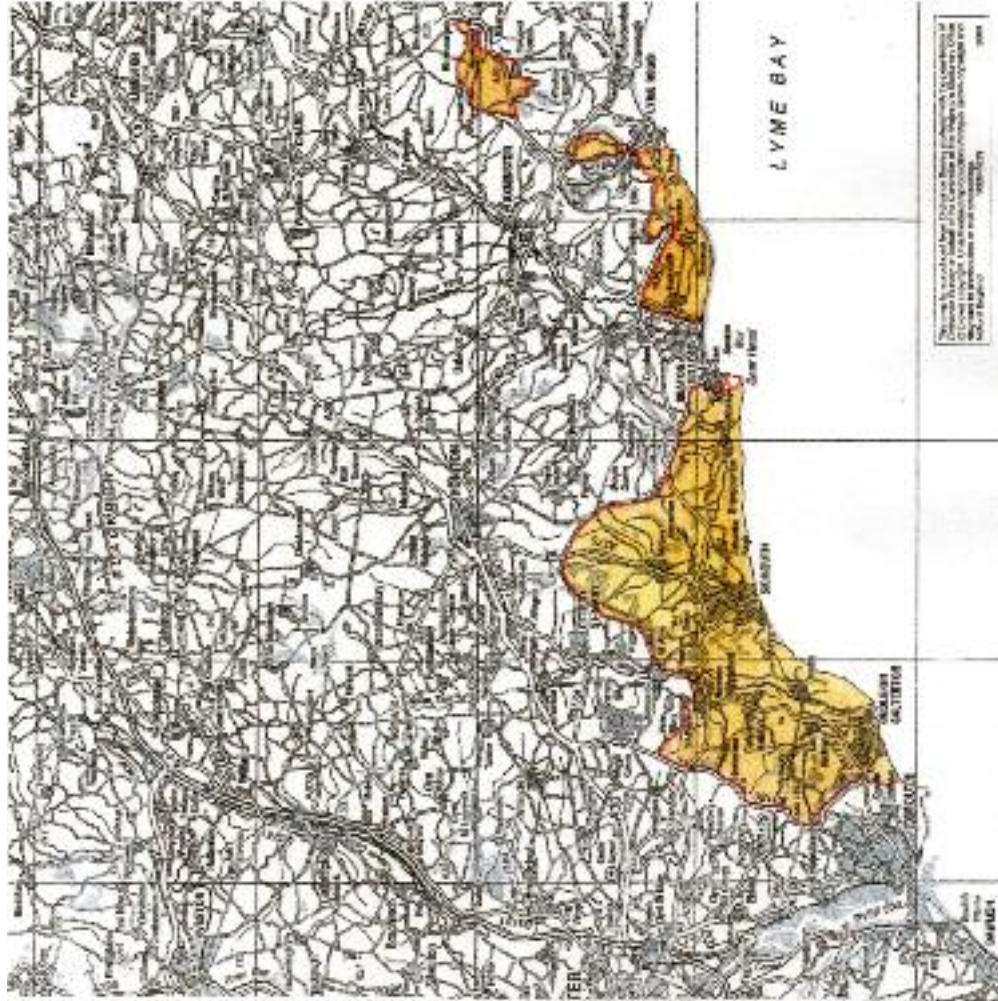
Boundary of proposed Blackdown Hills and Sidmouth Bay AONB as approved by the NPC in September 1957 for the purpose of informal consultation with Devon and Somerset County Councils

Area on map coloured pink with a red line boundary shows the approximate boundaries of the proposed AONB

Blue line denotes approximate boundary between Somerset and Devon

Scale 1:250,000

Map 4 National Parks Commission map of the proposed Blackdown Hills and Sidmouth Bay AONB covering some 184 square miles (1957)



MAP 5

Map showing approximate boundaries of the area suggested for an East Devon AONB by Devon CC in May 1959

Area on map coloured **yellow** bordered by a **red** line indicates the approximate boundary of an East Devon AONB suggested by Devon CC in May 1959

Scale 1:250,000

Map 5 Devon County Council map of the proposed East Devon AONB covering some 61 square miles (1959)

Both Somerset and Devon CC believed an officer meeting would be useful. Mr. Calvert questioned both County Councils in his letters²⁵ of 19 May 1959 as to their views on whether the Blackdown Hills were of sufficiently high standard to merit designation.

The County Planning Officers for Devon (Phipps-Turnbull) and Somerset (H. W. Dale), with their officers, considered this question. In their replies²⁶ to the NPC letters of 19 May, put the argument (letter of 8 June 1959 from H. Bramwell of the Devon County Clerk's Office, and letter of 13 June 1959 from H. W. Dale of Somerset) that the Blackdown Hills, in both Counties, were adequately protected by the AGLV definition in the County Development Plans, and did not merit AONB status.

The County Councils' views were considered by the NPC at their meeting²⁷ on 22 July 1959, and they then instructed L. J. Watson, Senior Field Officer to meet with the two County Planning Officer to discuss the boundaries of the Blackdown Hills and Sidmouth Bay proposed AONB, within the area suggested by the NPC.

L. J. Watson's discussions with the two County Planning Officers and other officers of their departments involved were summarised very clearly in a note which was prepared as Commission Paper²⁸ B/G/660, dated 3 March 1960, and considered by the NPC's Committee 29B on 22 March 1960.

SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL

COUNTY PLANNING OFFICER
R. W. DALE, M.T.P., A.M.I.C.E.

TELEPHONE NO. 2222 41011/4

Communications to be addressed (personally)
The County Planning Officer



41 UPPER HIGH STREET
TAUNTON

Yr. Ref: AB/52
Our Ref: RDD/APP/X.43

return to file after use

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13th June, 1959.

N.H. Calvert, Esq.,
Secretary,
National Parks Commission,
3, Chester Gate,
Hugent's Park,
London, N.W.1.

NATIONAL PARKS
COMMISSION

REC. 16 JUN 1959

Reg. No. PP/52

Dear Mr. Calvert,

Blackdown Hills

I refer to your letter of the 19th May, 1959, and apologise for delay in replying. I have been awaiting the County Planning Committee's consideration of this matter upon the report of the special sub-committee which examined the Blackdown area.

The Committee's resolution is to the effect that apart perhaps from certain uncultivated slopes and woodlands mainly in the possession of the National Trust, there is no land in this area which comes within the description of Outstanding Natural Beauty as distinct from areas of "great landscape value" already so defined in the County Development Plan.

I think you must take it that the position is the general feeling at any rate of my Committee is the additional designation "Outstanding Natural Beauty" ought not to be applied to normal agricultural areas which are not 'natural' but cultivated; and further where such cultivated countryside is of scenic beauty, it ought to be adequately protected by inclusion in areas of great landscape value in Development Plans.

54

It is difficult therefore for me to prepare any useful plan at this stage as the odd spots of natural countryside in the Blackdown Hills would not produce a workable area.

If you would like to discuss the matter further with me, perhaps you would let me know.

Yours sincerely,

R.W. Dale

(Date spent in office) 58



Underhooken

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NATIONAL PARKS COMMISSION
East Devon (Blackdown Hills and Sidmouth Bay)
Proposed Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Note by the Field Officer

1. In order that further consideration may be given to the question of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in East Devon, a 1" map has been prepared showing a boundary which is likely to be acceptable to the County Council. This comprises the southern largely coastal section of the former proposed Black Down Hills and Sidmouth Bay Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

A survey party of the Commission first toured this area in July 1957 and made recommendations for the designation of such an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The proposed boundary was approved by the Commission in September 1957, and maps were sent to the County Councils of Devon and Somerset in 1958. However, some considerable time elapsed before the Commission received any comments on the boundary.

2. In a letter to the Commission dated May 8, 1959, the Clerk of Devon County Council gave his informal views on the Devon section of the proposed Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, namely, that the area was too wide, and that "it should be confined generally to the coastal areas, extending inland where any particular feature seems to justify it".

On April 18, 1959, a letter had been received from the Clerk of Somerset County Council expressing similar views suggesting that the proposed area was too extensive, and this was later supported by a resolution from the Somerset County Planning Committee. In a letter from the Somerset County Planning Officer dated June 13, 1959, it was stated that the Planning Committee's resolution was to the following effect:- "...that apart perhaps from certain uncultivated slopes and woodlands mainly in the possession of the National Trust, there is no land in this area which comes within the description of Outstanding Natural Beauty as distinct from areas of Great Landscape Value already so defined in the County Development Plan".

3. In August 1959, on the instructions of the Commission, I met the County Planning Officers of Devon and Somerset, and discussed further with them the question of the proposed Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty boundaries in their respective counties. The main points in these discussions are summarized as follows:-

Somerset:

Mr. Dale, the Somerset County Planning Officer, said that his Planning Committee took the view that the wooded escarpment of the Black Down Hills was the only territory in this part of Somerset that really merited Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty status. This comprises a narrow strip about 6 miles long and less than 1 mile wide, from Seaford Point and Wellington Hill at the western end, eastwards to the neighbourhood of Staple Hill - S.W. of Staple Fitzpaine. His Committee felt that most of the remaining Somerset section of the proposed Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty consisted of rather ordinary enclosed agricultural land that was in no sense outstanding, and they saw no point in giving Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty status to country such as this.

/Mr. Dale

- 2 -

Mr. Dale said that his Committee might be prepared to consider A.O.N.B. designation of just the narrow Black Down Hills escarpment if the Commission felt very strongly about it, and this could probably be made to link up with any adjacent Devon territory which might also be considered suitable. But it was not felt that there was any urgency; the area was not threatened in any way. Mr. Dale pointed out that all this land was included as a Landscape Area in the County Development Plan, and the existing controls under normal planning seemed to be adequate.

Devon:

Mr. Turnbull, the Devon County Planning Officer, stressed the point made in the previous correspondence about the coastal areas being the most outstanding parts of Devon apart from the two National Parks. The existing North and South Devon Coast A.O.N.B.'s were predominantly coastal, and Mr. Turnbull thought there was not sufficient justification on scenic grounds for departing from this in the case of the East Devon area. He felt that there were advantages in having the Devon A.O.N.B.'s uniformly coastal.

A further point was that Devon were hoping to simplify planning in the eyes of the public, and they were trying to reduce the number of different categories that were being marked on the county maps. They hoped that in time they might be able to do away with the Landscape Areas on the coasts where these were also covered by A.O.N.B.'s. This might possibly be done at the next review of the Development Plan. Mr. Turnbull also hoped that they might be able to eliminate the scattered Article 4 Direction Areas, and have these covered by A.O.N.B.'s.

Mr. Wood - Divisional Planning Officer who was also present explained various points regarding the boundary suggested by Devon, and especially the proposed inclusion of the Woodbury Common area - north of Budleigh Salterton. Mr. Wood said that this area was very popular and much used by the public for picnics etc.

Also there are two small areas in Devon hitherto excluded which adjoin the Dorset A.O.N.B. which it was felt should now be included in the East Devon A.O.N.B. These are:- (1) Marcombe Bottom - north of Lyme Regis, and (2), the area between Lambert's Castle Hill and Hawkchurch.

4. Suggested Amended Boundary for an East Devon A.O.N.B.

In view of the fact that the Devon County Council do not appear to favour the central and northern sections of the original Black Down Hills and Sidmouth Bay area being designated as an A.O.N.B. and also that Somerset seem to be content with their part of the area as a Landscape Area under normal planning, the Commission may wish to consider the boundary of an East Devon A.O.N.B. which is likely to be acceptable to the County Council.

The possibility of a separate designation in Somerset of a small isolated strip of the Black Down Hills seems to be of relatively less importance if this were not to be linked up with the larger area in Devon, and this has therefore been left for consideration at some future date.

/I have inspected

- 3 -

I have inspected the boundary suggested by Devon, including the two small additional pockets of good country at the eastern end which it is felt should be included in the designation in view of their relationship to the Dorset A.O.N.B.

The boundary shown on the 1" map seems to me to be reasonably satisfactory, although there are problems, especially with regard to the coastal towns - whether or not these should be included in the A.O.N.B. There may be some justification for including Budleigh Salterton and also possibly Sidmouth. On the other hand it seems rather questionable whether either Seaton or Beer could be included with a clear conscience. There is a precedent for leaving a gap in a coastal strip, as in the North Devon Coast A.O.N.B. where the built-up part of Ilfracombe has been wholly excluded, and this might be the best solution in the case of Seaton and Beer.

Notes on the Boundary:

Harcombe Bottom:

This is one of the additional areas at the eastern end suggested for inclusion by Devon. It consists of about a square mile of the pleasant partially wooded valley which extends northwards from the River Lis near Uplyme - to Harcombe Bottom, and adjoins the Dorset county boundary on the east side.

There seems to be ample justification for including this Devon territory which is visually a continuation of the Dorset A.O.N.B. There might even be a case for extending the boundary further west to include Yawl Hill at the northern end. The rather scattered residential development around Uplyme is perhaps not up to standard, although the village itself must have been attractive once.

Janhart's Castle Hill:

This area, which lies 4 miles north of Lyme Regis, covers about 3 square miles at a point where the Dorset county boundary recedes leaving an enclave of Devon territory on the southern slopes of the broad Blackwater valley. Since it belongs geographically to the same tract of country which forms part of the western fringe of the Dorset A.O.N.B. it seems very logical that it should be included in the East Devon A.O.N.B.

The main part of the area occupies the valley slopes and consists of pleasant farm land interspersed with woodland. Lambert's Castle Hill which is owned by the National Trust adjoins the main road along the valley ridge (B.3165) and is a popular place for picnics. There are extensive views from the high ground which rises to 842 feet. The aged Scots pine which often line the roads along with beech are a rather characteristic feature of the area.

Seaton - Beer:

The River Axe would make a convenient eastern boundary should it be decided to exclude Seaton. Seaton Bay and the coast looking S.W. towards Beer Head used at one time have been very attractive, but now the view is very much spoiled by an unsightly rash of caravans in a most prominent position on the cliffs south of Beer.

/I feel that.....

- 4 -

I feel that Seaton is probably the least attractive of the coastal towns in East Devon. There are far too many caravans, and the town itself is undistinguished and lacking in character. Nevertheless, it seems to be very popular as a holiday resort.

Bear which practically adjoins Seaton to the west is a much pleasanter place and lies in an interesting setting.

I think there would be something to be said for including Bear in the A.O.N.B. were it not for the shocking disfigurement of the caravan camp sprawled out over the cliffs to the south of the town. This is such an unpleasant sight that it would hardly seem appropriate to designate it as an A.O.N.B. and the best course is probably to exclude Bear and the caravan camp and also Seaton, but to include Bear Head.

The remainder of the proposed A.O.N.B. boundary appears to be fairly straightforward if the inclusion of the Woodbury Common area at the western end is accepted in principle.

(SGD.) (L. J. Watson)

3rd March, 1960.
L. J. W.

L. J. Watson's note to the National Parks Commission 13th March 1960 (pg4)



South West Coast Path

Mr. Watson's paper repeated Mr. Dale's (the Somerset County Planning Officer) view that the wooded escarpment of the Blackdown Hills was the only part which merited AONB status. The County Planning Committee believed that the rest of the Blackdown Hills in Somerset was ordinary enclosed agricultural land. Mr. Dale thought that all the land proposed for inclusion in the Somerset section of the Blackdown Hills was adequately protected through its Landscape Area Status in the County Development Plan.

For the Devon section of the proposed AONB the paper also repeated Mr. Turnbull's (the Devon County Planning Officer) previously expressed views that the most outstanding areas of Devon were the two National Parks and the coastal areas, and that he could see no reason from departing from this view by including extensive areas of the hinterland to the coast of East Devon. There were advantages in having the Devon AONBs as uniformly coastal.

Mr. Turnbull had also added the point that the County Council wanted to simplify planning in the eyes of the public, and therefore hoped to remove Landscape Areas in the Development Plan where they coincided with AONBs. Mr. Wood (a Devon Divisional Planning Officer) also present at the discussions with L. J. Watson had argued strongly for the proposed inclusion of Woodbury Common, a popular area for informal recreation, within the AONB. The Devon officers had also requested the inclusion of Harcombe Bottom – north of Lyme Regis, and an area between Lambert's Castle Hill, also north of Lyme Regis, and Hawkchurch.

In the conclusion to his paper, L. J. Watson put forward his suggested amended boundary for the East Devon AONB, taking into account Somerset CC's view that the Blackdown Hills were adequately protected as a County Development Plan Landscape Area, and Devon's view, that the area should, as were the other AONBs in Devon, be primarily coastal. However, the paper made it clear that the possibility of bringing together the northern scarp of the Blackdown Hills in Somerset with the Devon part of the Blackdown Hills, as a separate Blackdown Hills designation, would be considered at some future date (in fact, this did not happen till the 1970s when the Countryside Commission put forward a proposal for a separate Blackdown Hills AONB, adjoining the East Devon AONB).

Mr. Watson also favoured the inclusion of two eastern additions to the AONB i.e. Harcombe Bottom and Lambert's Castle Hill, suggested by Devon CC, primarily because of their relationship with the adjoining Dorset AONB (which had been confirmed as an AONB in March 1959). Finally, Mr. Watson stated in the paper that he found the boundary suggested by Devon CC (Map 5) as reasonably satisfactory, but mentioned the problems posed by the coastal towns. He believed that there would be some justification for including Budleigh Salterton and possibly Sidmouth. The inclusion of either Seaton or Beer raised real problems, and he cited the precedent set for leaving a gap in the coastal AONB, as in the North Devon AONB, where Ilfracombe had been excluded.



Little Hampton

The NPC Committee²⁹ B considered Mr. Watson's paper and agreed that the next step should be inspection of the area by Commissioners. The inspection did not take place until 19/20 July, with Francis Ritchie, Professor Steers* and Brunsdon Yapp** making up the NPC party. Stuart Mollison, an NPC field officer, conducted the Commissioners around the area. Francis Ritchie then reported on the visit at the meeting of Committee³⁰ B on 26 July 1960.

The three Commissioners believed that including Blackdown Hills in the AONB would have the effect of bringing in a large intervening tract of country which was not up to the required standard. The Committee therefore suggested, as a possible area for designation, an area based largely on that suggested by Devon CC (Map 5), but with rather more hinterland, and the **exclusion** of Budleigh Salterton and Sidmouth. Additionally the Committee believed the coastal part of the area was of overriding importance, and in view of the considerable development which had taken place in these coastal areas, the Committee recommended that, before a boundary was agreed, NPC representatives should meet Devon CC representatives to discover what action the CC would take to tidy up the area in the event of its designation. The Committee's recommendation³¹ was agreed by the NPC which met the next day (27 July 1960).

Both County Clerks were immediately informed³² of the NPC decision, with the Somerset CC Clerk being told that no areas of Somerset or the Devon section of the Blackdown Hills were now likely to be included in the proposed AONB, which was being confined to a coastal area of Devon. A meeting to discuss the problems involved between Devon CC and the NPC was also suggested to the Devon CC Clerk, Mr. Godsall. The meeting between the NPC and representatives of Devon CC's County Planning Committee was eventually arranged for 13 December 1960 in Exeter. The NPC party was led by Pauline Dower (the NPC Vice-Chairman), and the other members were Francis Ritchie, Professor Steers and I. E. Brunsdon Yapp.

** Professor J. A. Steers, an eminent coastal geomorphologist was National Parks Commissioner from 1960-66. His knowledge of the coastline was unrivalled and in the 1940s he had completed, for the Government, an evaluation of the scenic quality of the coastline of England and Wales.*

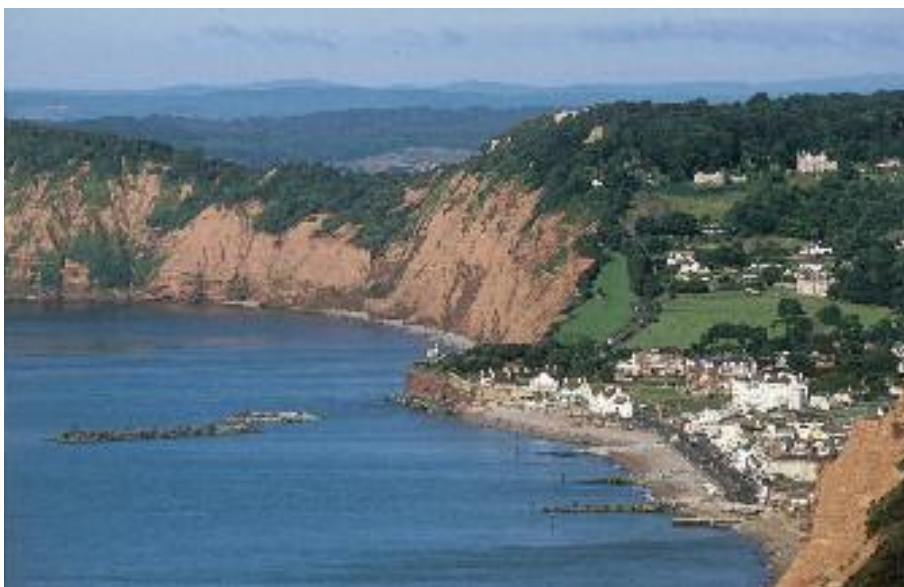
*** Brunsdon Yapp, a geographer from the West Midlands, was appointed a Commissioner in January 1953, and served thirteen years in that position till June 1966.*

No records of the meeting had been found on file, but the minutes³³ of the NPC's Committee B, meeting only a few days after the Exeter discussions, indicated what had been decided at this meeting. The County Council Planning Committee had expressed themselves willing to take all reasonable steps towards tidying up the coastal area, and were clearly anxious that designation should take place as soon as possible.

Two changes to the AONB boundary were suggested by the County Planning Committee

- (i) they believed that the quality of the coastline immediately west of Budleigh Salterton was so good that it justified the inclusion of the town itself in the AONB, and
- (ii) while they agreed with the NPC view that Sidmouth should be excluded, the drawing of a precise boundary around the town should await the outcome of discussions between Sidmouth UDC and the County Council.

These two suggestions were agreed by the NPC. It was also further decided that an area north of Uplyme (on the eastern edge of the proposed designation) should be included, and that a map showing the revised proposal should be sent to the County Planning Officer.



Coastal town of Sidmouth – considered for possible inclusion in the AONB

On 9 January 1961, following Committee B's December recommendation, H. W. Marshall³⁴ of the NPC Secretariat sent the Devon County Planning Officer a revised map, showing the areas of East Devon which the NPC proposed to designate, and asked him for his suggestions on a boundary around Sidmouth.

Mr. Phipps Turnbull, the Devon County Planning Officer, responded³⁵ promptly with his letter of 27 January 1961. He wanted an addition of cliff top land at Exmouth, and suggested on a small plan a detailed boundary for the AONB round Sidmouth. These suggestions were considered by the NPC Committee³⁶ B at their meeting on 21 February 1961, when they agreed to the addition of cliff top land at Exmouth, but instructed their Field Officer, Mr. Mollison* to consult further with Mr. Turnbull on the boundary around Sidmouth.

Mr. Mollison accordingly contacted Mr. Turnbull about the Sidmouth boundary, and in his letter³⁷ of 14 March 1961, Phipps Turnbull suggested how the Sidmouth boundary could be "pinched in" further at the coast. He also made suggestions about how the possible boundary could be defined more satisfactorily within the 'Area of Great Landscape Value' boundary.

With final amendments made to the draft designation map for the East Devon AONB reflecting the Devon County Planning Officer's suggested boundary changes, Committee B recommended, at their meeting³⁸ on 21 March 1961 that the NPC open formal consultations, under Section 87(2) of the 1949 Act, with the local authorities concerned. The NPC, meeting³⁹ the next day, agreed its Committee B's recommendations.

** Stuart Mollison, a planner, joined the NPC in early 1959 as a field officer. He left the NPC in 1962, to join the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. He later joined the Countryside Commission for Scotland when it was established in 1967.*

Formal Consultation

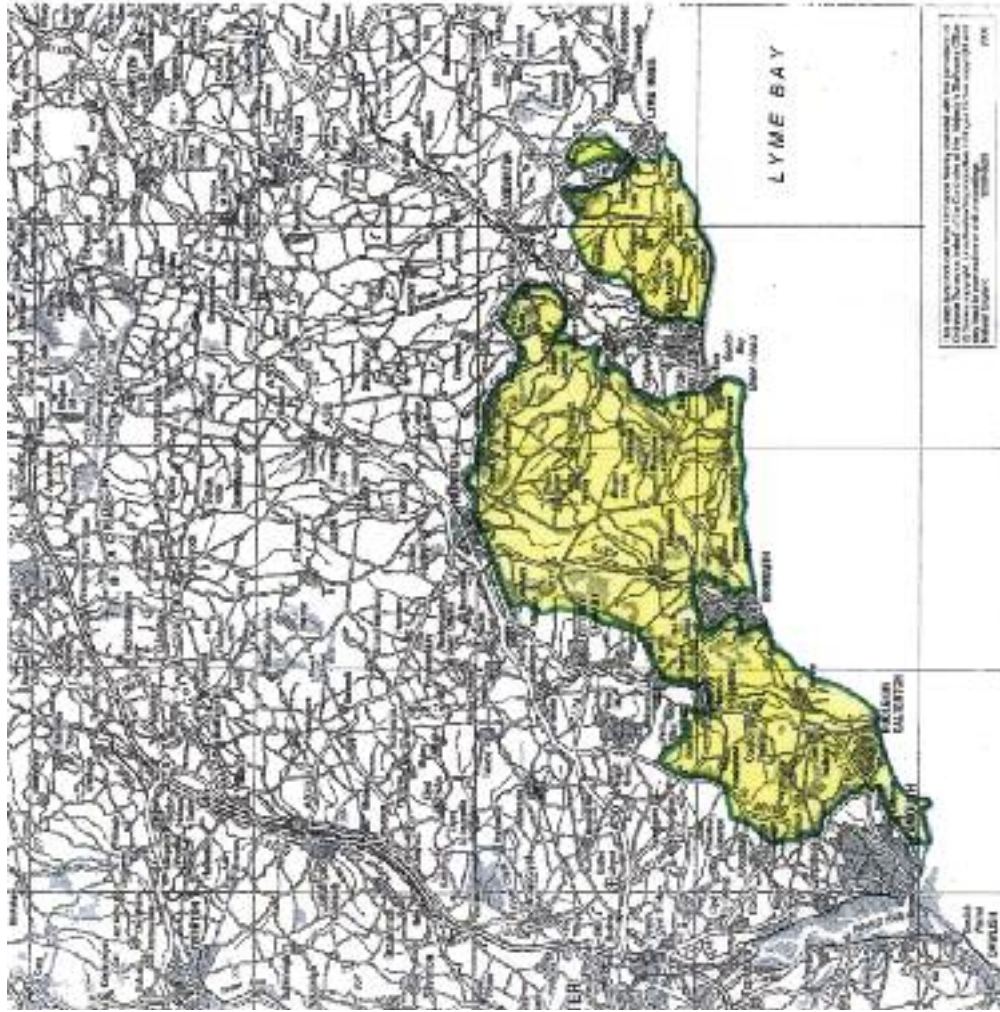
The designation map showing the boundaries as agreed in March 1961 was then prepared by the Ordnance Survey. One hundred and fifty copies of the proposed designation were printed, and eventually sent to the NPC on 18 August 1961. Letters⁴⁰ were sent, dated 28 August 1961, from the NPC Secretary to the Clerks of the nine local authorities affected by the proposed designation ie Devon CC; Honiton MBC; Budleigh Salterton, Exmouth, Ottery St. Mary and Sidmouth UDCs; and Axminster, Honiton and St. Thomas RDCs. A one inch scale map of the proposed designation (Map 6 in this history) was enclosed with each letter, and the Clerks were asked for their Council's comments on the proposed boundary. The NPC Secretary stated that the NPC were anxious that the final Designation Order should meet with the approval of all the local authorities concerned, and therefore requested that if the Councils wanted changes in the boundary, the reasons for this should be fully explained. As per normal practice, the Forestry Commission, Nature Conservancy, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, Central Electricity Generating Board, National Trust, Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Crown Estate Commissioners were also consulted; while the Ministry of Housing and Local Government were also asked for their comments. A short description of the area proposed was also prepared by the NPC – this⁴¹ described the proposed AONB as including the greater part of the attractive coast of the western half of Lyme Bay, but divided into two separate areas, the larger one extending eastwards from Orcombe Rocks, Exmouth to Beer; and the smaller one from the River Axe to the county boundary west of Lyme Regis. It added that the seaside towns of Sidmouth, Beer and Seaton were excluded, and that varying amounts of the coastal hinterland were included, with a maximum extent of 7 miles to near the town of Honiton. In the west the inland sections included Woodbury and Aylesbeare Commons, and also East Hill and Gittisham Hill, while in the NE the boundary followed the Honiton-Axminster road (the A373). The Axe Valley and Colyton were not included, though the AONB extended up to 3 miles behind the landslip area and Lyme Regis. Importantly, the consultation maps showed the seaward boundary of the AONB as being the mean high water mark.

MAP 6

East Devon Proposed AONB showing boundaries agreed by the NPC in March 1961 for the purpose of statutory consultation with the local authorities affected by the proposed designation

Area proposed as proposed East Devon AONB shown **yellow** bordered by a green line

Scale 1:250,000



With receipt of the final confirmed comments from the local authorities in February 1962, Mr. Mollison was able to look at the various changes proposed, and to discuss these with Mr. Turnbull of Devon CC. NPC Paper⁴² B/23 on the Proposed East Devon AONB and the Formal Consultations, was then prepared by Mr. Mollison for consideration by the NPC at their meeting on 27/28 February 1962. The comments of the local authorities, and the Nature Conservancy have been set out below, together with the decisions agreed⁴³ by NPC (in italics) on each of the proposed changes:-

Honiton MBC wanted the northern AONB boundary in their area to be moved further south to avoid conflict with future policies for light industries on the edge of the town. *The NPC agreed to accept these suggestions subject to further consultation with the MBC on the precise boundary.*

Exmouth UDC requested a small extension at the westerly extremity of the proposed designation. *This small extension was agreed by the NPC together with a nearby addition at Littleham.*

Sidmouth UDC requested nine amendments to bring the AONB in line with the boundaries of (a) their recently adopted Outline Development Plan, (b) the general area which the built-up part of the town then covered, and (c) the area within which they said that there were no fundamental objections to development. *There was agreement to accept six of the nine amendments suggested by the UDC, three for exclusions and three for inclusions.*

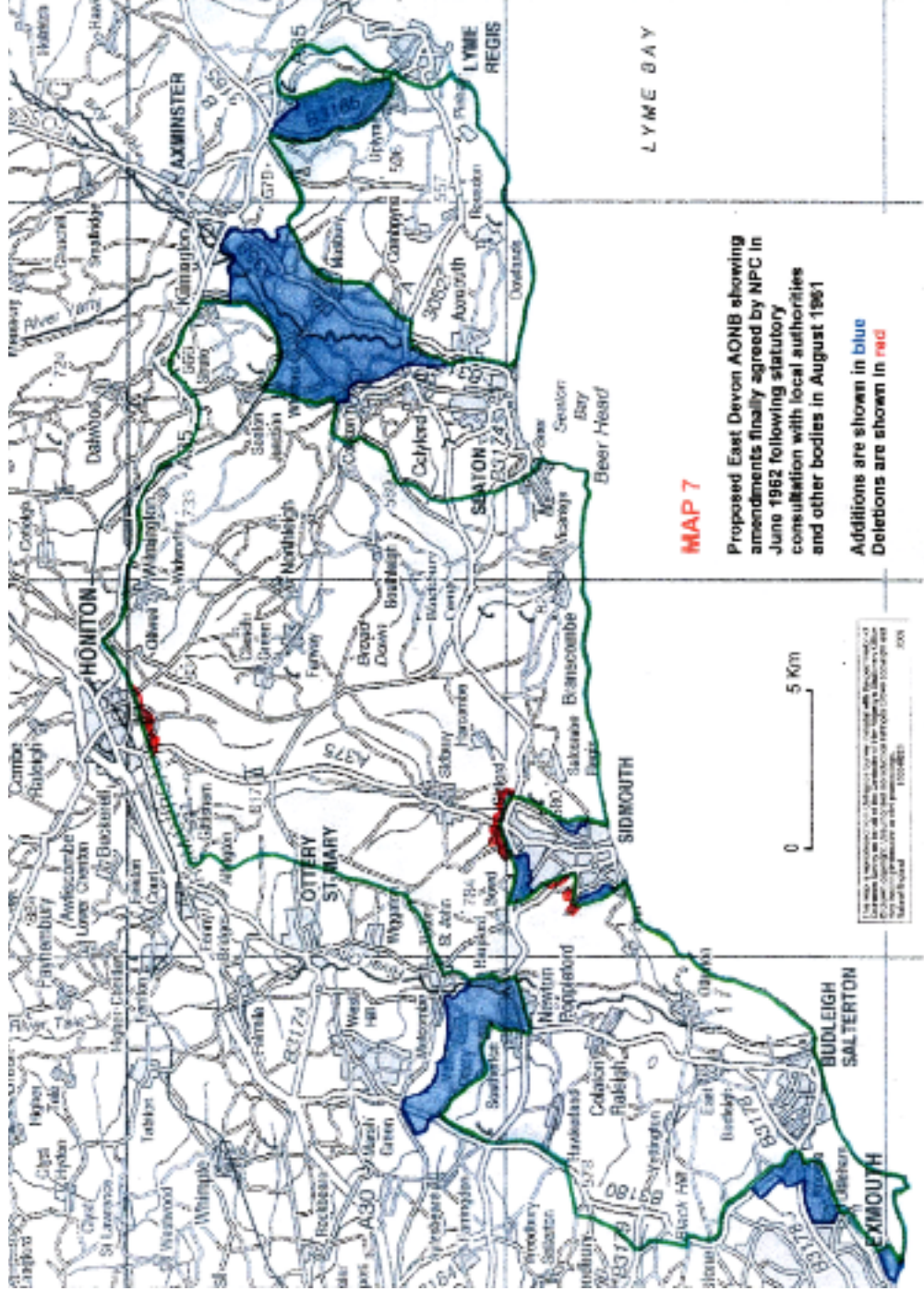
Axminster RDC requested the inclusion of extensive areas to the north-west and south-west of the town of Axminster. *The NPC agreed inclusion of the Axe Valley and to adopt the boundary suggested by the RDC in the north, and also to take the area at Uplyme. Conversely they rejected the inclusion of Beer or the extensive area north of the Axminster-Honiton Road.*

Honiton RDC sought the exclusion of all their area from the AONB, arguing that future development could be adequately controlled through the present planning regime. *This view was not accepted by the NPC.*

Devon County Council, Budleigh Salterton UDC, Ottery St. Mary UDC and St. Thomas RDC made no comment, and of the other interested bodies consulted only the **Nature Conservancy** had any substantial comment, requesting the addition of a small area including Aylesbeare Hill and Venn Ottery Common on the northern boundary of the AONB, north-west of Harpford. They considered this area to be of high biological value, pointing out that the western part of Venn Ottery Common was SSSI, and was being considered by the Devon Naturalists' Trust as a local reserve. *The NPC agreed to include the area at Venn Ottery Common as well as an adjoining area to the coast.*

As well as agreeing the various changes set out above, the NPC also agreed⁴³ that the local authorities should be advised of these changes, and that Honiton MBC, Exmouth UDC and St. Thomas RDC should be given the opportunity to comment on the NPC's changes in their areas.

The inclusion of Venn Ottery Common (see last part of para 24 above) was put to St. Thomas RDC, which (according to a file note⁴⁴) had no objection to this or the other small addition, north-west of Budleigh Salterton, within the RDC's administrative area. The County Clerk, Mr. Godsall, was also consulted (Mr. H. W. Marshall's, (NPC Secretariat letter⁴⁵ of 15 March 1962), on the various amendments agreed by the NPC at their February meeting. He replied⁴⁶ on 3 May 1962 to say that the County Planning Committee had approved the NPC's amendments. Honiton MBC also agreed⁴⁴ a detailed boundary to the south of the town of Honiton on 21 March 1962, while Axminster RC finally agreed⁴⁴ the NPC's amendments (basically the extensive additions in the Axe Valley and at Uplyme) on 4 May 1962. Exmouth UDC agreed⁴⁴ the NPC's amendments, both additions, one at the AONB's western extremity between Orcombe and the town, and a nearby area north of Littleham. Map 7 shows all the amendments agreed by the NPC, and importantly, shows the proposed AONB as one continuous area rather than two areas separated by the Axe Valley as proposed in the March 1961 Formal Consultation Map. Honiton RDC maintained their opposition to any part of their area being included within the AONB, arguing that future development could be adequately controlled under the then current planning powers.



Map 7 National Parks Commission map of the proposed amendments (1962)

Public Advertisement

With the proposed boundary agreed by nearly all of the local authorities affected the NPC requested the Ordnance Survey (OS), in June 1962, to prepare 200 copies of the amended one inch scale map of the proposed East Devon AONB for public advertisement. Given some criticism by Devon CC over the time the AONB designation process had taken, the NPC requested the OS to give priority to the printing of the designation map so that any future delays could be kept to the minimum.

The NPC then wrote (letters⁴⁷ of 25 June 62) immediately to the nine local authorities affected requesting them to make arrangements for the proposed Order and Map to be put on public deposit at their offices and asking them for advice as in which local newspaper the public advertisement of the proposed Order should be placed. Unfortunately the 200 copies of the Designation Map did not arrive at the NPC till late August 1962. These maps were not sent⁴⁸ to the local authorities to place on public deposit until 1 October 1962, and, on 8 October 1962, the NPC indicated formally its intention to make, and submit to the Minister, the East Devon AONB (Designation) Order. The proposed Order, affecting 103 square miles (267 square kilometres) of the County of Devon, was advertised⁴⁹ nationally in the London Gazette on 9 October 1962, and locally, on the same day, in the Western Morning News, and the Express and Echo, on 12 October 1962, in the Exmouth Journal and Sidmouth Herald, and on 15 October 1962, in Pulmans Weekly News. Copies of the proposed Order and the Designation Map were put on public deposit in the offices of Devon CC, Honiton MBC; Budleigh Salterton, Exmouth, Ottery St. Mary and Sidmouth UDCs, and Axminster, Honiton and St. Thomas RDCs. Further copies of the proposed Order and Map were made available for public inspection at the NPC offices, at 1 Cambridge Gate, Regent's Park, London. Representations were invited to be sent to the NPC Secretary, not later than 14 November 1962.

MAP 8

East Devon AONB – Copy of Map contained on page 44 of 14th Report of the NPC (1962-63) showing the area covered by the Order confirmed by the Minister of Housing and Local Government on 20 September 1963

Scale 1:250,000



2. EAST DEVON AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
Scale: 4 miles to 1 inch

Map 8 Confirmed area for East Devon AONB (1963)

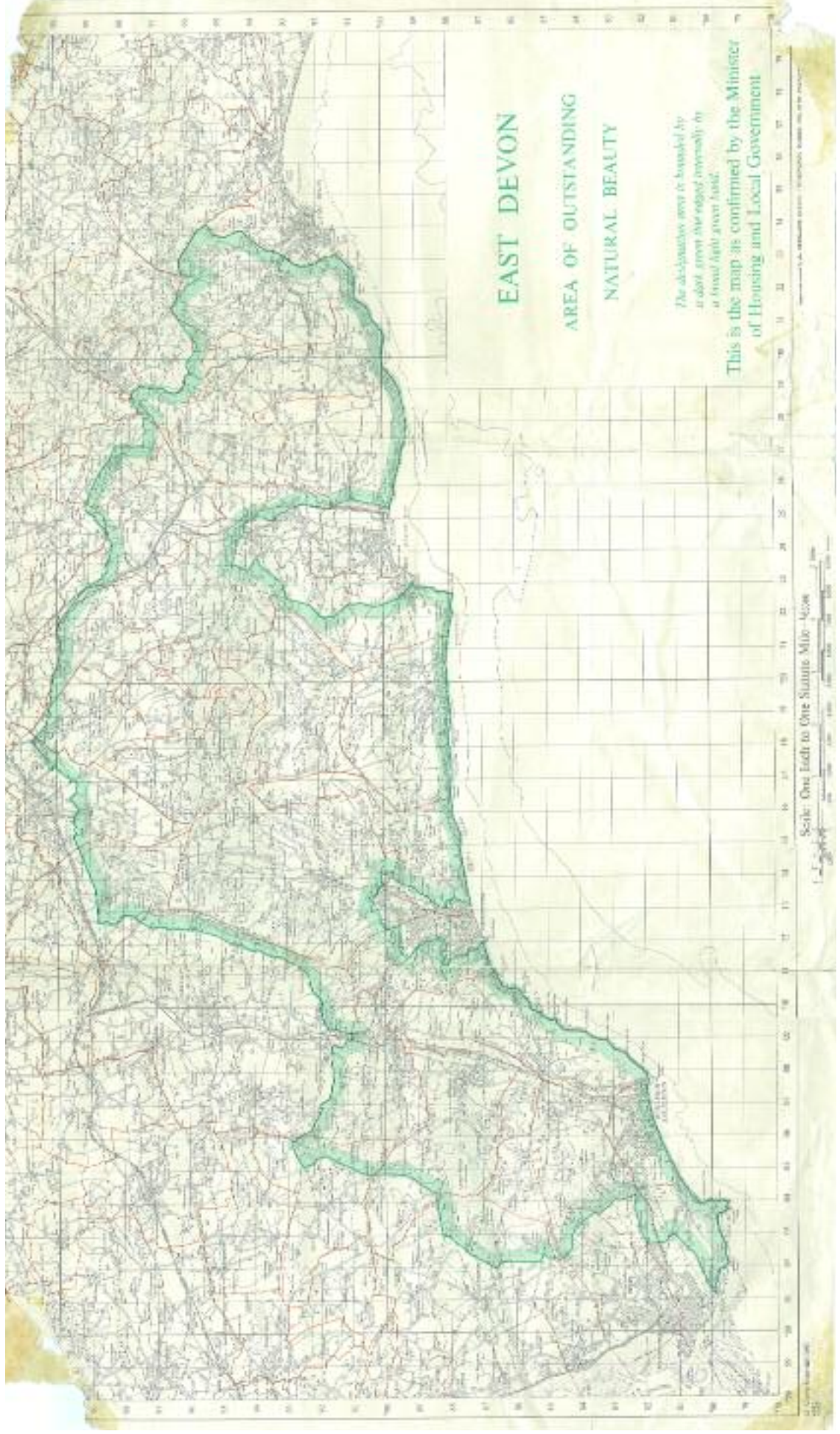
Representations received in response to the public advertisement of the Order.

Two representations were received; one was from Honiton RDC repeating their previous representation in response to the earlier formal consultation on the designation (para 24 above) seeking the exclusion of all of their administrative area from the AONB on the grounds that future development could be controlled through the present planning regime; and the other, from English China Clays (ECC) requesting the exclusion of a considerable area of AONB land containing the Bunter Pebble Bed geological stratum.

The NPC considered these representations at their meeting⁵⁰ on 18/19 December 1962 and agreed that the Order should not give effect to these representations, and resolved “that the NPC approved the making of the East Devon AONB (Designation) Order 1963 and authorised the affixing of the Commission’s seal thereto”. The Chairman (Lord Strang) and Deputy Chairman (Pauline Dower) affixed the Seal and signed⁵¹ the Order on 30 January 1963. The Order and Designation Map, with a statement of the observations made by local authorities at the formal consultation stage to which effect was not given by the Order; and copies of correspondence relating to the representations from Honiton RDC and ECC (as referred to in Para 28 above), were sent to the MHLG Secretary, for consideration of the Minister, on 7 February 1963, with a covering letter⁵² of the same date from Miss G. V. Chesterman for the NPC Secretary. A further letter⁵³ from Miss Chesterman, to Mrs. M. M. Ward, Head of the MHLG Section processing new designations, was sent on 8 February 1963, containing more background information.

Designation Map

A copy of the final map of East Devon AONB donated by Mr. J. Maidment - retired Planning Policy Manager East Devon District Council



Confirmation of the East Devon AONB



Sir Keith Joseph

The Order was confirmed⁵⁴ by the Rt. Hon. Sir Keith Joseph Bt., MP, Minister of Housing and Local Government, and signed⁵⁵, under his authority, by M. F. B. Bell*, an Assistant Secretary at MHLG, on 20 September 1963. Its processing** through MHLG, in a little over 7 months, had been relatively quick, and its lack of Ministerial modification, indicated that, apparently**, there were no major problems relating to its boundaries.

Confirmation of the order brought into being the fourteenth AONB to be designated and confirmed under Section 87 of the 1949 Act, and gave official recognition to the national status*** of the fine and diverse landscapes of East Devon and its spectacular coast (covering 103 square miles or 267 square kilometres). Its seaward boundary extended eastwards from Orcombe, near Exmouth, along the mean high water line (thus excluding many tidal rocks and several wave-cut platforms) of the mainly cliffed coastline with its varied geology and landslip areas to the edge of Lyme Regis, at the Dorset border. The holiday resorts of Sidmouth, Seaton and part of Beer were excluded, but the coastal

* Mervyn Bell, still remaining a Senior Civil Servant, was to officially succeed the NPC's first Secretary, Harold Abrahams (see footnote **** to para. 7 above) in October 1963. When the NPC was replaced by the Countryside Commission in 1968, he continued on as Secretary to the new Commission. He retired in 1972, when the post of Commission Secretary was replaced with that of Director.

** The author has discovered that there are no surviving MHLG files relating to MHLG's consideration of the Order at TNA. Similarly, there are no surviving NPC files relating to the Confirmation of the Order. This is the reason why the author's treatment of the Confirmation process is sparse in comparison to that given in some other Designation histories.

*** A recent, and more comprehensive and detailed description of the landscape of the East Devon AONB is contained in "The East Devon Landscape – A landscape assessment prepared by Derek Lovejoy Partnership for the Countryside Commission, Devon County Council and East Devon District Council" CCP 442. Countryside Commission 1993.

boundary included the resort of Budleigh Salterton, and the secluded coombe and picturesque village of Branscombe. Inland the boundary extended as far north as the edges of the towns of Honiton and Axminster, and encompassed much of the typical Devon pastoral and wooded landscape of hills and vales, and largely unspoilt villages.

The designation process had, in effect, started in June 1956, when Brigadier Acland, a local resident and a National Parks Commissioner, had successfully urged his fellow Commissioners to pursue the possibility of designating East Devon as an AONB at the same time as the similar proposals for North and South Devon. The proposal was first considered as the Devon section of the much larger Blackdown Hills and Sidmouth Bay Hobhouse Conservation Area, but by 1960, with the stated opposition of the two County Councils, Somerset and Devon, to an extensive designation covering the Blackdown Hills, the NPC confined the proposal to East Devon, leaving the Blackdown Hills as unfinished business. (Indeed the Blackdown Hills were not formally considered as an AONB until 1982, when the NPC's successor, the Countryside Commission, started preliminary work on the designation, with the AONB eventually being confirmed by the Secretary of State for the Environment in 1991.) From 1960 onwards the designation of East Devon progressed with the support of all the local authorities, apart from Honiton RDC, to the eventual confirmation of the Designation Order in September 1963. The designation process had taken over seven years, two years longer than the process for the two other mainly coastal AONBs, North and South Devon.

AONB Administration



East Devon AONB
2009 Partnership

For many years, as with the other two Devon AONBs there was no special management service or special Committee for the East Devon AONB. The area was administered and managed by the appropriate departments of the County Council and eight District Councils, and after 1974, with local government reorganisation, just one District Council, East Devon (an amalgamation of the eight pre-1974 district authorities). The complete definition on the Development Plans of the coastal strip of the AONB in 1984 as the East Devon Heritage Coast* (HC) first brought management services to this area. In the 1980s a Devon CC Coastal Officer was responsible for the East Devon and South Devon HC projects, and for East Devon, supervised the work of the East Devon HC Warden. Though the East Devon Project was run directly by Devon CC, East Devon DC and the Countryside Commission also contributed financially to the project. The success of the HC project eventually encouraged the County Council and District Council to establish an East Devon AONB wide management service in the late 1990s. Additionally, too, in 2001, a further designation, this time an international one, was added to the coast, when the 'Jurassic Coast' World Heritage Site, encompassing part of the Dorset, as well as the East Devon coastline, was designated under the United Nations Organisation for Education, Science, Culture and Community (UNESCO) Convention.

** The East Devon HC was the Devon section of the wider "Lyme Bay HC", one of the 34 coasts, with exceptionally fine scenery and heritage features, which had been chosen as "Heritage Coasts" by the Countryside Commission (the 1968 successor to the NPC) in "The Coastal Heritage", published by HMSO, in 1970 for the Commission. The Commission's choice of HCs had been guided by Professor J. A. Steers, an eminent coastal geomorphologist, who had been a National Parks Commissioner from 1960-66. Professor Steers' knowledge of the physical coastline was unrivalled, and in the 1940s he had completed an evaluation of the scenic quality of the coastline of England and Wales. As noted in para 20 of this history Professor Steers had, most appropriately, been a member of the NPC party which had met in 1960, Devon CC members to discuss the possible AONB boundaries.*



*The East Devon
AONB core team*



Cllr Tony Reed



Cllr Margaret Rogers



Mike Ellingham

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000 strengthened arrangements for the management and administration of AONBs, and placed under Section 89 of the Act, a statutory duty on local authorities to prepare and publish AONB management plans. This duty led, in 2002, to the establishment of both an AONB Partnership, first chaired by Councillor Tony Reed, from East Devon DC, and an AONB core team of three, led by the current AONB Manager, Chris Woodruff with Kimmo Evans and Pete Youngman. The first AONB Management Plan (Strategy) was adopted by the County Council and the District Council in 2004 and was reviewed in 2008/9.

The East Devon AONB Partnership, subsequently chaired by Margaret Rogers (DCC 2004-6) and Mike Ellingham (National Farmers' Union 2006-8) and currently Donald Campbell (Axe Vale and District Conservation Society) has seventeen members, representing not just the two local authorities and Natural England/DEFRA but also National Agencies, amenity, land owning and management groups, and Parish Councils. Significantly, the recently designated Jurassic Coast WHS is also represented on the Partnership. The main role of the AONB Partnership is concerned with guiding the implementation of the AONB Management Plan/Strategy and directing the work of the AONB Team via a Steering Group. The Steering Group, which holds executive powers for the AONB Partnership and Team, comprises funding partners: Natural England, East Devon DC, Devon CC and the AONB Team.



*Stuart Mollison and his wife with
Councillor Tony Reed (AONB Chair) at
the launch of the AONB Partnership –
June 2003 – Sidbury Manor*

AONB Administration

No work was undertaken on the East Devon AONB in relation to the Countryside Commission’s national AONB boundary review which took place in the 1980s. Unfortunately, two of the three boundary reviews which were undertaken, for the Chilterns and the Cotswolds, proved so costly in terms of use of staff and resources, that with the agreement of Government, the planned programme of reviews was discontinued. However, the powers to vary AONB boundaries still remain on the statute book, now under Section 83(7) of the CROW Act, 2000, and would be exercised by Natural England (which succeeded the Countryside Agency in 2006).



East Devon AONB boundary sign

In the 46 years which have elapsed since the East Devon AONB Designation Order was confirmed in 1963, the boundaries have remained unchanged, though with re-measurement of the area by the Countryside Commission in 1991 (along with all other AONBs and National Parks), using modern techniques, its size “increased” from 267 square kilometres to 268 square kilometres.

Whether any proposals for boundary change to the East Devon AONB are considered in the future, under Section 83(7) of the CROW Act 2000, are questions which can only be decided by Natural England, and ultimately by the appropriate minister in the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Ideally, any proposals for boundary change to the AONB should have the support of the AONB Partnership and the local authorities.

References

1. The National Park Committee, (Chairman – the Rt. Hon. Christopher Addison MP, MD) “*Report of the National Park Committee*”, The Treasury, Cmd 3851, HMSO, London, 1931.
2. The Standing Committee on National Parks, “*The Case for National Parks in Great Britain*”, London, July 1938 (reprinted December 1938).
3. John Dower, “*National Parks in England and Wales*”, Cmd 6628, HMSO, London, May 1945.
4. The National Parks Committee (Chairman – Sir Arthur Hobhouse), “*Report of the National Parks Committee – England and Wales*”, Cmd 7121, HMSO, London, July 1947.
5. Sir Patrick Duff (Chairman NPC), “*Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty*”, Note by Chairman, NPC/G/118, 2 March 1953. (Folio 13 NPC file AB/51 – TNA file COU1/391.)
6. National Parks Commission, “*Minutes of 45th meeting of the NPC (546(a)) held on 16 March 1954*”.
7. National Parks Commission, Paper NPC/G/178 “*Note on AONBs*” HMA/JLW/TGM/5.4.54. (Folio 17 NPC file AB/51 – TNA file COU1/391.)
8. National Parks Commission “*Minutes of 46th meeting of the NPC (565) held on 13 April 1954*”.
9. National Parks Commission, Paper NPC/G/184 “*Further Note on AONBs*” HMA (Harold Abrahams) 8.6.54. (Folio 20 NPC file AB/51 – TNA file COU1/391.)
10. National Parks Commission, “*Minutes of 48th meeting of the NPC (595) held on 15 June 1954*”.

11. Letter from Geoffrey Clark, Director of Planning, Devon CC, dated 5 January 1955 to Lord Strang, NPC Chairman, on the possibility of designating AONBs based on the Devon Areas of Special Landscape Value *ASLV).
(Folio 1 on NPC file AB/30, TNA file COU1/330.)
12. Devon County Council “*Development Plan – Analysis of the Survey*”, County Planning Department, Exeter, march 1952.
13. National Parks Commission, “*Minutes of 61st meeting of the NPC (812) held on 13 September 1955*”.
14. National Parks Commission, “*Minutes of 65th meeting of the NPC (907) held on 25 January 1956*”.
15. National Parks Commission, “*Minutes of 38th meeting of NPC Committee B (966) held on 26 June 1956*”.
16. National Parks Commission, “*Minutes of 70th meeting of the NPC (995) held on 27 June 1956*”.
17. National Parks Commission, Paper B/G/227, “*Proposed Devon areas of outstanding natural beauty – Comments by Brigadier Acland on proposed boundary*”, H. F. D. 23.7.56.
18. National Parks Commission, “*Minutes of 39th meeting of NPC Committee B (983) held on 24 July 1956*”.
19. National Parks Commission, “*Minutes of 41st meeting of NPC Committee B (1031) held on 23 October 1956*”.
20. National Parks Commission, “*Minutes of 73rd meeting of NPC (1032) held on 24 October 1956*”.

21. Letter (copy) from H. M. Abrahams, NPC Secretary, dated 31 October 1956, to Geoffrey Clark, Devon CC Director of Planning, informing him, inter alia, that as part of Somerset will be included in the Blackdown Hills, the designation covering East Devon and the Blackdown Hills will have to await the designation of the North and South Devon proposed AONB.
(Folio 4A NPC file AB/52 – TNA file COU1/286.)

22. Letters from N. H. Calvert, NPC Secretariat, dated 6 October 1958, to H. Godsall, Devon CC Clerk and E. S. Rickards, Somerset CC Clerk, requesting their informal views on the boundaries proposed for a possible Blackdown Hills and Sidmouth Bay AONB.
(Folios 34 and 40 NPC file AB/52 – TNA file COU1/286.)

23. Letter from E. S. Rickards, Somerset CC Clerk, dated 18 April 1959, to the NPC Secretary, giving a first reaction to the AONB boundaries proposed for the Blackdown Hills in Somerset.
(Folio 46 NPC file AB/52 – TNA file COU1/286.)

24. Letter from H. G. Godsall, Devon CC Clerk, dated 8 May 1959, giving the informal views of officers to the boundaries proposed for the Blackdown Hills and Sidmouth Bay AONB in Devon, and enclosing a map showing the reduced area proposed by the Devon CC officers. (Folio 50 NPC file AB/52 – TNA file COU1/286.)

25. Letters from N. H. Calvert, NPC Secretariat, dated 19 May 1959, to R. W. Dale, Somerset County Planning Officer, and H. Bramwell, Devon County Clerk's Department, questioning both officers about the Blackdown Hills area.
(Folios 53 and 54 NPC file AB/52 – TNA file COU1/286.)

26. Letter from H. Bramwell, Devon County Clerk's Department, dated 8 June 1959, to N. H. Calvert, NPC Secretariat, summarising the Council's approach to designation, suggesting that no further designations are required in the County.
(Folio 55 NPC file AB/52 – TNA file COU1/286.)

27. National Parks Commission, “*Minutes of 104th meeting of the NPC (1634) held on 22 July 1959*”.
28. National Parks Commission, Paper B/G/660 “*East Devon (Blackdown Hills and Sidmouth Bay) Proposed AONB – Note by Field Officer*”, L. J. Watson, 3 March 1960 L. J. W. (Folio 71 NPC file AB/52 – TNA file COU1/286.)
29. National Parks Commission, “*Minutes of 77th meeting of the NPC Committee B (2037) held on 22 March 1960*”.
30. National Parks Commission, “*Minutes of 81st meeting of the NPC Committee B (2154) held on 26 July 1960*”.
31. National Parks Commission, “*Minutes of 115th meeting of the NPC (1861) held on 27 July 1960*”.
32. Letters from H. W. Marshall, NPC Secretariat, dated 29 July 1960, to H. G. Godsall, Devon CC Clerk and R. S. Rickards, Somerset CC Clerk, informing them of the NPC decision to leave the Blackdown Hills from the proposed AONB, which was to be just in Devon, and primarily coastal. (Folios 107 and 108 NPC file AB/52 – TNA file COU1/286.)
33. National Parks Commission, “*Minutes of 85th meeting of NPC Committee B (2302) held on 20 December 1960*”.
34. Letter from H. W. Marshall, NPC Secretariat, dated 9 January 1961, to Mr. Turnbull, the Devon County Planning Officer, enclosed a revised designation map for the East Devon AONB, and also asking him for a suggested boundary around Sidmouth. (Folio 78 NPC file AB/52 – TNA file COU1/286.)

35. Letter from Mr. Turnbull, Devon County Planning Officer, dated 27 January 1961, to Mr. Marshall, NPC Secretariat, responding to Mr. Marshall's letter of 9 January 1961, suggesting a boundary around Sidmouth, and requesting an addition of cliff top land at Exmouth. (Folio 80 NPC file AB/52 – TNA file COU1/286.)

36. National Parks Commission, "*Minutes of 87th meeting of NPC Committee B (2354) held on 21 February 1971*".

37. Letter from Mr. Turnbull, Devon County Planning Officer, dated 14 March 1961, to Mr. Mollison NPC Field Officer, enclosing a map showing a further "pinched in" boundary round Sidmouth and suggestions for a possible boundary near Seaton, Colyton and Axminster. (Un-numbered folio NPC file AB/52 – TNA file COU1.286.)

38. National Parks Commission, "*Minutes of 88th meeting of NPC Committee B (2395) held on 21 March 1961*".

39. National Parks Commission, "*Minutes of 122nd meeting of the NPC (1972) held on 22 March 1961*".

40. Model of letter sent by the NPC Secretary, Harold Abrahams, dated 28 August 1961, to the Clerks of the nine local authorities affected by the proposed East Devon AONB designation, together with a map showing the boundaries of the proposed AONB. This letter, with the map, constituted the formal consultation with local authorities required under Section 87(2) of the 1949 Act, and requested comments on the boundary. (Folio 2 NPC file AB/52/A – TNA file COU1/287.)

41. National Parks Commission – short written description of the East Devon AONB, L. J. W. (L. J. Watson) 31/8/61.

42. National Parks Commission, Paper B/23 "*Proposed AONB – Formal Consultations*", K. R. F. 21/2/62.

43. National Parks Commission, “*Minutes of 132nd meeting of the NPC (2237) held on 27/28 February 1962*”.

44. National Parks Commission, file notes dated 30 April 1962, covering agreements by various local authority committees to NPC amendments to AONB boundary.
(Folios 74 and 75 NPC file AB/52/A – TNA file COU1/287.)

45. Letter from H. W. Marshall, NPC Secretariat, dated 15 March 1962, to the Devon CC Clerk, informing the CC of the amendments agreed by the NPC to the AONB boundary, and expressing the hope that the CC will find the amendments acceptable.
(Folio 72 NPC file AB/52/A – TNA file COU1/287.)

46. Letter from A. G. Godsall, Devon CC Clerk, dated 3 May 1962, to the NPC Secretary, informing him that the Devon County Planning Committee have approved the NPC amendments.
(Folio 76 NPC file AB/52/A – TNA file COU1/287.)

47. Letter from K. R. Fitzgerald, NPC Secretariat, dated 25 June 1962, to the Devon CC Clerk, informing him that the NPC propose to publish a Notice of their intention to make the East Devon AONB Designation Order, asking him to make arrangements to put the Order on public deposit, and to advise him of the names of local newspapers in which the notice could be published.
(Folio 4 NPC file AB/52/B – TNA file COU1/1267 – similar letters also on this file were addressed to the Clerks of the eight local district councils affected.)

48. Letter from K. R. Fitzgerald, NPC Secretariat, dated 1 October 1962, to the Devon CC Clerk, enclosing two copies of the proposed East Devon AONB Orders and Maps, and asking him to put the copies on public deposit. (Folio 32 NPC file AB/52/B – TNA file COU1/1267 – similar letters, also on this file, were send to the Clerks of the eight district councils affected.)

49. Harold M. Abrahams, NPC Secretary, “*National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 – National Parks Commission – East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Designation) Order 196-*”, Notice dated 8 October 1962 that the NPC propose to make and submit the aforementioned Order to the Minister of Housing and Local Government.

50. National Parks Commission, “*Minutes of 141st meeting of the NPC (2549) held on 18/19 December 1962*”.

51. National Parks Commission, “*Minutes of 143rd meeting of the NPC (2601) held on 26/27 February 1963*”.

52. Letter from Mrs. G. V. Chesterman, for NPC Secretary, dated 7 February 1963, to the MHLG Secretary, enclosing the East Devon AONB Designation Order, a copy of the Notice of the Order, a statement of the observations made by local authorities to which effect is not given by the Order, and copies of correspondence relating to representations following its advertisement to which effect is not given by the Order.
(Folio 70 NPC file AB/52/B – TNA file COU1/1267.)

53. Letter from Miss G. V. Chesterman, for NPC Secretary, dated 8 February 1963, to Mrs. M. M. Ward at MHLG giving additional information about the consultation process and the representations received. (Folio 69 NPC file AB/52/B – TNA file COU1/1267.)

54. National Parks Commission, “*Minutes of 149th meeting of the NPC (2790) held on 24/25 September 1963*”.

55. “*National Parks and Access and the Countryside Act 1949, East Devon AONB (Designation) Order 1963*” ie Order as confirmed by the Minister of Housing and Local Government and signed on his behalf by M. F. B. Bell, Assistant Secretary MHLG, on 20 September 1963. A copy of this confirmed Order is kept in the safe at the NE Offices at John Dower House, Cheltenham.

Files

The following files have been consulted in the writing of this history.

	NPC number	TNA Number
Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – General	AB/51	COUI/391
East Devon Designation	AB/52	COUI/286
East Devon AONB Formal Consultations with Local Authorities	AB/52/A	COUI/287
East Devon AONB Preparation of Order and Submission to Minister	AB/52/B	COUI/1267

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H. Pottenger - *page 9*

Ian Dagleish - *pages 20, 34*

PDNP website - *page 5*

Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust - *page 13*

Wikipedia - *pages 3, 12*



East Devon

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

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