

South Downs National Park Public Inquiry

Part 2: Boundary

Historic Boundary Decisions – A Personal Recollection

by

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on behalf of



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Introduction

1. I am Europe's most knowledgeable botanist and have been involved in conservation work all my adult life. I have written a number of books of which the *Flower Key* is perhaps the best known. I am also a co-author of *The Flora of Hampshire*. I have written numerous academic papers. I have lived in East Hampshire for over 40 years.

A Personal Recollection of Historic Boundary Decisions

2. My first involvement with efforts to conserve the South Downs dates back to the war years when I became involved in the Nature Reserves Conservation Committee. At that time, terms like 'National Parks' and 'Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty' were not used, we talked of 'Conservation Areas'.
3. When we first looked at the South Downs in Sussex we recognised the need to conserve the chalk hills themselves and, indeed, I believe this was the driving force behind the Hobhouse recommendation for the boundary of a South Downs National Park. But I was one of the leading proponents of the view that areas to the north of the Downs were of equal worth and also should be conserved. The most important area in my view, and that of others, is that known as the western Weald. Here the variety in geology and habitat combines to form a quite exceptionally valuable area that had real merit not only in its own right but also through its intrinsic inter-connectivity with the South Downs. We believed that by including that area we would enhance considerably the recreational value of the Conservation Area. Precisely the same thinking led us to the view that in the Peak District the Conservation Area should not just include the White Peak area of Carboniferous Limestone but also the Dark Peak of Millstone Grit. Far from wanting to restrict Conservation Areas to one type of geology, landscape or habitat we felt that variety was most important.
4. In Sussex I was particularly keen to see included the sandy heaths of the Folkestone Beds of the Lower Greensand like Iping Common, the river valleys (particularly the Rother and Arun) and the Hythe Bed uplands of Black Down and Woolbeding.
5. We considered other areas like the High Weald but concluded these would have to be dealt with separately because of the lower quality area separating it from the South Downs. We also considered whether the area should extend into Surrey but concluded that this would be taking it too far away from the South Downs and in any case the county border was a convenient administrative boundary. I should add that county boundaries are not just lines drawn on a map they often reflect significant geological features, topography, soils, vegetation and cultural factors. It is, for example, no accident that the boundary between Sussex and Hampshire is drawn where the Tertiary geological formation known as the Portsdown syncline ceases since this results in a change in land forms and vegetation: the Forest of Bere does not extend into Sussex. The boundary between Surrey and Sussex reflects the fact that the Weald in Sussex was colonised from the south whereas Surrey was colonised from the north.
6. We did not begin to consider East Hampshire until later. Though we had long recognised the value of Butser Hill, Old Winchester Hill and the Hangers, the area was less familiar to us at the time. Later, of course, I became very much more

knowledgeable about this very important area and indeed have done much work since to document it's biodiversity, particularly the Hangers, Woolmer Forest and the fine Greensand sunken lanes.

7. By the time the boundaries of the AONBs were under consideration in the 1950s, the rationale behind the conclusions reached by the Nature Reserves Conservation Committee in the 1940s was very much accepted (that the area should extend beyond the Chalk). For example, the boundary of the East Hampshire AONB is more or less what we drew up a decade earlier.
8. I am personally delighted that the fruits of our work of over 50 years ago is now coming to fruition in the formation of the South Downs National Park. In particular I am delighted that the arguments I mounted back then in support of the intrinsic value of the western Weald and its links to the South Downs are still accepted as valid today.
9. I hope it can be seen from this that thinking evolved over time and arguments that might not have been fully accepted in the 1940s were later acknowledged. Indeed, thinking continues to evolve and I am personally delighted that the designated boundary has been extended beyond that of the AONB to include important areas like Woolmer Forest.
10. It is all too easy for people today to read into events of 50 or more years ago an interpretation that is unfamiliar to those of us who were around at the time. I appreciate these reflections are not backed by documentation, but I have an extremely good memory. I trust this will be of some use in piecing together the events of that time.