

I was there – mostly - a personal memoir

Although I started my warden/ranger career as long ago as the early 1970s, the Association of National Park Wardens pre-dated me by a few years. Those wardens who braved the censure of their employers to initiate the Association may have had a dream, but I doubt if even they could have imagined where the Association would be 40 years on.

Through changes of name reflecting the changing situation and priorities in countryside and recreation management – Association of National Park and Countryside Wardens, Association of Countryside Rangers, Countryside Management Association – the Association has maintained and enhanced its basic belief in and support for improving the professionalism of the ranger and manager. Parallel changes in the National Parks Commission to Countryside Commission to Countryside Agency [CCW in Wales] to Natural England also indicate the close working relationship that the two organisations have maintained over the years.

What's in a title? Over 25 years ago the Association's members had a total of over 25 different job titles, probably more now. Those were the days when the Newsletter was produced on the kitchen table and all envelopes were hand written, usually by family members, although I did eventually persuade a local school that typing practice could have a useful end product, and at 1p an envelope it was money well spent. Methods have changed, and so has the Ranger magazine.

The Jobs Service was a matter of checking as many publications as possible, copying the ads and then stuffing envelopes once a week for sending out. We made a substantial income each week. The publication of 'Law of the Countryside' in partnership with Charlie Parkes resulted in my attic floorboards groaning under the weight of books waiting to be sent out. The village post office was also a substantial beneficiary.

The Losehill connection exactly parallels my own membership of the Association, from Warden Training Course No 1 in 1975, through Senior Ranger Training Course No 1 in 1982 and numerous other courses up to and including the 2005 Annual Seminar, but also including partnership in the European Ranger Project and TOPAS. Peter Townsend was our guiding light through most of this period.

In my early days of membership I would expect to meet up to 100 colleagues at annual conferences and seminars, which usually lasted for 5 or 6 days. Times have changed, but then membership was building up throughout the 1980s and early 90s to over 1200, and has now stabilised at a somewhat lower level.

Make no mistake, individuals can and do make a difference. A chance meeting with a Peak District National Park warden in 1971 was the catalyst that changed my whole future [thanks Ian] and eventually gave me friends, colleagues and acquaintances around the world. The Association's first

international exchange to Poland organised by Gordon Miller and Bob Reid was the starting point for the International Ranger Federation [of which CMA was a founder member], and has since taken us to World Congresses in Poland, Costa Rica, South Africa, Australia and now back to Scotland.

Many other people have been instrumental in giving us all the opportunity to be involved – think of John Wyatt, sadly recently deceased; Frank White, one of the first Country Park wardens, Chairman and Newsletter editor for many years; Gordon Miller whose vision took us to the world; Colin Dilcock, treasurer who kept our finances on a sound footing in the difficult years – and many, many more distinguished, far-seeing servants of our professional organisation.

It's odd how things work out. I have many times been at odds with the Association and its elected officers. Even in 1975, when membership was £1 per annum, I argued that it was excessive. I suppose that now I am an Honorary Life Member and pay no subscriptions, I should be content at last. I can only say that membership has given me far more than I have given, but I still think that our Association can further develop and be yet more active in pushing forward our contribution to the world of conservation of our environment and making our voice heard in the competing hubhub of the modern world.

Mike Marshall

Formerly Secretary [5 times] and Honorary Vice-President