

Reflective Fieldwork Journal: Dinefwr Park

BMOE6003: Landscape & Sustainable Recreation

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1. Executive summary

Dinefwr Park in Llandeilo, Wales, contains many attractions to visitors, such as castle ruins, a renovated country mansion, a historic deer park, and acres of wildlife, vegetation, and walking paths. Because of these amenities, Dinefwr encounters many issues with management of each area. The deer in the deer park, as well as the cattle on property, are experiencing high levels of tuberculosis outbreak, diminishing the population of both, as well as a lack of hiding places for the deer during high heat. These will be fixed by education on TB, prohibition of feeding the animals, and the continuation of closures in certain weather conditions. The castle has competing visions for its use, which will be rectified via public survey to find the most attractive solution, as well as issues with vandalism and thievery, which will be solved with educational measures and more security. Visitor behaviour (littering, vandalism, ignoring signs) is also a current issues post-pandemic, which will be fixed with more aggressive signage, fines for poor behaviour, ridge runners, and incentives for trash clean ups and other community endeavours. Finally, the car park and trails need to be maintained, with the car park being repaved and potentially expanded and the trails being hardened to prevent overuse and damage to the flora that Dinefwr is known for. All of these measures were chosen using background research of frameworks and theories like George Perkins Marsh's emphasis on fixing damage to the natural world, as well as ecotourism, which help to choose the best options for management. There was also the consideration of strategies that other parks have taken, like historic Mesa Verde's protection of historical and cultural landmarks and the eradication of vandalism in Acadia, Maine, U.S.A. All of this leads to the conclusion that while park management is difficult in that there are many moving parts to deal with, it is worth it to tell a story of the abundance of history in one place and the nature that comes with it, providing a wonderful experience to visitors that keeps bringing them back.

2. Introduction

This report will contain a management plan for Dinefwr Park, a designated National Nature Reserve (NNR) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in Llandeilo, Wales. Dinefwr Park, as it exists today, contains the ruins of Dinefwr Castle, a restored 17th-century country house called Newton House and various other visitor attractions such as a Deer Park, trails, and more on its 800 acres. Dinefwr Park as a whole has a deep and rich history, and its designation as a

NNR as well as an SSSI means this history is to be well-preserved. National Nature Reserves are designated conservation areas for the people to engage with certain natural and ecological aspects and has the highest level of conservation protection. Sites of Special Scientific Interest are sites with flora, fauna, and other interesting aspects of the land which are to be conserved. Current problems Dinefwr Park is facing include impacts to resources such as the wildlife, castle, and Newton House, impacts to experience with crowding and visitor behaviour and impacts to facilities and services with the car park and trails. There will be a management plan to contend to these issues in Dinefwr Park the next 5 years. Decisions in the management plan will be justified with research on frameworks and theories, the impact of outdoor recreation on the park and management strategies and practices.

3. Body

3.1. Management plan

3.1.1. Impacts to resources

The Deer Park is one resource that is an important part of Dinefwr and its history, and it is crucial to be preserved. In recent years, the deer population has diminished due to an increase in tuberculosis (TB) infections, so it is vital to maintain what deer there are and grow the population. Current efforts in place surrounding the Deer Park that serve both the deer and the human visitors are closures of the park with inclement weather (if temperatures reach 30°C or winds reach 45 miles per hour) to protect the ancient trees on the site, not feeding the deer by hand, giving the deer places to hide from humans during the heat (site closure), and prohibiting dogs in the deer park. Some strategies to be used in the future to further protect the deer are informational sessions about the Deer Park, the deer, and its history, free for the public to attend, as well as information online and at the site in the form of signs or brochures about the dangers the deer and the public face if certain measures (park closure) are not taken. Additionally, there should be the prohibition of certain behaviours like feeding the deer that incur a fine if they are taken. These measures to ensure the deer and visitors both stay safe could also be used on the cattle, which are experiencing similar problems to the deer with TB.

The castle represents the majority of tangible culture and history surrounding Dinefwr Park. The castle, which has existed since the 12th century, is now in ruins. Near

the castle there is a car park for disabled badge holders, which has a £5 parking fee, and the castle is open year-round with the exception of certain holidays. Because the castle lies within Dinefwr Park (which is managed by the National Trust) but is partially owned by the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales and is managed by Cadw, there are competing visions for the use and future of the castle. In order to rectify this, these groups need to come together and pick one vision, via polling visitors on their desires for the park to draw more visitors in, which allows for more people to be educated on the history that lies so close to their homes. As for other issues, like preserving the history of the castle, during peak season there should be some kind of guard/ranger to prevent stolen stones or items thrown from the castle, as well as signage before entering the castle educating on the history and the importance of preserving what is left.

3.1.2. Impacts to experience

Signage is a main issue for the park at the moment in terms of current depreciative behaviour amongst visitors. It exists minimally on purpose, in order to allow visitors to explore as well as to not obstruct the natural beauty of the landscape. Signs are still, however, crucial for guidance of visitors around the park and its trails. There are signs every 150 metres, with more aggressive signage (at every 25 metres) in areas with electric fencing, waterways, and areas where dogs are off lead. Additionally, there are signs at junction points and every 300 metres in the wet meadow. This strategy has worked in the past, but post-pandemic there has been an increase in poor behaviour by visitors, such as littering, not following paths, jumping fences, and stealing, which is requiring a different approach to signage in the park. Strategies to improve littering include fines, more aggressive signage, educational missions like free seminars, pamphlets, and similar items to inform of the impact of incorrect rubbish disposal and littering, and incentives for taking part in group litter clean-ups.

For other depreciative behaviours of not following paths, jumping fences, and stealing, there needs to be more clear signage, possibly sacrificing beauty, at least until this behaviour decreases. There could, depending on resources and needs of the season, be some sort of ridgerunner on the trail educating on the importance of leaving the trails

how you found them and disposing of rubbish responsibly. Stealing should have an imposed fine, and possible restriction to and of items that have been stolen (such as stones from the castle). Methods may have to be adjusted or adapted if they are not working to fix this behaviour; since summer months tend to lead to worse visitor behaviour, there may need to be more intense and increased management strategies.

3.1.3. Impacts to facilities and services

Dinefwr Park is a very historic site, and due to this, some aspects of accessibility and safety are hard to manage. To start, the car park is a feature that, as it is the first place most visitors encounter as they enter Dinefwr, will need some alteration. The main car park, as it currently stands, is small, not newly paved, and far from the main house (Newton House). It also costs £5 to use the car park. These current conditions of the park present issues of accessibility and crowding. To rectify these issues, the car park will be repaved, and if possible, some of the land adjacent to the current car park will be used as an expansion/overflow parking. The parking fare will be used to cover these costs. Additionally, the pavement of the car park will be maintained to prevent a breakdown of the materials rendering it inaccessible to visitors with physical disabilities/those who require mobility aids.

In addition to the service of the car park, trails are a main facility of Dinefwr. However, trails are easily overused and require hardening to prevent damage to the earth and people who use the trails. The main issue that Dinefwr encounters with overuse of trails is mud, especially in wetter months, which leads to slippage (potentially causing harm to people using the trails). There are a few ways Dinefwr Park will manage this, by blocking off and diverting paths to allow for regeneration, by installing planks over areas that are more prone to overuse and mud, and by reducing the number of visitors allowed in the park per day (which is the last option in Dinefwr's case). Additionally, there should be an awareness of visitors walking off-trail and creating new trails- if this is happening, measures such as sign posts and fences may be necessary to preserve the beauty of the vegetation that grows in the park.

3.2.Evaluation of frameworks and theories

In order to determine which conceptual frameworks and theories would be best to inform my management plan for Dinefwr Park, there was research done about well-known frameworks used to develop national parks. One such framework was from George Perkins Marsh, in his book *Man and Nature: Or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action*, first published in 1864. Marsh believed that mankind would destroy the world by their own actions if they first did not take action to restore and conserve the world. This is a large underpinning of the importance of national parks, as they preserve the natural world and allow people to immerse themselves in it in a sustainable manner (Marsh, 1864). This is important for parks like Dinefwr, that exist for human use but also, more importantly, for conservation of flora and fauna. Another theory used was ecotourism, which defined by the International Ecotourism Society is, “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education” (International Ecotourism Society, 2015). Dinefwr is a great example of ecotourism, as it combines local history, education, and the environment in one place—and the management practices put into use at Dinefwr help to promote ecotourism and make it even more influential toward visitors.

3.3.Evaluation of impact of outdoor recreation

Outdoor recreation has a large impact on Dinefwr Park’s land, especially via the walking paths throughout the park. The footpaths go through various terrains in the park, such as the floodplain, up a rocky hill to the castle, and through fields. Each of these different areas are affected differently; however, in each one, the main issue is muddiness and trail widening/going off trail. This has the biggest impact on the soil, which was seen in the module material on the impacts of outdoor recreation. Thus, there are actions that need to be taken via hardening and diversion of paths, as the walking paths are sites of high attraction (and thus can easily affect the land). Additionally, outdoor recreation has an impact on the visitor experience and facilities and services. This is due to crowding (car parks) and the high potential for vandalism that has occurred at Dinefwr, due to an increase in the volume of visitors the park receives, especially in the summer. So, the car park needs managing and potentially expanding, and there exists a need for restrictions, fines, and other strategies to

handle the issue of vandalism. These three items indicate the main impact that outdoor recreation has on Dinefwr Park.

3.4. Evaluation of strategies and practices

Using previous case studies of national park management plans, as well as matrices for strategies and practices of outdoor recreation management, certain strategies and practices were picked that would be best for Dinefwr Park. It was important find strategies that worked specifically for cultural monuments (castle), hardening of trails, and vandalism. For cultural monuments and depreciative behaviour at these monuments, the Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado, U.S.A was looked to. Mesa Verde is home to a large collection of ancient cliff dwellings from the Ancestral Puebloan people, and there were issues in the park regarding vandalism from tourists. The park managed these concerns by restricting use and allocating a park ranger to always be stationed at the site to monitor use and answer questions, and also heavily relied on education to improve the visitor experience (Manning and Anderson, pp. 99-103, 2012). While the castle in Dinefwr has less issues with crowding, there exists vandalism with the stealing of stones from the castle and throwing them off the top—borrowing from Mesa Verde’s tactic, it was chosen to have a stationed ranger of some type as well as educational material.

Next, Acadia National Park in Maine, U.S.A. was turned to as a source for information on vandalism, since these are main issues Dinefwr faces (with the footpaths as a heavy visitor draw). Acadia uses ridgerunners, who walk the trails talking to visitors and informing them about the importance of staying on-path and following other visitor regulations (like not littering). They found great success with the ridgerunners; however, Dinefwr is a much smaller park and does not need this to such an extent, but it was included as a possible technique if others fail to rectify the issue (Manning and Anderson, pp. 63-66, 2012). Another source for management on the footpaths at Dinefwr was the Appalachian Trail, a 2175-mile-long trail that stretches from Georgia to Maine. Since the Appalachian Trail receives millions of hikers per year, there are issues with trail usage, like group size and soil and vegetation disturbance. Using signage and posted rules and regulations, as well as ridgerunners, there was success in fixing these issues—which is why these methods were

also chosen to manage Dinefwr, although again to a lesser extent as the Appalachian Trail is much larger and more popular (Manning and Anderson, pp. 67-70, 2012).

4. Conclusion

Dinefwr Park is an important ecological and historical site in Southwest Wales. As a National Nature Reserve and Site of Special Scientific Interest, it serves the public and those interested in how history and nature come together. It contains sites such as an ancient castle, mansion, and miles of footpaths. It is important for Dinefwr and parks like it to be conserved and managed for years, in order to preserve the culture and history that has existed there for hundreds of years. If these management techniques, and others that may have to be implemented if new problems arise, are used successfully, Dinefwr should continue to draw in guests and provide to them a fantastic experience that keeps bringing them back.

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