

National Parks Lessons From Around the World and the Situation in Scotland

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National parks - 2,781 at the last count - have been established in many countries. Yet they are very variable in their rationale, size, location, purpose and management. In the short articles presented in this edition of *The Geographer*, a number of international experts explore these variations, identify key issues in relation to climate change, and describe the historical development of national parks in Scotland and assess their effectiveness.

There is not a standard international definition of a national park. The International Union for Nature Conservation (IUCN), in its seminal guidance published in 2008, classifies the majority of national parks globally as areas for either ecosystem protection or cultural landscape protection, such as the Serengeti in Tanzania, the Yosemite and the other national parks of the North American Rockies, and the Vanoise and other national parks in the European Alps. In Britain, by contrast, national parks are classified as areas of landscape protection in recognition of the values of managed landscapes heavily used for informal recreation.

The conclusion from this distinction is that a national park is what the nation thinks it is. For example, many are based on mountain areas, as in the parks in England, Scotland and Wales, or the iconic mountains of the Tatra of Slovakia or the Triglav of Slovenia (a key symbol on the national flag), where they are a key element of the national cultural heritage. In the



Doa Inthanon National Park, Thailand: cultural monuments and vegetable growing by local people. © Roger Crofts

establishment of national parks in Denmark a few years ago, it was clearly recognised by the government that national desire rather than any ecological or environmental construct was the driving force in bringing in the new system.

This association of national park establishment with the feeling of nationhood is clearly the case in Scotland. Here, after virtually a century of lobbying by highly informed sources, including the RSGS, it was ten days after the referendum vote in favour of the establishment of a Scottish Parliament that the political leaders formally announced

that national parks would be established.

Whilst there are many and varied opinions, many of the national park articles included here are written by members of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, a global expert network on all aspects of the establishment, management, science, culture, governance and evaluation of all types of protected areas, including nature reserves, landscapes, and national parks. See www.iucn.org/wcpa (and in particular *Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories*). Data on protected areas, including national parks, can be found on www.protectedplanet.net, the excellent web site developed and managed by the UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre in Cambridge.

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Rila National Park, Bulgaria: mountain recreation and water extraction side by side. © Roger Crofts

Triglav National Park, Slovenia: the mountain as depicted on the national flag. © Roger Crofts