

BMC response to Dartmoor byelaws public consultation

5. BYELAW 5 PARKING

(iii) Between the hours of 9pm and 9am no person shall occupy or sleep in any mechanically propelled vehicle, caravan or trailer parked on Access Land.

Do you agree with the amendment **iii** relating to the byelaws on parking?

NO

The addition of the word 'occupy' is somewhat ambiguous. It would seem the intention is to prevent people sleeping in vehicles from claiming they are not asleep; however, it would criminalise anyone being in a vehicle for a genuine reason between 9pm-9am. For example, waiting out bad weather, night photography or even making a cup of tea before/after being out climbing/walking would all technically no longer be allowed. While there may be reassurances that this is not the intention of the changes from current DNPA personnel, there is no guarantee that future staff may share this view and it is important that the byelaws be as clear and prescriptive as possible. Because of this, we think the word 'occupy' should be removed from the proposed changes.

7. BYELAW 7 CAMPING

(i) Camping is only permitted in single person bivouacs or in tents that sleep no more than 3 people and can be carried in a backpack and in groups of no more than 6 people; This byelaw does not apply to agreed expeditions who have written permission from the owner of the land and the Authority

Do you agree with the amendment **ii** relating to the byelaws on camping?

NO

We understand the reasoning behind this amendment in wanting to discourage large groups from using Dartmoor for fly/party camping.

However, specifically limiting numbers per bivouac or tent isn't the best way to avoid this happening (there are plenty of 'mountain' tents that are 4 person for example, and two person bivouacs are available). A better approach would be to avoid specifying size and instead focus on the portability – perhaps using "*Camping is only permitted in compact and portable bivouacs or tents which can be carried in a backpack.*"

One pathway for newcomers to discover wild camping safely and with minimal impact is as part of an instructed group. Formal education is not the only way to learn of course, but it has the advantage of being able to convey the complex issues around wild camping good practice in a structured way. However, whilst there is no set instructor to student ratio within the outdoor education sector (due to the inherent variability of group type, terrain, weather etc), a ratio of 1:5 is small. For organised groups who have only modest financial resources (many school/Duke of Edinburgh's Award groups for example), a maximum group size of 6 could prevent them from being able to offer structured learning on how to wild camp responsibly.

8. BYELAW 7 CAMPING

(ii) No person shall erect or use any tent, hammock, tarpaulin or other temporary structure that requires support by cords or bands placed on trees

Do you agree with the amendment **ii** relating to the byelaws on camping?

YES

From previous conversations with DNPA staff, we understand that there has been damage caused to trees in woodland of high ecological value as a result of hammocks or similar being tied to them. Wild camping is possible using self-supporting shelters and so we have no concerns about this amendment impacting upon responsible, minimal impact wild campers.

9. BYELAW 7 CAMPING

(iii) Camping is only permitted in the areas as detailed in the Camping Map which shall be (1) published on the Authority's website and (2) available for inspection at the Dartmoor National Park visitor centres and at the headquarters of the Authority and (3) amended from time to time after approval by the National Park Authority at a public meeting

Do you agree with the amendment **iii** relating to the byelaws on camping?

NO

In general, we are supportive of the proposed areas in which camping will no longer be permitted where they are located along the borders of roads, allowing easy access for fly/party camping which does not follow the minimal impact ethos of wild camping. However, there are two areas we feel strongly should not be included:

- 1) Bellever/Riddon Ridge – we fully understand the issues near to the road/river in this area and the need for restrictions here, but the extent of the proposed restricted area is too great. The southern part of this area (beyond the Hut Circles) makes an excellent location for newcomers to wild camping. It is away from the road and feels 'wild', but not so far that if things don't go as planned (as can often happen when learning), a hasty exit can be made. We suggest that the restricted area is limited to the northern part of the identified land parcel which would prevent the roadside fly camping which has been so problematic here in recent times, whilst not unduly discriminating against legitimate and responsible wild campers in the area further away from the road.
- 2) Avon Dam – given this area is 2km from the nearest road/parking spot, it is unlikely to attract fly/party campers who are looking for convenience and seems unlikely to be a hot spot for irresponsible behaviour now or in the future. It is also a very good location for wild camping in the south of Dartmoor and losing access to this area would only disadvantage responsible wild campers following a minimal impact ethos.

Our final concern was around point **iii (3)**: "*amended from time to time after approval by the National Park Authority at a public meeting.*" The wording of this point suggests that future changes to the byelaws would be possible at DNPA's discretion and without due process which is extremely concerning. We believe that any proposals to change the byelaws should require wide public consultation to ensure the views of all users and stakeholders are considered, so we strongly advocate for the removal of this point.

10. BYELAW 9 FIRES

(i) No person shall light or tend a fire on the Access Land, or place or throw or let fall a lighted match or any other thing so as to be likely to cause a fire

Do you agree with the amendment **i** relating to the byelaws on the use of fires?

YES

We are only too aware of the issues around moorland fires and the devastation they can cause, so are fully supportive of this minor amendment.

11. BYELAW 9 FIRES

(iii) The use of barbecues, including disposable barbecues whether manufactured as such or

otherwise, is not permitted anywhere on the Access Land if it is used in such a manner as to cause fire, damage or harm to the land or vegetation or when the Fire Severity Index reaches High or at other such times when directed by signs

Do you agree with the amendment **iii** relating to the byelaws on the use of fires?

YES

This amendment is not unduly restrictive, requiring individuals not to use barbeques in a way that could be damaging or during periods of high fire risk. In order to make this successful, more will be needed than just a change to the byelaws which will not be read by most visitors however and effective, engaging and empowering public education will be required to have the desired effect.

12. BYELAW 9 FIRES

(iv) No person shall gather any material from the Access Land to use as fuel for any fire

Do you agree with the amendment **iv** relating to the byelaws on the use of fires?

YES

The BMC advocates a minimal impact approach to the outdoors, leaving a place as you found it or ideally in a better state. Collecting/removing material for a fire, even away from Dartmoor, does not follow that ethos so we are supportive of this amendment.

13. BYELAW 9 FIRES

(v) No person shall launch Chinese Lanterns, fireworks or flares from the Access Land

Do you agree with the amendment **v** relating to the byelaws on the use of fires?

YES

The risk of a wild fire from using these items could be extremely high, especially as the person who sets them off has little or no control over where they land, so we agree that a total ban is justified.

23. BYELAW 17 COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES

No person shall offer for sale or hire any goods or services on the Access Land in exchange for payment or reward unless he is authorised to do so in pursuance of an agreement with the owner of the land and the Authority

Do you agree with the amendments relating to the byelaws on the carrying out of commercial activities?

NO

This proposed change would seriously negatively impact upon guides and instructors who operate on Dartmoor with instructed groups who pay for their services. For example, instructors leading a group walk would need to contact multiple landowners, (who are difficult to identify and obtain contact details for) and DNPA for permission. This level of bureaucracy is a significant step change and would add a huge (arguably impossible) burden of admin to the many individual freelance instructors who use Dartmoor. No to mention, it would remove the essential ability of instructors to revise and adjust their plans according to group ability, weather and any number of other factors affecting groups in the outdoor environment.

These instructors contribute hugely to education of newcomers to the outdoors, ensuring they have an appreciation of the value of the places they visit, how to look after them and of course ensuring students learn how to operate safely in the harsh environment Dartmoor can offer.

Preventing instructors from being able to operate effectively on Dartmoor is essentially removing an incredibly valuable pathway into the outdoors for newcomers, who may otherwise be poorly prepared and lacking in education about how to minimise their impact.