

Visitor Control at Kennemerduinen

Due west of Amsterdam lies the Kennemerduinen National Park: 1,240 ha (3,064 acres) of coast and dunes with its own particular and fascinating flora and fauna. Two and a half million people live within 30-odd kilometers of this national park and many of them seek the sea for recreation. In good weather the park may welcome as many as eighteen to twenty thousand people daily, or some three quarters of a million visitors a year.

We have found it is possible to offer these people all the room and possibilities for leisure they want and also to protect the vulnerable park landscape with its flora and fauna from destruction.

If the Kennemerduinen National Park had been given over to recreation without any special steps having been taken towards its protection, it would have been severely damaged within a few years. The sand is very fine and easily blown away, and the covering layer of plants and humus is often thin and vulnerable. It is thus easy to cause "wandering" dunes, a highly destructive process. In this part of Holland the dunes with their flora and fauna are the last "green oases." However, in spite of the heavy visitor load, the park and its living resources have remained practically undamaged. How did we solve this classic problem? Our solution lay in modification of the landscape in limited areas close to the park entrances to adapt them to the requirements of those visitors who come mainly for leisure activities.

This development is the result of special observation studies. We found that more than 90 percent of the people who visit this national park seldom do so specifically to look at the flora and fauna but rather because it provides an opportunity to be in the open air together with other visitors, to play, to sunbathe or simply to be lazy. Even those who just want to stroll often seem to avoid the very quiet places in the center of the park.

We did not use interviewing for this study as we established early that most of our visitors do not realize what type of scenery they prefer. Also they hardly know what they are going to do in the park before they arrive there; it all depends on the climatological circumstances, the mood they are in, their physical fitness at the time, and so on. The parts of the park most frequented by visitors were ascertained by observation, entrance gate data and numbered tickets. A small army of assistants would check these tickets at various spots throughout the park and note down where the visitors preferred to stay.

We found that the majority looked for a so-called "open" landscape, that is, an area with small groups of trees or shrubs, an open space and partially bare sand. The presence of water (paddling-pools) also proved to be of some importance. Such a landscape has a recreation capacity of about 125 persons per hectare. The so-called "fringe effect" was also very obvious. Our visitors tend to prefer one type of landscape where it borders on another: a hedgerow, the edges of woods, beaches, etc. Most of our visitors show very little preference for dense woods or shrubs. These preferences mean that it is possible to keep nearly all the visitors more or less concentrated in particular places by surrounding the leisure areas with a girdle of dense woods. In the areas of the park which we have zoned for recreation use, we have provided many open spaces in woods and shrubs in order to create "fringes." Large paddling pools covering about 7 ha (18 acres) also have been made. These are sheltered against the wind, which is why large numbers of visitors prefer them over the beach of the North Sea. In the areas which surround these pools (30 to 40 ha) all sorts of recreational activities are allowed.

It is very important, we have found, that the preferred type of

area be located at a short distance from an entrance. Driving motorcars, motorcycles or motorized bicycles through the national park is not allowed except on a short track just behind the first row of dunes. Visitors coming to the park in vehicles not only avoid walking but also bring a lot of equipment with them, such as air mattresses, chairs and tents, which they do not want to carry very far. Parking places have been made, but not so large that the number of visitors who use the car park can exceed the capacity of the nearby leisure area.

The attraction of the North Sea beach has been enhanced by making it accessible: a passage has been dug through the dunes, from the end of the road where a parking area large enough to hold 1,250 motorcars is located. At the seaside a restaurant overlooking the sea has also been built. The effect of these measures is that on peak days of 20,000 visitors, 95 percent of them gather in the vicinity of the entrances or at the beach, so they use only about 160 hectares of the total of 1240 in the National Park.

Thanks to the measures mentioned above it is not necessary to have those awful barbed wire fences and typically Dutch signs saying "Verboden . . ." ("Forbidden . . .") such as one can see so often elsewhere in our country. Thus the visitors are not annoyed; on the contrary they can find just what they are looking for, consciously or subconsciously: playgrounds near the entrances or the possibility of going for long walks in the solitude of nature. Contented visitors normally do not make trouble or cause damage. If the protection of the landscape, flora, and fauna had in fact consisted only of barbed-wire and prohibitive notices, and if no opportunities for recreation had been specially provided, it is almost certain that many of the visitors, out of sheer annoyance and dissatisfaction, would have behaved in a way damaging to nature.

In the Kennemerduinen we try as much as possible to allow some compensation for activities that cannot be permitted (we don't use the word "forbidden" since it does not fit in with the policy of our National Park). For instance:

1. Within the park, visitors are not normally allowed to leave

the roads and paths, but they can do so on the 160 ha (400 acres) of playground.

2. We cannot have people climbing up and down slopes everywhere, but ten dune tops have been made more or less easily accessible by paths covered with shells and steps leading to their summits. There are also a few slopes where climbing up and rolling down is allowed.

3. In the center of the Kennemerduinen a lake has been created for the benefit of the birds. Bathing here cannot, of course, be allowed. Around the edge of this bird sanctuary are some signs showing a picture of two birds pointing to one of the paddling pools and saying, "This lake is ours, the paddling pool is over there."

Naturally there are some activities, such as the collecting of flowers and birds' eggs or nests for example, that can never be allowed and for which there are no alternatives. In these cases the only thing to do is to make it clear why they are forbidden. Such negative regulations—no matter how valid—often provoke irritation, especially when the reason why something is forbidden is not understood.

In the Kennemerduinen there are several signs which show by means of pictures what kind of damage could be done. For instance, if someone climbs up the slopes of the dunes, sand is blown away. If he does not keep to the roads and footpaths, flowers and birds' nests may be damaged. Signs with only words are not very effective, we have found. During the last decade people have become more used to looking at pictures than to reading words (television, etc.).

When designing notice boards, we think it is also very important to keep in mind that they should be somewhat irregular in form and bear a friendly text in written characters; their impact will then be much greater than that of rectangular boards bearing impersonal, authoritative text in printers' characters.

Moreover, the number of words should be as small as possible. In the Kennemerduinen National Park we now are busy trying to design signs without any words at all.

Special "paddling pools" are featured attractions within areas set aside for recreation. Located near entrance points, they are the most heavily used parts of the park. These centers concentrate heavy recreation impacts into small part of the park's total area. The same paddling pool is used for ice skating in the winter.





Signage in the Kennemerduinen is informal and indirect. This animal character, (left), featured on a number of other signs throughout the park, points to the Visitors Center and says, "Do have a look over there." Right: "This lake is ours. The paddling pool is over there."



"Trimcourses"

Over the past few years the National Association of Sports has encouraged a program of physical exercise for everyone.

The ensuing result was that on weekends and holidays more and more people were to be found in the park trotting along the paths, climbing dunes, and otherwise disturbing the usual tranquillity found outside the special areas zoned for mass recreation.

The solution to this problem was the construction, near the entrances, of special exercise tracks called "trimcourses." Such a course is about 1.6 km long and has sixteen spots where different exercises can be done on roughly built structures. When energetic visitors, especially the younger ones, have done such a course properly, they have used so much energy that they generally are content to stay at the recreation areas. These courses are now used very frequently. However, they did not satisfy all of the athletically inclined visitors, particularly those who want only to run or jog for several miles or so and not do any other sort of exercise. They went on running through the quiet areas so we constructed a special course to meet these needs. Its length is about 4 kilometers; it has no exercise areas but it leads over very rough terrain. Result: more satisfied visitors.

Another way of preventing damage was found in the installation of a visitors center. Its main purpose is to raise interest in nature in those visitors who are hardly interested in plants and animals—if at all. There are no signs carrying the words "Museum" or "Visitors Center" leading to it. We think these would frighten off exactly the kind of visitors we want to go in. So to lure them inside we have a big hare pointing in the direction of the visitors center. He stands on a nearby car park and shouts the inscription: "Do have a look over there." At the spot where the hare stands the building is invisible. The building itself has no windows so you have to go in if you want to know what's inside.

Inside there are several big dioramas showing the most common examples of flora and fauna seen outside. Nothing is written on the walls; instead printed guides are available for those who want them. Sound devices provide the names of the most common species of birds and play their specific songs. In this way visitors

can learn how to get more pleasure out of nature by observing, by listening to, and being able to recognize the birds.

This visitors center does not contain all that can be seen in the park, and especially rare species are not shown. We feel this would not be wise, that a mass of information will not be remembered by visitors very long after their visit. But when they are making a stroll through the park at some future date it will be great fun for them to meet and recognize the animals and plants they saw. We think it will stimulate them to look and see whether there are more interesting things to be seen or heard.

It is most important that everything in the center be as perfect as possible. Dusty, discolored and ill-prepared exhibits and specimens are not the best way to stimulate an interest in nature.

Another well-known way of instructing visitors is by nature trails. These are of great importance. However, many visitors are not so interested that they will follow the whole trail, from the beginning to the end. In the Kennemerduinen National Park, therefore, we installed special interpretation devices. These are hollow pillars with small tape players inside. When a visitor stands in front of a pillar a hidden contact starts the recorded message providing an explanation of what can be seen and heard at that point. The device uses an endless tape and is battery powered.

We are very much convinced that these techniques can make people aware that nature is worth observing, and worth conserving too.

Dr. E.C.M. Roderkerk was Director of the Kennemerduinen National Park until his retirement on March 1, 1976. Photos were supplied by the author.

Correction

In the article titled "Biosphere Reserves and National Parks" published in the last issue, a photograph and caption referred to Glacier Bay National Monument as a biosphere reserve. It is not now included in the MAB program, but Glacier National Park is. We regret the error.