

EUROPARC Federation:

Living Parks

100 years of National Parks in Europe

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100 Years of National Parks in Europe

1

PHOTO

Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, first National Park in Scotland

LORNE GILL, SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE

100 Years of National Parks in Europe is an achievement realised by many people across the continent. These often unsung heroes and heroines and the work of those that have followed has enabled this shared inheritance of natural treasures. Sometimes little known, sometimes world-famous, throughout Europe lie areas that together make a network of infinite riches to be held in trust.

The EUROPARC Federation, the umbrella organisation for the national parks and other protected areas of Europe, has created this book to mark this centenary year. In taking the first park from within each country to be designated, from Europe's first in Sweden in 1909 to Denmark's Thy National Park of 2008, we have created a journey through time and place. Our contributors provide insights into the context, achievements and future of these dynamic, well-loved places and consider our common future. Protected areas belong to us all, and are a precious example of shared care and commitment.

Humans have long attached reverence and special significance to particular places in the natural world. Whether for ancient spiritual significance, locations for food and water or seemingly limitless landscapes to be feared and admired, the people of Europe have imbued implicit values to parts of their surroundings. As populations grew, these valued places were marginalised, to the very sacred, the less useful and those areas available to an exclusive elite. All that remains of the once vast natural treasures of European society are now held in its national parks and other protected areas.

The modern concept of European national parks and protected areas culminated a century ago in the designation of the continent's first in Sweden. Those that followed in the other countries of Europe started with the high mountains, often inaccessible, yet, iconic in the national psyche. As the century progressed, early values of national parks were enhanced with further concepts of species protection and ecological integrity and the need to ensure exemplars of Europe's great diversity of habitats, land and seascapes, to be preserved in perpetuity. In more recent years, public recreation, sustainable development and community involvement models of protected area governance have become the norm.

Our parks and protected areas today do retain their original universal values and yet deliver many vital benefits to European society. They remain reservoirs of biodiversity, sources of water, cultural and economic assets, places of recreation, health and well being and spiritual replenishment.



Today, protected areas face challenges and pressures unforeseen by our enlightened predecessors. Parks are at the frontline of climate change, where effects on ecosystems are already evident and mitigation to retain Europe's natural heritage critical. They are our early warning system and monitoring and enlightened management are needed to secure the very systems that support us.

Concerns over multiple uses of protected areas do also loom large. However, people are part of the protected areas process and should not be apart from it. Local people can be strong advocates for parks! EUROPARC's own Charter for Sustainable Tourism, and transboundary certification process, are well developed tools that seek to assist protected areas in expanding the boundaries of participation and involvement, whilst seeking to balance potentially different perspectives pertaining to future management.

The EUROPARC Federation was founded on the need to protect and enhance Europe's natural and cultural protected areas. This is achieved through a collective approach to seeking solutions and international co-operation in raising standards, in all areas of parks management. These principles are embedded in the work of the Federation, bringing together those who care for Europe's national parks and protected areas. EUROPARC facilitates and stimulates collaboration and partnerships to provide learning, training and experience opportunities. Such opportunities aim to help build strong teams of professional national parks staff, to encourage innovative, forward-thinking, outward-looking inclusive approaches that will deliver the complex integrated management needed for the parks of the future.

Engaging with the young people of Europe will also be essential to the future of national parks. Rangers, Educators and Interpreters across the parks of Europe are key to ensuring young people are not only connected to these places of national identity and international importance but that they rediscover the values upon which they were founded. Europe's youth point the way to the future.

In this, the second century of Europe's national parks, we all have a twenty-first century responsibility of great importance. It is to proclaim anew the meaning and value of national parks and other protected areas. The creation of Europe's national parks was built on that shared inheritance of valuing special places they are expression of faith in the future, a pact between generations, a promise from the past to the future. As European society lurches from financial to ecological crisis and back again, the need to invest in an integrated network of protected areas could not be more important. Appreciating our natural assets means supporting the structures that underpin parks, expanding and training the front-line Rangers who interact with communities and visitors, encouraging scientists who monitor effects and impacts and farmers and fishermen who manage sustainably our cultural and living landscapes.

The parks of today and tomorrow need to sharpen their focus on the longer term, less on what parks are and more what parks do and deliver! Together, with newer protected areas being recognised and the development of the Natura2000 network, we need to regain the values of our early ancestors and realise fully the worth of our national parks

and protected areas, so that together we can create a common future.

The national parks of Europe are both fundamental to, and underpin the livelihood of, European society. They are, in the words of Patrick Geddes, Scottish biologist and philosopher, "*Microcosmos naturae, sedes hominum, theatrum historiae, eutopia futuris*"¹ —The Microcosm of Nature, The Home of Man, The Theatre of History, The Good Place of the Future.

Carol Ritchie, Director, EUROPARC Federation

¹ Quote from Patrick Geddes is engraved on the The Typical Region, known as The Valley Section, Outlook Tower, Edinburgh.

NATURE CONSERVATION—A FEW FACTS & FIGURES

A historical perspective

There has been a long tradition of protecting sacred sites around the world for spiritual or religious reasons.

The first official European protected area

1579 Djurgården, Stockholm (SE) Reason: Hunting. Created by: King Johan III

First area in the USA

Yosemite Nature Reserve in 1864

First national park ever

Yellowstone National Park (USA) in 1872

First national park in Australasia

Royal National Park in 1879

First area in Africa

Sabie Game Reserve (later Kruger National Park) 1898

From local to global

- There are 3,900 national parks across the world, covering 4.4 million km²
- There are 273 national parks in Europe, covering 98,000 km²
- Approximately 12% of the earth's surface is protected areas
- Agricultural land area is about 7%.

The first national parks in Europe

- The first nine national parks were established in 1909.
- The reasons for protecting these natural areas was to support scientific research and patriotism (later tourism).
- The scientists wanted to preserve the land, the tourism representatives to conserve the land.

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Białowieża National Park



LOCATION **north-east Poland**
WEBSITE <http://bpn.com.pl>

Białowieża National Park was founded by the Polish government in response to appeals by scientists and naturalists to protect the last fragment of European lowland primeval deciduous forest. The scientists mounted an expedition into the forest in April 1919 to look for the magnificent and charismatic bison *Bison bonasus*. Although they found no evidence of bison, the expedition resulted in their resolve to appeal to the government to protect the forest by dedicating it as a national park.





There are 23 national parks in Poland with a total area of 315,000 ha. This represents approximately 1% of the country. National parks in Poland protect natural areas on a large scale: 1,000 (ha) is the minimum size. The parks cover places which have unique scientific, natural, cultural and educational values. They are open to visitors, but nature conservation has priority over all other activities. The main body responsible for the parks, apart from their administration, is the Ministry of the Environment.



PHOTOS TOP

Left KOSINSKY/WWW.KOSINSKY.PL; **Right** BIAŁOWIEŻA NATIONAL PARK

PHOTOS BOTTOM

KOSINSKY/WWW.KOSINSKY.PL

Białowieża National Park lies at the centre of the Białowieża Forest which straddles the border between Poland and Belarus. This rich mixed deciduous forest was protected for centuries by kings and tsars as an exceptionally good hunting ground. It is now one of the very few remaining places in Europe where natural processes shape the forest ecosystems in conditions unchanged by direct human interference. The Belarussian part of the forest is also now a national park (see separate entry).

Białowieża National Park's logo is the European bison. It is the largest European mammal and was saved from extinction by the long-term, devoted work of many of the park staff. Starting in 1929, using a small number of individuals brought from zoos, the breeding programme has increased the population to a very healthy level in the wild. The park now has the largest free-living collection of European bison in the world.

The park's biodiversity is extraordinary, with 809 species of vascular plants, over 3,000 different fungi, almost 200 mosses and 277 lichens with numerous rare species specific to primeval forests. The park also boasts 120 breeding bird species, 44 different mammals and almost 10,000 invertebrate species, mainly insects.

FACTS & FIGURES

AREA **62,500 ha**

OTHER PARKS FOUNDED IN **1932 Pieniny Mountains**