



香港地貌岩石保育協會
Association for Geoconservation, Hong Kong

4 April, 2018

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
Country and Marine Parks Branch
Address 6/F & 7/F, Cheung Sha Wan Government Offices
303 Cheung Sha Wan Road, Kowloon
Hong Kong

Attention: Mr Patrick CC Lai
(Email: patrick_cc_lai@afcd.gov.hk)

Dear Mr Lai,

Consultancy Study on Enhancement of the Recreation and Education Potential of Country Parks and Special Areas

Further to our participation in the workshop on 1 March 2018, we are writing to elaborate our view on the above project.

Enhancing the recreational and educational potential of country parks and special areas will need to take into account the specific context and characteristics of Hong Kong. Despite their extensive coverage, the resources are finite and limited for a population of over seven million plus increasing visitation of tourists

Furthermore, a very high percentage of country parks are on moderate to steep slopes which make them unsuitable for development of large-scale facilities. Likewise, the limited entrance areas to country parks risk overcrowding if too many activities are introduced.

Geodiversity and Geotourism

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)'s Resolutions 4.040 at Barcelona (IUCN 2008) and 5.048 at Jeju, Korea (IUCN 2012) both clearly state that geodiversity is part of nature and geoheritage is part of natural heritage. Geodiversity also underpins or delivers most of the ecosystem services identified in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA 2005).

Geodiversity is a significant treasure in country parks and special areas but to date this has not been fully recognized. Understanding and appreciation of geodiversity will extend visitors' experience substantially to cover the three-dimensional and time history of nature. Today, nature in country parks and special areas is mainly appreciated in the dimension of biodiversity and landscape scenery.



香港地貌岩石保育協會
Association for Geoconservation, Hong Kong

In fact geodiversity and geoheritage are not restricted to the Hong Kong UNESCO Global Geopark. Geodiversity and geoheritage are rich throughout Hong Kong and across country parks and special areas.

There is vast potential to promote geodiversity and geoconservation in country parks. Geodiversity ranges from small scale to macro scale features, from individual outcrops to entire rock formation of different era. In terms of geological age, structures, major fault lines criss-cross the territory whereas folded and tilted rock strata are commonplace in many areas of sedimentary formation. Additionally, fossil-bearing strata have been discovered even at high altitude such as Sunset Peak. On the other hand, the abandoned mines at Lin Fa Shan in Tai Lam Country Park are little known to the public, both for its history and origin of mineralization.

The most dramatic part of geodiversity is expressed in landforms- mountain ranges, gorges, waterfalls, natural shorelines, plateaus etc. Active processes of erosion contribute to the formation of sea caves, arches, stacks and wave-cut platforms. Concurrently active processes of sedimentation produce wetlands, beaches, sand bars, tombolos, mudflats etc. Some of these landforms are critical to the maintenance of important habitats of high biodiversity values.

As a first step, it will be necessary to compile an inventory of geodiversity and geoheritages in country parks and special areas. Starting from literature review, AGHK will be pleased to assist in the development of the inventory in collaboration with other experts, geological groups and Government departments.

Enhancement of Landscape and Visual Quality

Conservation is a major objective of country parks and special areas. As such it is desirable to minimize disturbance to natural areas. However, there are two areas of concerns where developments of small to moderate scale may be unavoidable, or else are already in existence. There are two scenarios:

- Roads and other infrastructure facilities (e.g. waterworks) at the peripheries or within country parks and special areas
- Trails and amenities by the Home Affairs Department (HAD) and District Councils (DC)

There are immense opportunities to improve both the standard of facilities and infrastructure to be more compatible with the natural setting of country parks and special areas. Examples are:

- Green engineering measures for roads and slopes
- Natural looking street furniture and safety barriers
- Use of grasscrete for parking areas
- Quality landscape design at fringe areas



香港地貌岩石保育協會
Association for Geoconservation, Hong Kong

- Use of locally extracted rock materials including those from nearby tunnel works for infrastructure
- Restoration of degraded areas
- Better coordination with HAD for more pleasing design
- Review of AFCD engineering standard with a review to even better practices

Afforestation

Afforestation has been a major focus of country parks and special areas. This has been necessary to revitalize the extensively deforested countryside of Hong Kong. Furthermore, tree planting is highly valued by the public and is often equated with environmental protection.

However, we would like to caution that at this stage, afforestation and tree planting need to be carefully planned for the following reasons:

- Forest is not the only habitat in the natural environment
- The diversity of landscape and scenery could be lost with indiscriminate tree planting
- Excessive vegetation could block the view of viewpoint to appreciate dramatic landscape
- Excessive vegetation could obscure geological outcrops which may be of geological or landscape values
- Certain countryside areas e.g. uplands, dunes behind beaches would be more attractive if left as grassland

In this respect, we would like to advise that areas surrounding the Plover Cover Reservoir and many upland areas of Lantau should not be afforested to retain the current landform. There are similar areas throughout country parks and special areas which require careful study.

Accessibility

Country parks and special areas are well accessible by public transport, yet transport from the city can be tiring and uncomfortable. This is particularly the case for families, elderly visitors and larger groups.

Visitors wishing to enter country parks from urban areas often have to traverse urban fringe areas which may not be clearly marked. Some routes also have security or stray dogs problems.

It would be desirable that visitors can enter country parks directly from urban areas and major public transport hubs via attractive and clearly defined routes.

It is also necessary to improve the opportunities for round trips and itineraries with multiple activities, e.g.



香港地貌岩石保育協會
Association for Geoconservation, Hong Kong

- Start from one public transport hub ending directly at urban areas
- Trip ending at bus stop with ongoing possibility to a tourist attractions where visitors can relax in a café, stay on the seafront promenade or have meals

We believe that initiatives to enhance walking connectivity and round trips will not only be beneficial to visitors, but also helps to alleviate pressure on the demand for buses and minibuses serving country parks.

The Case of Wilson Trail

Hikers descending Wilson Trail through “The Twins” will find themselves ending in the middle of Stanley Gap Road. Despite the proximity to Stanley, there is no direct walking connection. As a result, visitors will need to take a bus to Stanley, return to the city or else walk alongside the road in the absence of a footpath. This is the same case for visitors trying to access Shek O on foot after completing the Dragon’s Back trail.

Safety of Countryside Activities

Injuries and other tragedies have been happening and will continue to happen in country parks over the years. In reality such events are diverse in nature but some are more severe than the others. Typical scenarios are:

- Falling from heights (mountain climbing, stream and coastline trekking, hiking on certain trails etc.)
- Slips and trips
- Heat stroke
- Drowning (Flash floods, swimming in streams, pools, beaches or during boat trips, swept away by waves)
- Animal bites
- Sudden illness

Despite the availability of abundant data from the Police, Civil Aid Service, Fire Service Department, Department of Health (post-mortem) and Hospital Authority, there has been a lack of systematic epidemiological study on the risk factors and how accidents can be realistically prevented. Without such studies, there will always be a limit of generalized safety education and prevention measures.

Traffic Risks

Country parks and special areas have an interface with road traffic in the following circumstances:

- Visitors mixing with occasional taxis and other traffic (e.g. Maclehorse Trail Section 1)
- Visitors needing to walk alongside traffic (e.g. Tai Mong Tsai Road between Pak Tam Chung and Tsak Yue Wu)
- Visitors needing to access bus stops and public transport facilities



香港地貌岩石保育協會
Association for Geoconservation, Hong Kong

- Visitors needing to cross traffic (e.g. Maclehoose Trail at Route Twisk, Hong Kong Trail at Tai Tam Road and Shek O Road)

Interactions with traffic degrade the experience of visitors and are hazardous, especially where traffic is busy and fast, and with large group of visitors.

For this reason, we recommend a review of all locations where country park visitors interact with traffic. The objectives are multi-folds:

- Provide adequate capacity, widths, visibility etc
- Reduce the risk through traffic calming i.e. lower speed compatible with the activities on the road or diversion of visitors from traffic flow
- Enhancement of the landscape design at interfaces through participation of professionals

Cycling in Country Parks

We do not object to more relaxed rules for cyclists to country parks, on the conditions that adequate consideration is given to safety. In particular, the following aspects will be important:

- Roads in country parks are often on gradients and are not suitable for all levels of users
- Cyclists trying to access country parks may need to cycle along public highways
- Catchwaters alongside tracks are hazardous
- Possible conflicts with traffic
- Possible conflicts with pedestrians along tracks and at junctions

Additionally, permission of cyclists should take into account potential degradation of the quality and tranquility of country parks. Such degradation could be due to excessive bicycle usage or uncontrolled rental service.

Mountain Bike Track

Cross-country mountain cycling is enjoyed only by a small circle of trained cyclists, yet it requires extensive network traversing country parks while would cause serious damages to the soil and plants if without active management. There are also safety concerns, especially where cross country cycle tracks intersect other paths used by the general visitors. We strongly object to the proliferation of such provisions.

Overnight Accommodation

It would be an excellent idea to improve accommodation facilities within and at the fringe of country parks. The objectives would be to facilitate visitors appreciating and enjoying country parks beyond daylight hours.



香港地貌岩石保育協會
Association for Geoconservation, Hong Kong

In this respect, decent and clean facilities in the form of campsites, hostels or small lodgings are preferred. In particular, it is necessary to enhance water supply and sanitation for these facilities. Current sanitary conditions of some campsites e.g. Tung Ping Chau are unsatisfactory. Improvements are essential and immediate.

While we do not preclude hotels of better standards in the surrounding of country parks, it is necessary to avoid introducing more luxurious hotels or resorts. These will not be compatible to the context and purpose of country parks in Hong Kong.

Food and Beverage Services

Better service should be available at country parks kiosks. While basic supplies at reasonable price should continue to be available, we consider that better quality food and beverages can be provided at a higher price. Concurrently, adequate and decent outdoor seating should be provided around such kiosks.

Best regards,

(As signed)

Cindy Choi
Chairman
Association for Geoconservation, Hong Kong
Email: cindy@rocks.org.hk
MP: (852) 9370 4914

Copy:
Urbis-HKG4-AFCD@urbis.com.hk
adrian.to@urbis.com.hk

Lewis Cheung: ltocheung@eduhk.hk