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Y900051

Historical summaries of YHA members' regulations

Study Guide

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**Note: these summaries are in the nature of a perpetual draft, and are constantly revised:
this version is 2012-12-21. All previous versions should be destroyed.**

Y900051-1 Rule 1 and Rule 4, relating to The YHA and private transport

[See also Y610018, Y620001

In the old days up to 1960, Rule 1 in the annual handbook banned the use of motor vehicles to reach youth hostels. It was a hard-and-fast rule relating to arriving 'under your own steam' (on foot or by bike, and later by canoe or pony), and most wardens adhered strictly to it. By the 1950s, however, several factors put strain on the ruling: the rise of car and motor-bike ownership and concomitant fall of touring hostels by bicycle, the universal and national obsession with hitch-hiking, the rising costs of public transport, railway closures and the freer interpretation of travel-to-hostel rules in Scotland and elsewhere. These created many philosophical problems for YHA and its members to resolve, and Jack Catchpool, for one, was promoting the idea of relaxation of the rules, at least at some locations. There was for up to 20 years up to 1970 some acrimony, according to letters to the Youth Hosteller magazine. A ginger-group magazine called IV-UM ('Forum') was published to keep alive the notion of hostels for traditional use only, and the term 'suitcase hosteller' became one of derision for those who would seek to undermine the conservative position by touring by car. The matter concerned much YHA Council time and energy, and there were decisions and reversals. The first sign of official change came in the 1961 handbook; a proviso was inserted that members could use cars to reach a hostelling area, but had to abandon them once there (somewhere – out of sight of the warden, presumably – car parks at hostels of course being rare). Touring, however, was not allowed. The interpretation of this must have caused friction between wardens and members.

The 1969 handbook stated that youth hostels did not provide car parks, though before then the warden of Stratford Hostel was pleading with management to ratify the local decision to allow parking in the hostel grounds, as neighbours were complaining about indiscriminate village parking and the police had been called. A few other large hostel were following the same practice. In 1970 there were the vestiges of car park provision (with charges). From 1971 the same provisions held, but became rule 4. From 1973 the handbook openly stated that no-one was excluded from hostels by way of their means of travel, though at busy times motorists might be asked to move on.

The Rule 1 / Rule 4 débacle has largely evaporated, a sign of a much changed world, though it is still one of those memories that define YHA for some older members. Yet in YHA's 80-plus years, members have been allowed to go hostelling by car for 50 of them. A few hostel locations (Black Sail, Skiddaw House) provide a modern setting for the old rule.