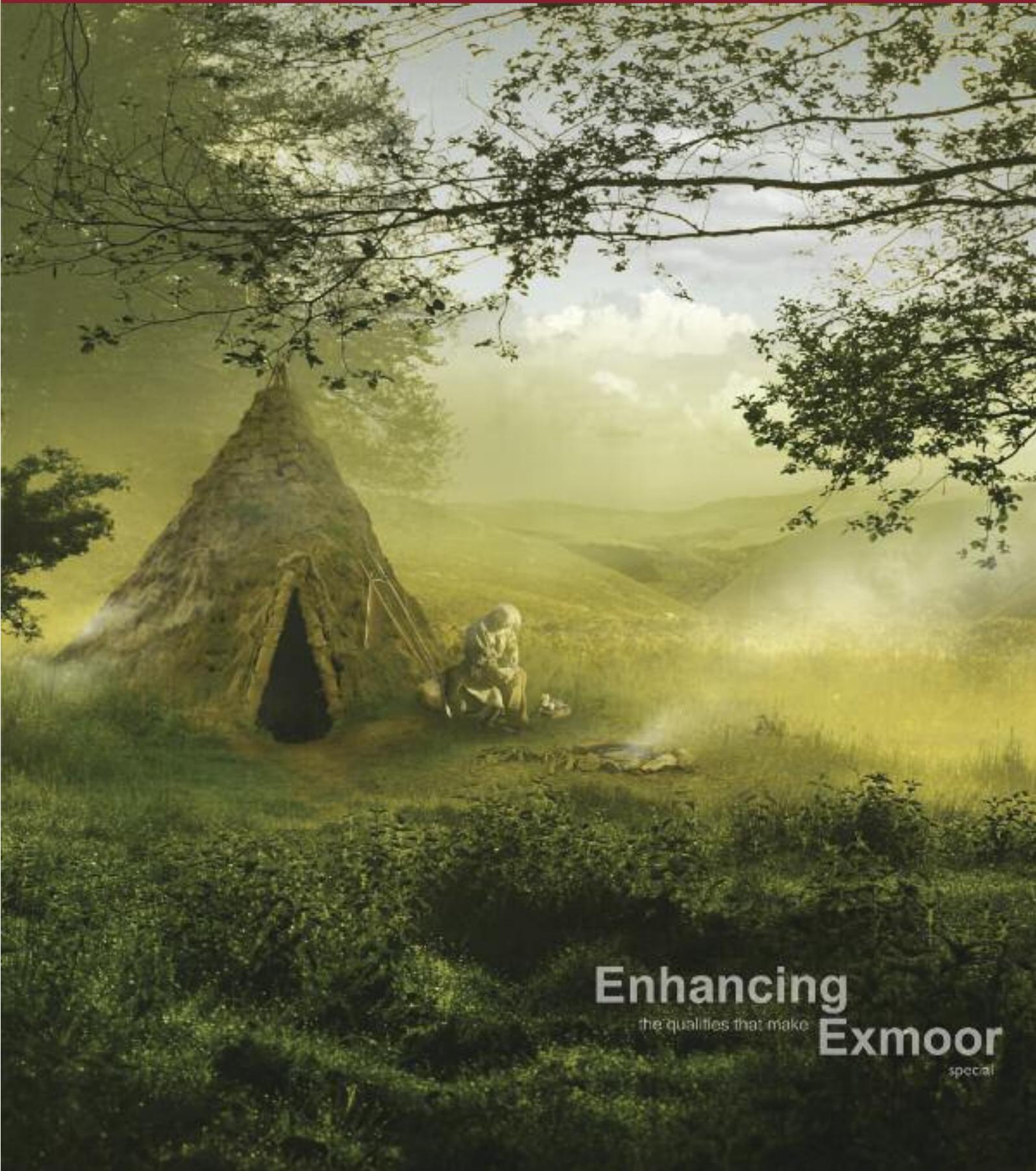




EXMOOR
NATIONAL PARK

May 2014

Historic Environment Review



Enhancing
the qualities that make **Exmoor**
special

2013 was no exception in providing a wide range of material for this publication; our annual review of archaeological activities undertaken across the National Park during the year. It was an eventful year weather wise; the dramatic floods from late 2012 were followed by extended wintery weather and a glorious summer providing challenging conditions for some of our historic sites and archaeological work, but also some spectacular photographic opportunities.

Exciting work by the Exmoor Mires Project, the Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnership Scheme and the Universities of Bristol, Leicester and Plymouth have increased our knowledge of Exmoor's archaeological landscape and provided opportunities for a significant rise in the number of local people actively involved in archaeological fieldwork and research, partnerships which we look forward to seeing develop in 2014.

Dunster Pottery Kiln Conserved

As featured in last year's review this unusual structure, a rare survival of an 18th century pottery kiln was conserved in May and June 2013 with grant aid from English Heritage. It's tucked away behind the Dunster National Park Centre in a corner of Dunster Park and well worth a visit with the bonus of a dramatic view back to the castle. Leaflets about the kiln are available from the Centre.



Dunster pottery kiln after conservation work by contractor Cyril Harriss and Jonathan Rhind architects.

Porlock Stone Circle

The questions associated with the consolidation of a loose stone led to a sample excavation of Porlock Stone circle and stone row as part of Dig Porlock. Mark Gillings of Leicester University examined these prehistoric features with students and volunteers.



Views of Exmoor exhibition

The **Views of Exmoor** exhibition was held at the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon from 14 September to 12 October 2013, showing how archaeologists are piecing together an amazing story of human resilience on Exmoor's moorlands. The story begins around 8,000 years ago when hunter gather groups first walked across Exmoor's uplands and continues with the emergence of farming and the building of Exmoor's unique miniature standing stones around 4000 years ago. Other periods in the moorland's history also featured, such as the enormous efforts made by Victorian improvers to plough up and 'improve' tracts of the moors.

The exhibition not only included recently excavated hunter gatherer tools but a replica 'hunter gatherer toolkit' to encourage visitors to interact with the exhibition. A replica Bronze Age urn made by Joss Hibbs from Powdermills Pottery on Dartmoor was displayed along with the sherds of the original pot which was found by members of the North Devon Archaeological Society near Parracombe.

Elements of Views of Exmoor will be moving to other locations on and around Exmoor, visit www.heartofexmoor.org.uk to find out more.



Fancy An Archaeological Walk?

Exmoor's moorlands are rich in archaeology, the traces left behind by people over the last 8,000 years, but the archaeology is notoriously subtle and difficult to find. Now a new series of walk cards is available, offering routes through Exmoor's moorland landscapes which take in a diverse range of historical and archaeological sites. While some of the places may be familiar, the walk cards provide a suggested route, as well as explaining the context and significance of some of the sites and landscapes encountered along the way. For much of Exmoor's moorland this encompasses 8,000 years of occupation, from the Mesolithic to World War II. The walk route cards are in a 'pocket-size' format, designed to take out and about. They were produced by Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnership Scheme, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Four walk cards are currently available from National Park centres priced at £1 each or £3 for all four. They are:

- No.1 Larkbarrow and Tom's Hill**
- No.2 Badgworthy**
- No.3 Hoarok Valley**
- No.4 Simonsbath and Cow Castle**



The Exmoor Archaeology Forum 2013: A view from the floor

"The annual Exmoor Archaeology Forum is a great way to learn about the archaeological discoveries and investigations which take place across the National Park in places which can be geographically remote and sometimes unseen by the public. The presentations about the Exmoor Mires Project and the Moorland Landscape Partnership Scheme really enhanced my understanding, both of what happened on Exmoor in the past, and where the National Park Authority would like Exmoor to be in the future, in terms of its good condition, heritage preservation, wide usage and enjoyment. The introduction of advanced technology was enthusiastically demonstrated by Rebecca Bennett from Duke University who had travelled all the way to Porlock from the USA. The use of LiDAR three dimensional landscape modelling to make the landscape archaeology and heritage of the moor more accessible to a wider range of people via the internet will be eagerly anticipated as will the new projects tantalizingly hinted at for the near future. Rob Wilson-North and his team hosted what was a really interesting event, I look forward to attending next year!"

Dan Ayre (Archaeology undergraduate, University of Southampton)

DIG Porlock 2013

From hunter-gatherer campsites to WWII training grounds, the moorlands around Porlock contain a wealth of archaeological evidence, left by the people who have used and changed this landscape over thousands of years. But many of the big questions remain unanswered: Who were the first people in Porlock parish? Where did they live? What were their lives like? How did they contribute to the Porlock we see today?



In 2013 members of the local community along with archaeologists from Exmoor National Park embarked on DIG Porlock: the aim was to investigate the origins of Porlock parish, through archaeological fieldwork, geophysical surveys, research and excavation. The project was supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund through the Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnership Scheme.

Throughout 2013 over 50 volunteers from Porlock and the surrounding area, along with children from St Dubricius and Exford Schools, were involved in DIG Porlock in all weathers, from snow, gales, mist and rain to heat waves, carrying out extensive surveys, excavation and field walking of archaeological sites. The end result of all this hard work is a solid archive and a much more coherent story about how our ancestors lived and died.

In 2014 archaeological work will focus on Porlock village itself. If you would like to get involved in the project, why not come to one of the events or contact us (see back page for contact details) or Porlock Visitor Centre.



Repairing Exmoor's historic bridges after the floods

On December 22nd and 23rd 2012 Exmoor experienced its worst flooding for many years. People were forced to leave their homes, property was damaged and there was considerable local disruption. The river Barle rose swiftly and dramatically reaching levels close to those of the catastrophic flood of August 1952. The river tore healthy trees from its banks and once in the floodwaters they became projectiles hurled against any obstacles in their path. It was not surprising therefore that, during the flood, Tarr Steps – the ‘ancient’ 17 span, clapper bridge across the Barle between Hawkridge and Winsford - was severely damaged. Many of the clapper stones which form the walkway were displaced and one, weighing as much as 2 tonnes, was carried 20 metres downstream.

Tarr Steps is the responsibility of Somerset County Council, and repair work was arranged in a very timely fashion with full consultation over the sensitivities of both the structure itself (which is a Scheduled Monument) and with those responsible for the management of the adjacent land (including a National Nature Reserve). Tarr Steps, under the gaze of national media, would be returned to its original state. But how ‘original’ is original? It seems that Tarr Steps

has been reconstructed regularly over the years and close scrutiny of old photographs shows how its form has subtly changed. This raises the question of how such a structure could have been regularly repaired in the past without a considerable investment of time and labour. Did it not wash away so regularly...or is it not that old? It seemed as if the more we thought about Tarr Steps, the less explicable it became!

To answer some of these questions Exmoor National Park commissioned an historical and archaeological study of Tarr Steps, something, that, surprisingly, had never been done before. The survey has concluded that Tarr Steps is probably late medieval in date (in the 15th or 16th centuries) built at a time when there was a need to cross the Barle to gain access to a corn mill which stood beside the river. The study looked at over 280 photographs, drawings and paintings from 11 collections, and provides a visual record of the structure and its condition from 1827 (the earliest image found so far) to the present day.

For further information and to see the report visit the [Exmoor Historic Environment Record website](#).



Other historic bridges repaired by Somerset County Council in 2013 after flood damage were the Barle Bridge at Dulverton, where there was an opportunity to have a

closer look at the date stones and the packhorse Bridge in Winsford which had been severely undermined.



Above left: the two date stones on Dulverton Bridge. One inscription reads Dulverton Bridge repaired in The yeare of our Lord God 1684... we couldn't read all of it so we'd be delighted to hear from anyone who has a record of the full inscription. The other inscription reads "Bge Widned 1819 by John Stone"

Above right: Winsford Bridge being supported in January 2013 before being repaired

Left: Bridge over the river Barle at Dulverton during repairs.

Exmoor's Past

The Historic Environment Record (HER) for Exmoor National Park is a fascinating resource providing information on archaeological remains and historic buildings dating from the prehistoric period to recent times. It is used for a whole variety of purposes, from local interest to specialised academic research as well as being used to inform planning applications and the conservation and management of historic sites.

2013 has been a very busy year for the Historic Environment Record. In April English Heritage undertook their annual flight of Exmoor (part funded by the National Park) to provide aerial photographs of significant archaeological and historic landscapes, focussing on scheduled monuments and historic settlements. This year's flight run included Tarr Steps, to show its present form after repairs following flood damage; Lynton and Lynmouth, in particular to record works at the new Pavilion site; and many individual sites such as Lyshwell deserted farmstead (pictured), which has excellent earthwork remains and is believed to be of post-medieval date. The HER holds a collection of aerial images taken since 1996 and they form an important record used for research, conservation and management. English Heritage also holds an outstanding range of items in its historic National Collections, including an online archive

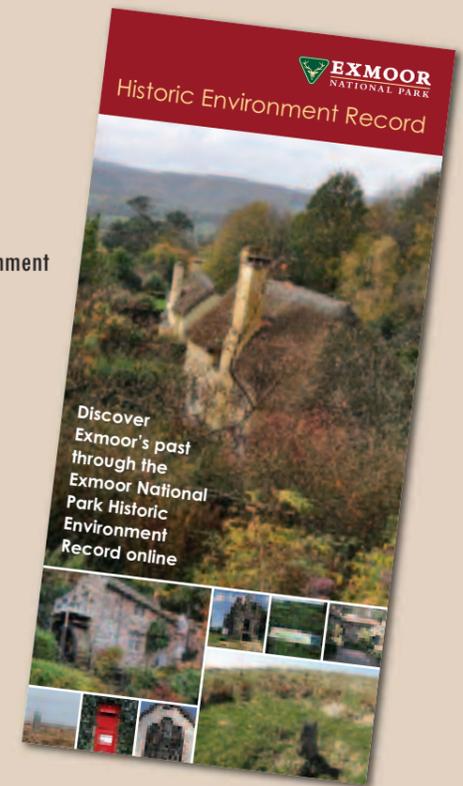
where you can view over two million photographs and records online (visit www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/archives-and-collections).

We want to make sure the HER is as good as it can be to meet the needs of its users and comply with nationally agreed standards. As the HER is quite new (2009) we are working to improve the records all the time. To assess where we are and what needs to be done, an audit of the HER was completed in early 2014. This audit is being part funded by English Heritage and will help us prioritise future improvements.

As usual, project work in 2013 produced a large amount of new archaeological information to be incorporated into the HER. Projects include the Exmoor Mires Project (funded by South West Water), those run through the Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnership Scheme with significant projects at Porlock Allotment and Hoakoak Valley, and other work such as excavations being undertaken by the Universities of Bristol and Leicester. To help input information from the Exmoor Mires Project and to assist with the audit the Historic Environment team have recruited a temporary Historic Environment Record Assistant, Sophie Thorogood.

We want to ensure that access to the HER is as wide as possible and this year saw the launch of our new website, Exmoor's Past. Here you can explore Exmoor's fascinating archaeology and history searching by text and map, as well as browse our subject library of time periods, features, themes, projects and research on Exmoor. A new subject recently uploaded is *War on the Moor: Commemoration*, a discussion of Exmoor's war memorials.

To access the HER website please visit www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/environment/history and follow the links to the Historic Environment Record. If you have any information on Exmoor's past that you would like to add please do not hesitate to contact us. Visitors are also welcome to view our collection at Exmoor House by prior appointment; you can reach us at HER@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk or 01398 322273 for further details.



Above: Selworthy War Memorial

Left: Lyshwell Farmstead ©English Heritage 27658_001

Above: Historic Environment Record website
Right: new Historic Environment Record leaflet

The website also provides information on a range of useful resources relating to Exmoor's historic environment, including web links and references for books, journals, reports, photographs and aerial images held in the HER in Exmoor House, Dulverton.



Exmoor Mires Project



Spooners and Deer Park

Spooners and Deer Park are two adjoining areas of moorland to the south of Simonsbath bounded by the River Barle and the roads to Brayford and Horsen Farm. Both areas saw extensive drainage attempts in the 19th century and are targets for mire restoration by the Exmoor Mires Project (EMP). Work began early in 2012 to understand the archaeology of the two areas which was known to include the remains of Blue Gate Mine and a range of prehistoric features such as the Halscombe Stone Setting and several cairns with most known sites located on Deer Park in the west, Spooners being considered something of a blank!

Now, a year and a half later the picture is rather different. Walkover survey alone has yielded a total of 36 new archaeological features for inclusion in the Historic Environment Record, ranging in age from the deep prehistory of the Mesolithic to the 20th century. They have included extensive prospecting features of types previously unknown on Exmoor, disused field boundaries, unrecorded standing stones, cairns and new finds of prehistoric artefacts.

Detailed investigation and recording was undertaken on several of these sites in 2013, including geophysical and measured earthwork survey and excavation. At Wintershead, where a small group of worked flints had been retrieved from an eroding track, geophysical survey

suggested extensive buried archaeological remains. Sample excavation uncovered a series of features one of which was fully investigated and turned out to be a small pit containing charcoal and heated rock and clay. Work on the contents of the pit is ongoing, but flints from the site indicate activity in both the Late Mesolithic and Neolithic periods. As archaeological features from these periods are rare Wintershead may prove to be a significant site for the archaeology of Exmoor.

Geophysical survey was also undertaken further to the east on Spooners where a long stoney mound on the banks of a stream showed a large magnetic anomaly, most probably because the rock fragments forming the mound had been heated. Similar features elsewhere are known as burnt mounds and are usually prehistoric in date although their function is enigmatic and suggestions include the sites of feasting or even saunas and sweat lodges.

The archaeological work undertaken as part of EMP has transformed Spooners and Deer Park from relative archaeological backwaters into exciting areas with high potential for future research as well as proving the worth of an investigative methodology based on multiple repeat site visits under different conditions to maximise the identification of unrecorded features.

Excavation at Wintershead: providing shade for photographic recording.



Examining the peat

Peat has an amazing capacity to preserve organic materials. As a result, elsewhere in the country, peat wetlands have yielded spectacularly well-preserved objects such as boats, wooden trackways, ritual offerings and even bodies. Perhaps less glamorously peat also maintains an archive of past environmental change through its preservation of the remains of flora and fauna living in and around the mires.

Such palaeo-environmental evidence from Spooners and Ricksy Ball to the south and west of Simonsbath has been under investigation. The main objective of this work was to record vegetation change over the last millennium in order to explore the influence of the Royal Forest on the local environment and to provide useful data for hydrological work at the project monitoring stations on Spooners and Ricksy Ball.

A further aim was to identify horizons of tephra; microscopic fragments of volcanic glass thrown into the atmosphere by eruptions and deposited in mires by wind. It is possible to link tephra to a specific eruption, providing a valuable means of dating the peat. Eleven different tephra horizons were identified of which nine could be dated. Eight of these were from Icelandic eruptions ranging in date from 1947 to around 5000BC, but the earliest horizon originated from the Campi Flegrei Fondi di Baia volcano in Italy around 7400 years ago. This is so far the only example of this tephra in the country and suggests unusual weather conditions at the time of the eruption!

Dating of the samples showed that at Spooners peat began to accumulate around 8500 years ago. The Ricksy Ball mire is somewhat younger, forming from around 5000 years ago, with a rapid accumulation of peat making it particularly suitable for the investigation of the last millennium. Initial results indicate that, far from being a period of unchanging human activity, the tenure of the Royal Forest saw subtle variations in management practices, the most pronounced being a sudden decrease in the frequency of microscopic charcoal in the late Medieval/early Modern period, possibly indicating a cessation or reduction in the use of swaling at this time. More recently, the evidence clearly shows the impact of the excavation of drainage ditches in changes in the flora and fauna living in the mire.

The industry of cutting peat

In the past, cut peat, known locally as 'turf', was an important household fuel on Exmoor, its use only finally ceased in the 1990s. Although the remains of this activity are widespread and are among the aspects of archaeology most affected by the work of mire restoration, they have attracted little study and consequently the industry is poorly understood. To address this, in 2012 Hazel Riley was commissioned to collate available information and assess the evidence.

The study has involved the investigation of photographic and artefact collections held by museums and private

individuals, documentary research and detailed field survey, as well as the examination of oral histories, aerial photographs and LiDAR survey data. As a result, it has been possible to explore the methodology of turf cutting, its social context and how it fitted into the agricultural year. Even minor variations have become apparent between turf cutting undertaken on the big Exmoor estates and the moorland edge farms. Some quantification of the impact of the industry has also been possible, with turf cuttings covering at least 1000 hectares of Exmoor's peatlands, or around one sixth of the total area, concentrated in the deeper parts of the blanket peat. Using several case studies, the typical archaeological remains of turf-cutting activities are detailed; the turf pits themselves, the remains of turf drying stacks, trackways and the specialist buildings which survive on several Exmoor farms. The study provides a valuable statement of the nature and extent of the evidence for a previously neglected but vitally important rural industry on Exmoor and provides a firm foundation for future research in the area.



Above: Peat cutting on Brendon Common in the 1990s

Archaeological work in the Hoarook Valley



Hoarook Valley runs northwards out of the high moorland of The Chains before joining the East Lyn River at Hillsford Bridge near Watersmeet. It is a remote place, and towards its southern end comprises some of Exmoor's most dramatic and remote moorland combes. In the last two years it has been the focus of intensive archaeological survey and conservation work, funded through the Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnership by the Heritage Lottery Fund and other local partners, including the Heathcoat Trust and the Amory Trust.

Within the valley are the ruins of Hoarook Cottage, the home of a shepherd and his family since the beginning of the 19th century, which was abandoned in 1958. The building has been in gradual decline for at least 20 years, exacerbated by an inherent structural problem which is causing its southern wall to collapse. In 2012 a plan to conserve the cottage as a ruin was agreed by Exmoor National Park, the Exmoor Society, Friends of Hoarook Cottage and the Exmoor Uprising. Since then a careful process of recording the building and removing unstable masonry has been underway. By Summer 2014 the ruins of the cottage will be visible as a consolidated ruin in the landscape: a testimony to the people who have lived there.

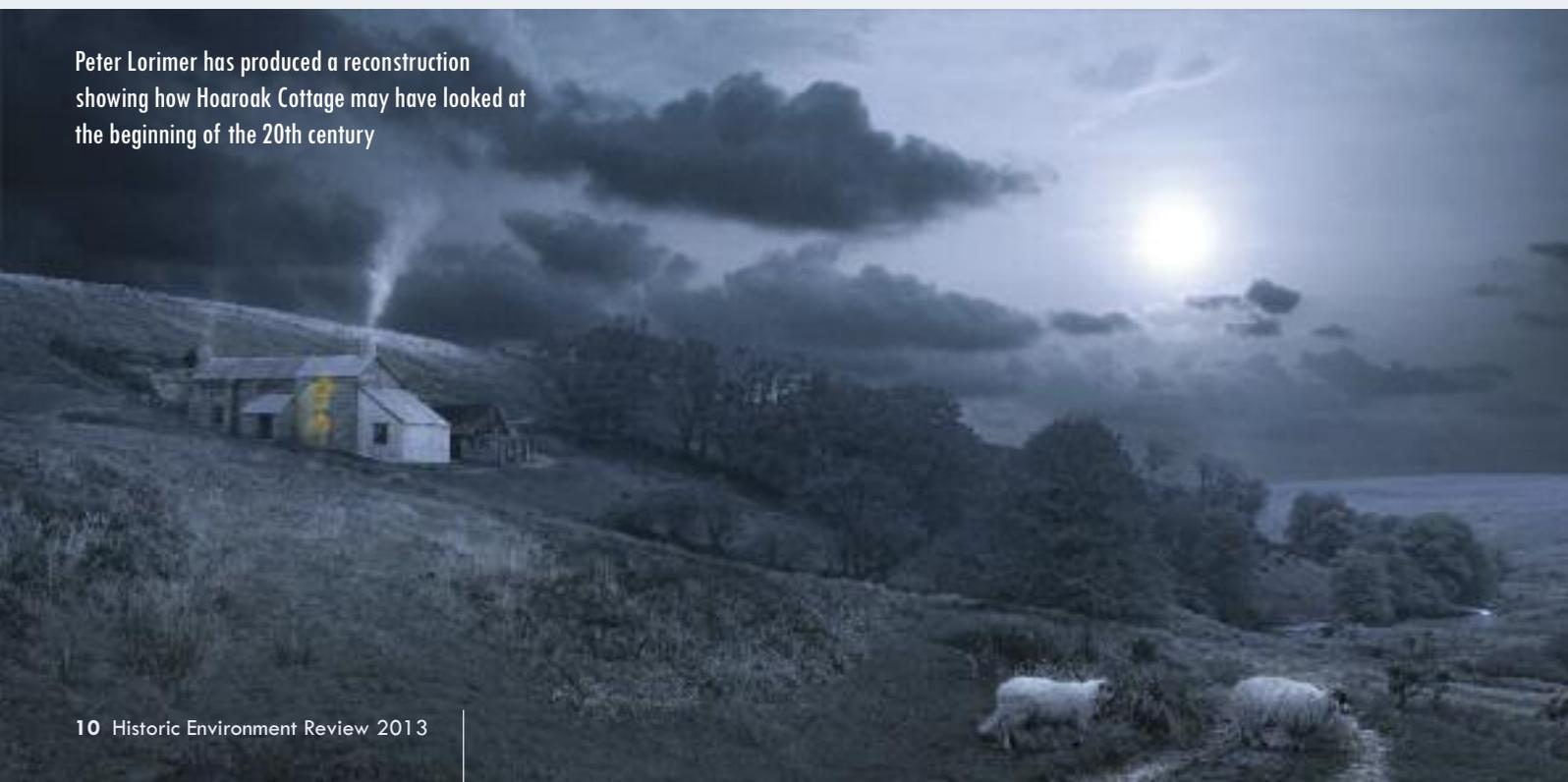
But what of the earlier use of this valley? The cottage is surrounded by its own abandoned fields, but was there a deeper history? The Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnership has undertaken a series of initiatives to reveal and interpret this story, showing that there is a much longer human history in the Hoarook valley than previously

thought. A detailed survey has been completed of a 19th century worker's cottage near to Long Chains Combe, within the boundary of the former Royal Forest, possibly to house labourers working for the Knight family of Simonsbath. They are thought to have been working at a 'gatepost factory' - a natural rock outcrop a few hundred metres to the north. This cottage was short-lived and can be seen today as a ruin on a knoll above the Two Moors Way. A programme of careful consolidation was carried out in May 2013 on the most vulnerable walling at the site.

Opposite the Hoarook Cottage on Cheriton Ridge laser-scanning of the earth's surface has revealed the traces of previously unknown prehistoric settlement. Following this discovery, preliminary archaeological survey and geophysical survey has been carried out. This has shown that there are at least four prehistoric settlements and an associated field system there gathered around the spring line. Close to the prehistoric settlements, and using the same spring, is an abandoned medieval settlement, probably comprising one or two small farmsteads. These were probably abandoned by the 1400s.

Taken together we can now see the Hoarook Valley not as a remote, hardly-used valley, but rather as a place where people have lived – perhaps continuously – since the beginning of the Bronze Age around 4000 years ago. To help visitors appreciate the Hoarook valley and discover its archaeology for themselves, an Archaeology Walk Card has been produced which is now available in National Park Centres (see page 3 for more details).

Peter Lorimer has produced a reconstruction showing how Hoarook Cottage may have looked at the beginning of the 20th century



The Radar Station at North Hill

North Hill above Minehead lies at the north-eastern corner of the National Park and is a topographically isolated area of coastal heath overlooking the Bristol Channel. During the Second World War the area was taken over by the army for training, and in particular became a tank training range, seeing a period of intense activity before the Normandy landings in 1944.

One of the only upstanding buildings from the use of the area during World War Two is a radar station. It is owned by Exmoor National Park and is used as a volunteer store, but also forms part of the annual North Hill Big Adventure Day when the wartime history of this area is explained and military re-enactors bring wartime vehicles and equipment and have a parade on the site. The radar station itself is a rare survival of its type and of national importance. It has recently been studied and recorded by archaeologists to try and fully understand its purpose. The recording was undertaken by Andrew Passmore and Stella de-Villiers of AC Archaeology who write:

'The radar station at North Hill was a Second World War Coastal Defence/Chain Home Low (CD/CHL) establishment. It is built of reinforced concrete and was probably in use from 1942 until 1944. It formed one of a chain of buildings around the coasts of Britain designed to detect shipping and low-flying aircraft. They were short range radar extending to only 25 miles (40km). The station on North Hill would have worked in conjunction with CD/CHL radars in Swansea and Oxwich in South Wales. These would have overlapped providing full coverage of the entrance to the Bristol Channel. Associated Coastal Defence gun batteries were situated along the Bristol Channel, at Ilfracombe, Minehead, Brean Down, as well as Flat Holm and Steep Holm within the channel itself. Information gathered by the radar stations would have been used to help these coastal batteries engage enemy shipping and aircraft.'

Conservation of the building has been carried out by local contractors through the Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnership with financial assistance from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The 2014 North Hill Big Adventure Day is on 23rd August. The radar station will be open to visitors and you are welcome to come and see the radar station for yourself.

An Envious Possession?

Until the beginning of the 1800s much of the central part of Exmoor was still owned by the Crown - as it had been for almost 1000 years - as one of its Royal Forests. In this way it had remained bleak moorland for long centuries, once described as 'filthy' and 'barren', but had been home in the summer months to thousands of sheep and cattle, grazed there for a headage payment made by farmers to the Royal treasury.

In 1818 the Forest was sold and passed into private hands. It became the possession of John Knight, who was from a wealthy Worcestershire family made wealthy by iron founding. John set about a process of 'improving' Exmoor and turning moorland into productive farmland. Over a period of at least 50 years much of the former Forest was drained and ploughed. Around 14 farms were created, farmsteads built, beech hedges planted and thousands of kilometres of drains were dug by hand. This was the last great Victorian land reclamation scheme in England - and it transformed the heart of Exmoor.



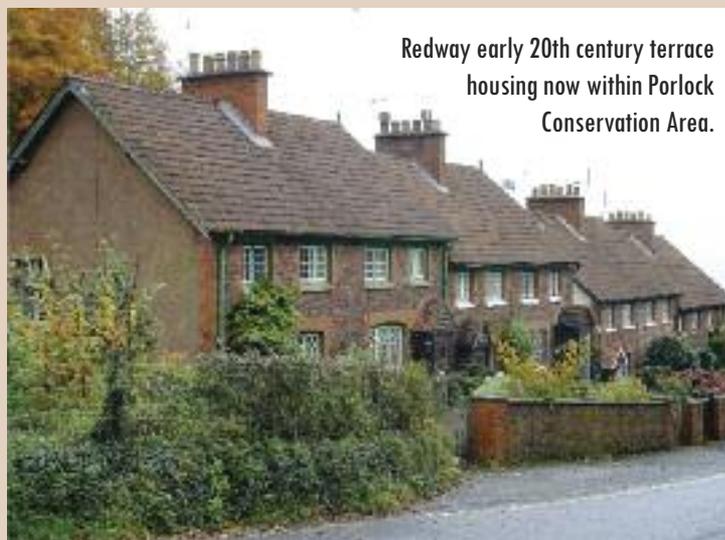
At the heart of the former Royal Forest is the tiny village of Simonsbath. Only a single dwelling in 1818, John Knight saw Simonsbath as both his home and the hub of his estate. He set about building a great neo-Gothic mansion there and planned a setting fit for such a fine house. He was an old man when he came to Exmoor and his taste was old fashioned: he seems to have planned a 'picturesque' landscape to surround his great house, but his aspirations were never to be fulfilled, and the mansion stood, incomplete, at his death, destined never to be completed.

Nearly 200 years after the Knight family began their Exmoor Experiment, Exmoor National Park Authority has now acquired one of the oldest buildings on the Knight estate. White Rock Cottage was once the gardener's cottage, but later became the village school. It lies at the entrance to the hidden valley of Ashcombe where two great white stones announce the entrance of what was once to be part of the private gardens of the estate. In the coming years, a programme of research and careful conservation will be undertaken to ensure that the full story of this remarkable place is told and that the surviving parts of John Knight's great plan can be conserved for the future.



Conservation Areas

The newly extended conservation area boundary and appraisal for Porlock was formally adopted by Exmoor National Park in November 2013 following public consultation over the summer, which included two events in the village hall. The revised area takes in additional historic areas and buildings to the east and west of the village as well as the hamlet of Hawkcombe to the south, which is mainly 19th century in character. Porlock is the first of the 16 appraisals to be completed. Lynton, Lynmouth, Dunster and Wootton Courtenay conservation areas were surveyed in 2013, with Dulverton and the four historic farmsteads to be completed in early 2014. Public consultation for all conservation areas will follow later in the year.



Redway early 20th century terrace housing now within Porlock Conservation Area.

Coming up:

The Historic Environment Team are involved in a number of events occurring throughout 2014. For more information on these events, to find details of further events run by a variety of organisations and open days at Simonsbath Sawmill see: www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov/visiting/events

May 7

History and Ecology of Restored Mires; a circular walk from the Pinkery Centre to the Chains led by the Exmoor Mires project

June 27-28

Dig Porlock; a community archaeology event

August 17

Bogtastic; a drop-in family adventure day

August 20

A walk around Historic Porlock 10.30am - 12.30pm

August 23

North Hill Big Adventure Day; family activities and events with a World War II focus

September 11

Simonsbath, a vanished mansion and its gardens; guided walk 2.00 - 4.00pm

September 27

Exmoor Archaeology Forum; Filleigh Village Hall

October 1

Exploring Exmoor's Mires; history, archaeology and ecology a guided walk 10.30am - 3.00pm

Front cover:

Detail from a new reconstruction of Mesolithic Hawkcombe Head by Peter Lorimer

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