



1

Preamble

"For all its mythology, the history of the Kinder Mass Trespass has been laid out before; facts, once contentious, are now more or less agreed. What the trespass meant – and means – is another matter."²

Ever since I was a small boy growing up in Glossop, I have had an abiding love for the moors and crags of the Dark Peak – the northern part of the Peak District. Ever since I was an undergraduate studying Political Philosophy and the History of Ideas, I have had an abiding fascination and professional engagement with ideologies and politics. My undergraduate years spanned 1968, and ever since I have been an unrepentant *soixante-huitard* and have found myself at various points along a socialist political spectrum.

As it happens, in the early-1980s, those strands of my life coincided in a particular event. I was an early member and first National Secretary of Red Rope, the Socialist Walking and Climbing Club which emerged in 1980 and sought to revive the traditions of the Clarion Movement's outdoor socialism and the activism of the British Workers' Sports Federation.³ This led to my becoming heavily involved, alongside Benny Rothman and others, in planning, organising and promoting the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the 1932 Kinder Scout Mass Trespass.⁴

As the 90th Anniversary of the Mass Trespass hoves into view, I have been wondering whether the three strands could be brought together again. It was not entirely clear what sort of 'value added' contribution I could make to the existing literature on the 1932 Mass Trespass. There are plenty of (largely recycled) narrative accounts of the 1932 Mass Trespass and the oft-rehearsed positions of its various protagonists and antagonists. There is an accompanying literature – part campaigning, part analytic, part mythic – weighing up the place of the Mass Trespass within the broadly defined 'struggle for access to moors and mountains'.⁵

Revisiting some of that literature, I chanced upon Ed Douglas's and John Beatty's beautifully produced: *Kinder Scout: The People's Mountain*. They made the observation I have quoted at the head of this Preamble.

It set me thinking about the fierce political controversies in the 1930s around the decision of the British Workers' Sports Federation to organise a Mass Trespass on Kinder Scout. That prompted me to look back to the remarkably similar political controversies over land ownership and access arising from the Diggers' trespasses in the middle of the seventeenth century. I remembered that, at the time of the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Mass Trespass, one of the most prominent – and controversial – campaigns was the Women's March for Peace's trespass and peace camp on Greenham Common. More recently a new 'Right to Roam' campaign has grown up to extend access beyond the the limits and restrictions of the 2000 CRoW Act as part of a wider land justice movement.⁶ And a new generation of climate activists such as those involved with Extinction Rebellion are pursuing the politics of direct action to bring about an equitable and ecologically sustainable approach to land ownership and use in the face of the global climate emergency.

My six essays emerged from such stray thoughts. As Douglas suggested, the much celebrated Mass Trespass of 1932 has achieved a near mythic status. What has been lost from that myth are some of the deep-rooted political controversies surrounding the Trespass. In the circumstances of the 1930s, the Trespass surfaced very starkly some of the enduring tensions and conflicts associated with the political economy of land ownership and the cultural politics of landscape and countryside. The six reflective essays on this website are an attempt to recover and share some of those lost political dimensions and resonances of the Mass Trespass.

The first essay provides a brief, narrative overview of the events of the Mass Trespass in the contexts of the landscape of the Dark Peak and the turbulent politics of the early-1930s. It introduces seven political motifs reflected in the Trespass which will help me to structure the remaining essays. The second and third essays look back at the historical hinterlands of those motifs of the Trespass in relation to the politics of land and the politics of landscape, countryside and the growth of recreational rambling and climbing. The fourth essay is a review of the political dimensions and reverberations of the Trespass in the turbulent 1930s. The fifth explores the significance, resonances and elaborations of those politics half a century later in the no less turbulent 1980s. The sixth essay is more speculative. Against the background of the ascendancy of Neo-liberalism, it considers ways in which the politics of the Mass Trespass have a continuing resonance in the 2020s, not just for the future of recreational access to the countryside but more widely in relation to the politics of land and climate justice and the challenges of developing a sustainable global ecology.

I must stress that the essays do not offer a new narrative account of the Mass Trespass. I am not seeking to resolve those facts of the 1932 trespass which are still disputed or ambiguous.⁷ Nor am I trying to find a single, enduring political meaning of the Trespass stretching across an entire century. I will be looking at the Trespass as an intervention on the broad terrain of radical campaigning, socialist / progressive struggles, the politics of direct action, along with the related cultural politics of nature, leisure-time and the changing landscape and countryside. That entails revisiting some aspects of the history of the access / outdoor movement, focussing on the political and ideological conflicts and cross-currents which have shaped that movement. Because I am a sometime rock-climber, I have also included a bit more about the politics and cultures of rock-climbing than is usually found in the predominantly walking / hiking / rambling accounts of the countryside 'access movement'.

The six essays are personal reflections in the sense that they are essentially collages of people, ideas, events, political movements and debates which have interested me for many years. I have provided references wherever possible, but I am well aware that others will make different choices and have different perspectives. It is some time since I was an academic political theorist / historian and more recent researchers will bring a host of new insights and frameworks to bear on

the politics of the Mass Trespass. Similarly, younger generations of political activists and campaigners will have their own ways of making sense of the world and the challenges of organising to create a more just environment. I crave their indulgence and hope that the reflections of an 'old leftie' may make some small contribution to tackling the vast array of landscape-related problems we face in co-creating an equitable natural, social and political order which will carry us through to the Trespass's 100th Anniversary and along our way to the 120th.

I have tried to make the 'storyline' across the six essays accessible, coherent and not too cluttered. I have made use of footnotes, not just for references, but as a way of providing bits of additional information along with a mixture of analysis / critique / comment. I make frequent use of quotations as a way of presenting political ideas and issues at different times and amongst different groups; to understand the politics one has to engage with what the political agents one is considering actually thought, said and wrote.

The Resources section currently contains the formal bibliography of all the books, articles, websites etc which I have consulted, together with a few useful links and options for further exploration. This section will eventually be extended by a set of reflection-related resources. They will provide a bit more information on some of the topics touched on in the essays and offer a few suggestions of things you can read and do for yourself to discover more about the wider politics of the Mass Trespass. I will also provide a few comments on some of the theoretical issues underlying my approach to the politics of the Mass Trespass.⁸

Last, but by no means least, please do not take what I present here as an exclusive or authoritative account of the political significance and meanings of the Mass Trespass. I am a retired academic adult educator and my underlying aim is to capture your interest and encourage you to explore and make your own sense of the political and cultural histories, meanings and resonances of the 1932 Mass Trespass on Kinder Scout.

Julian Batsleer
Manchester
February 2022

Endnotes

¹ Commemorative plaque at Bowden Bridge Quarry, Hayfield. The Mass Trespass started there with a rally. The plaque was unveiled at the 50th Anniversary Celebration on 24 April 1982.

² Douglas (2018) p.109

³ See Batsleer (2020) for an account of the early years of Red Rope. <https://www.redrope.org.uk/news/red-rope-finds-its-feet-the-early-years/>

⁴ See Batsleer (2021) for more detail on the 50th Anniversary celebration in 1982.

<https://kindertrespass.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Mass-Trespass-50th-Anniversary-JB-20210316-final.pdf>

⁵ Look at the titles or subtitles of Cook (1977); Hill (1980); Rothman (2012); Stephenson (1989); Shoard (1997); Taylor (1997)

⁶ See Bibliography on Resources page of the website for a list of land justice campaigns and websites

⁷ Keith Warrender of Willow Publishing, Timperley, who published Benny Rothman's 1982 account of the Trespass and the updated and expanded posthumous 2012 edition is publishing a further edition in 2022. My sense is that our respective approaches and texts will be complementary and not cover the same ground

⁸ It will be summer 2022 when these additional resources are added.