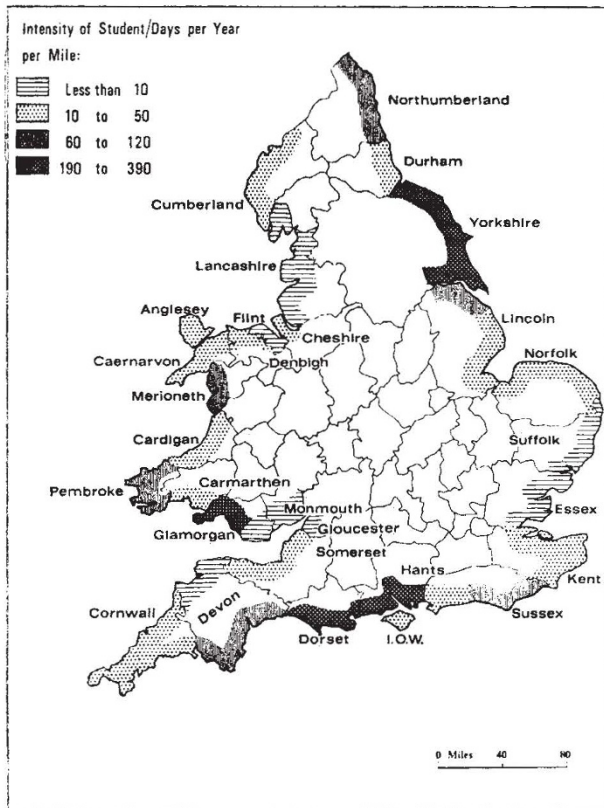


must therefore be taken of all aspects of the coast, and all planning, management and development of it, whether at the local, regional or national level, must be based on ecological research. Here the commission believes the Nature Conservancy has a special part to play in undertaking and sponsoring research through its National Nature Reserves (of which there are 120 miles in coastal areas); the reserves should continue to be used primarily for research, wildlife conservation and education.



Results of a survey by the Nature Conservancy of the use made by students of the coastline of England and Wales.

Besides making various suggestions for safeguarding the scientific interest of the coast, the new report contains much factual information on the geology and wildlife of the British coastline and on the present administrative measures by which sites of scientific importance are conserved. The various conflicting demands on the coast are usefully tabulated in a "Chart of Human Impacts on Coastal Wildlife and Scientific Interest" which traces the incidence and

effects of an activity or operation whether by industry, tourism, recreation and including the over-use of areas by scientists and students on field trips. The report also provides a classified catalogue of 371 sites of scientific importance that lie along the coast of England and Wales.

NATURAL HISTORY

Behind the Scenes

LAST week the small back rooms of the British Museum (Natural History) were unlocked to two hundred or so academics and government scientists. This was the first open day at the museum, and many visitors may have been surprised to see the labyrinth of rooms and corridors in which the museum's zoologists, botanists, palaeontologists and mineralogists carry out their labours.

One of the chief duties entrusted to the museum is the cataloguing of the thousands of new animal and plant species that are described each year. To handle so much taxonomic data the museum has installed data processing machinery and is already preparing catalogues of the spider and primate collections in machine readable form.

Another useful piece of equipment is a scanning electron microscope which is revealing the micro-structure of pollen grains, diatoms, sponges and mites and is also helping with the identification of mites of the order Astigmata.

Fishermen who hanker after a mention in the *Guinness Book of Records* will be glad to know that the museum has taken their problems to heart. Freshwater fish specialists are sorting out the characteristics of hybrids of the British members of the Cyprinidae, the carp family, so that they can be easily identified before hopes of a record are raised too far—hybrids are, it seems, just not good enough for the records league table.

The botanists have been striking out in a new direction with their survey of Mull, now in its fifth and final year of field work. The object of the exercise is to produce a comprehensive flora of the area which will describe the whole range of vegetative life from flowering plants to marine algae. The variety of expertise available in the museum has made it possible to mount this project, without the need to concentrate only on flowering plants and ferns, as most writers of floras must. The team from the museum have had the services of a Royal Navy helicopter to take them to outlying islands. The first fruits of the project were on show, including news of a hitherto unknown hybrid fern.

Transition to the Seventies

A QUARTER of a century after the first nuclear reactor at Harwell went critical the British nuclear power industry now finds itself on the threshold of a new era. The last of the Magnox power stations conceived in the first nuclear programme will be opened this year, four of the second generation advanced gas cooled reactors are already under construction, with several more in the pipeline, and the high temperature and fast reactors

are far enough along the design and testing path to keep the electricity generating authorities planning well into the nineteen eighties. But how far is British industry a prisoner of its early advances in nuclear power, and how imaginatively have the essential elements of continuity and innovation been combined in defining a reactor policy appropriate to the last two decades of the century?