

MOUNTAIN REFUGES AND NATIONAL PARKS
PICOS DE EUROPA DECLARATION

I.- INTRODUCTION

Mountain refuges have a long tradition in areas now enclosed within National Parks. Mountaineering has been involved in the preservation of many of these sites, through the Federations, hut wardens, and mountaineers, and has given more than enough evidence of its sensitivity to the conservation of mountain regions. The aim is to hold on to this precious feeling of respect for the mountains, which is compatible with the protection, use and enjoyment of the National Parks. Since their first meeting held at the National Park of El Teide in December 1999, the Regional Organisation of National Parks and the Spanish Federation for Mountaineering and Climbing Sports (FEDME) began to work together, aware of the important role mountaineering had to play in preserving the mountain environment and its use and enjoyment. This endeavour subsequently led to the organisation of four work sessions: Sierra Nevada (March 2000), Ordesa (May 2000), Aigüestortes (November 2000) and Picos de Europa (May 2001). These contacts have blossomed into a valuable exchange of know-how and experience, along with the implementation of common objectives that bring mountaineers and the Management of National Parks closer together. As a result, a consensus document has been drawn up that aims to help establish mountain huts or refuges satisfactorily as core infrastructure for mountaineering activities and to offer an example of a harmonious relationship between nature and mankind.

II.- DECLARATION

1. Huts need to be erected as an example of the compatibility of mountaineering activities with nature conservation. There should be a propensity to extend mountain regions, by distancing refuges from the summit and promoting pedestrian access only amongst the users.

2. Huts provide a base for mountaineering activities and have sports infrastructure and public utility status. Apart from their sports functions and contribution to safety, the huts should also serve as information and dissemination points for the Park's values and ideal models of behaviour to be observed inside the Park. With this aim in mind, those responsible will work in coordination with the management teams and wardens of the Protected Area. The activities linked to the refuge should respect the relevant sector and territorial regulations at all times, in accordance with the objectives and guiding principles of the National Parks.

3. Huts located inside the grounds of National Parks should offer models of infrastructure management in the local surroundings that are capable of extension to other mountain areas. This implies being able to capture environmentally satisfactory resources, making rational use of energy, minimising the production of waste along with provision for its re-cycling and removal, and adequate sanitation and maintenance systems. To this end, the competent Authorities should offer the support required in each case for adaptation on a progressive scale.

4. The huts should be integrated within the countryside and respect the cultural heritage of the area. In all cases, building designs and operating plans should strive for minimum levels of noise and visual impact, and should be subjected to an evaluation of their ecological footprint.

5. Traditionally, those responsible for looking after mountain huts have been called “wardens”. Their work, tinged with a healthy dose of vocation, goes way beyond any mere tourist programme to enter the realms of public service. Since wardens have been called upon to play a significant role in nature conservation, formulas should be devised to enable them to participate in training programmes, run by the competent authorities, that are relevant to the activity or that lead to increased knowledge of the values and regulations for protection of the environment.

6. The capacity of these refuges is limited, depending on the targets set concerning the protection of natural resources and quality of the visit. Mountain huts are restricted to providing accommodation for the number of places assigned to them. Only in cases of emergency can the maximum capacity of the shelter be exceeded. Active measures should be implemented to encourage users to reserve their place before setting off. Organised on the basis of self-maintenance, as a consideration for use of the services provided at the facility, a fee should be charged, from which a number of rights are derived. The users, whether lodging at the shelter or not, are required to abide by the house rules.

7. The activities of the shelter and the environmental parameters of the local surroundings should be monitored. There should be a fluid transmission of information, including data on overnight stays, origin of users, number of federation members, accidents in the area, routes frequented, and also any comments and effects observed on the natural environment.

8. The signatories to this document express their intention to continue to participate along the same lines of discussion and consensus of opinion undertaken thus far through the creation of a Permanent Working Group formed by representatives from both parties.

FINAL DECLARATION

This Declaration should serve as a framework reference for any future relationship between the Regional Organisation of National Parks and the Spanish Federation for Mountaineering and Climbing Sports and autonomous Federations.

In Cangas de Onís, on 12th May 2001

The Picos de Europa Declaration has been signed by the representatives of the National Parks of Picos de Europa, Sierra Nevada, Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici, Ordesa y Monte Perdido, Teide, Caldera de Taburiente, the Spanish Federation for Mountaineering and Climbing Sports (FEDME) and the Autonomous Federations of Andalusia, Aragon, Asturias, Catalonia and the Canary Islands.