



# NEW FOREST NOTES

— DECEMBER —

## **Islands Thorns Inclosure**

Islands Thorns Inclosure lies in the north corner of the Forest and is one of our most beautiful oak woods, planted in 1852, but its fine trees are also at the root of its undoing. Every couple of years or so the Forestry Commission undertakes a programme of felling there and, because the soil is a heavy clay, the grassy rides are cut to ribbons, its old network of hand-dug drainage ditches is blocked, its culverts are smashed and the whole is left like the set for a WW1 film. Such felling and extraction has been undertaken in this year's sodden conditions, leaving the southern part of the wood in a dreadful mess. No doubt some of the damage will eventually be patched up, although experience shows that little attention is paid to the ruts not immediately affecting the rides. Any such repairs will take years to consolidate and in any case nothing can be done before the hoped-for dry conditions of next summer. There will then be a gap of a few months before the next assault is launched and because of this "rotation" large parts of the track network are unusable for most of the time. A forester (no longer in the New Forest) told me some years ago that the sale of fine oak timber from Islands Thorns had provided a remarkably large proportion of the New Forest's income for a year of particularly heavy felling. The wood is thus a continuing juicy target for the Commission.

Now Islands Thorns is threatened with a new and wide ranging assault which has the potential to cause even more damage. Most of the

streams are to be filled with clay and gravel to within a few inches of the surface as part of a plan to "conserve" the New Forest. There are, of course, a few deep and eroding channels which would benefit from remedial work, but the wholesale disruption now planned has the potential to alter the entire character of the wood. A sort of ecological fanaticism requires supposed absolute purity of form in every watercourse — except in the matter of imported filling material which will leave few streams in the Forest without an entirely alien bed of clay and stones. What the late John Lavender described as the quality of the woodland scene "a more intimate enjoyment (than landscape) experienced within the wood itself" is irrelevant to the proponents of this faith. Little waterfalls (they call them "nick points") must be destroyed, deep pools must be filled, miniature canyons of the type in which many Forest children, me included, have played over the generations must be levelled, picturesque and leaning trees above the streams must be cut down because they would impede the operation of heavy machinery and because the filling process will in any case kill them as their root systems are drowned. All these features which I, and I am sure many others, find so delightful in the Forest, must be sacrificed on the altar of "favourable unit condition". Ecologists see the Forest not as others do, but as units to be ticked off once they have been manipulated to their satisfaction. If units are not made favourable, grants will be withheld, the skies will fall and, perhaps not entirely incidentally, there will be a lot less employment for the army of ecologists promoting such operations.

## **The election that never was**

The Forest electorate was either largely happy with the performance of the Verderers' Court, or else potential candidates decided that their chances against the two sitting members were not particularly good. Anyhow, there was no contest and the verderers' election scheduled for this week was cancelled. Dionis Macnair and Dave Readhead will now serve for a further six years. In the case of Dionis, once she completes this term, she will become the longest serving elected verderer of postwar years and probably the second or third longest since the Court was reconstituted in 1877. That is a remarkable record and it is little wonder that potential challengers were not confident of success.