Welcome to the Historic Environment Review for 2007. In it we look back over some of the notable activities, discoveries, events and projects carried out over the year. Much of what has happened has been achieved through partnerships with others, including English Heritage, universities, other local authorities, local groups and individuals. In particular, we have been very fortunate in securing substantial external funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the West Somerset Mineral Railway and from English Heritage for the National Mapping Programme and the Historic Environment Record.

During 2008 we hope to see further progress on key National Park Management Plan objectives for the historic environment in respect of the historic settlement of Dunster, the West Somerset Mineral Railway, the conservation of Scheduled Ancient Monuments, understanding of Exmoor’s prehistoric landscape and the history of Exmoor’s coast.

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Front Cover Image
West Somerset Mineral Railway - The Iron Ore Mines
Somerset Mineral Syndicate: miners at Timwood Adit.
Photograph courtesy of Mike Jones; photographer H H Hole 1908
In December 2007 work began on the conservation and interpretation of structures associated with the West Somerset Mineral Railway and the iron mining landscape of the Brendon Hills in eastern Exmoor. This work follows on from nearly four years of project planning and development and has been the subject of a grant of £603,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The project will lead to the conservation of three industrial structures which are central to the iron mining landscape of the WSMR. They comprise two major Scheduled Ancient Monuments (a ventilation chimney and an inclined plane) and an unscheduled engine house. Physical access to these three sites will be created, as well as improvements to access arrangements in and around the harbour town of Watchet. The project also includes a range of interpretation initiatives: the development of a website, the publication of a detailed account of the railway and its associated mining landscape as well as a popular publication, improvements at Watchet Market House Museum, leaflets and guides as well as guidance and information for schools, and some on-site interpretation. To achieve all of this, the project is being guided by a group of dedicated partners led by Exmoor National Park Authority – the partners include the Forestry Commission, Somerset County Council, West Somerset Council, Watchet Town Council, Watchet Market House Museum and English Heritage, as well as local groups including the Exmoor Society, Somerset Rural Youth Group and the Exmoor Mines Research Group; as well, there is the expertise of key individuals such as Mike Jones, David Dawson and Eric Robinson. Together the partners encompass an invaluable reservoir of talents, knowledge and experience.

The partners have been ably led by Evelyn Marsden, a Member of Exmoor National Park Authority whom we will be sorry to lose in 2008.

Jonathan Rhind Architects (based in Taunton) are supervising the conservation work which is being carried out on the ground by Corbel Conservation Ltd. The interpretation projects will be co-ordinated and run by a Heritage Education Officer who will be based at Exmoor National Park Authority for 18 months from May 2008.
For the last seven years Exmoor has relied on a split between an internally run Historic Environment record (HER) at Exmoor National Park Authority and the two county based HERs in Somerset and Devon for all public enquiries about Exmoor’s past. However, during 2008 that is set to change. Exmoor National Park Authority carried out a Staffing Complement Review in 2007 which recommended the creation of the post of Historic Environment Record Officer to manage and develop an HER for Exmoor. The HER will contain detailed information about all aspects of Exmoor’s past: from archaeological sites and surface finds, to historic buildings and wider historic landscapes and will be the primary record of information about Exmoor’s past. The post, created with financial support from English Heritage, will develop and maintain the HER for Exmoor and will take it online through English Heritage’s Heritage Gateway.

During 2007, the recently discovered prehistoric stone row at Warcombe Water was surveyed by staff of English Heritage’s Exeter Office at the request of Exmoor National Park Authority’s Historic Environment Team. The stone row – one of only eight on Exmoor – was surveyed along with other prehistoric features in the area. During the course of the survey a collection of previously unrecognised archaeological monuments were surveyed, making this a very rich prehistoric landscape. At the same time, a newly discovered stone setting on Trout Hill was also recorded.
Exmoor’s misunderstood prehistoric landscape

During 2007 a number of initiatives have been developed to further investigate the mysteries of Exmoor’s prehistoric past. The University of Leicester, with support from the University of Bristol has begun a programme of excavation on Exmoor’s stone settings, and with additional funding hopes to continue this work through 2008 with excavations at two sites. The University of Bristol is also seeking funding for further excavations on the hunter gatherer site at Hawkcombe Head near Porlock. The University of Exeter is developing a project to examine the prehistoric landscape at and around Roman lode near Simonsbath. These three initiatives, combined with the valuable environmental research currently being carried out by Dr Ralph Fyfe at the University of Plymouth promise to make the biggest contribution so far to our understanding of Exmoor’s prehistoric landscape.

After the Burn – fieldwork in the wake of swaling

Despite the incredibly wet summer in 2007 there have been a very high number of moorland burns, both planned and unplanned. Burning or swaling is a traditional method of moorland management and Exmoor National Park Authority works with tenants and landowners to ensure that swaling is carried out carefully to avoid archaeologically sensitive areas. However some burns are ‘unplanned’ and expose previously unrecorded archaeological features, so it is important to check such areas by a walkover survey. In 2007 the burning checks were carried out by Heather Smith and Jane Wilson who spent three months with the Historic Environment team as part of their MAs in Landscape Archaeology at the University of Bristol. They covered 25 areas and a total of 1.8 km2 and were able to add detail to the archaeological record for these areas, for instance in recording the position and form of the extensive iron mining pits and channels on the North Molton Ridge. The survey discovered three previously unknown sites; one cairn and two new field systems.
Sustainable management of the historic environment within Exmoor’s upland valley mires

Monuments such as standing stones or barrows are familiar features of the rich and varied archaeological landscape of Exmoor’s uplands: but how can we tell how people in the past used sites like these and the landscape around them? Pollen and plant remains preserved within peat provide a detailed record of human impact on the environment through time. Recent palaeoenvironmental work on Exmoor has shown that small upland valley mires contain a wealth of information about changing patterns of land use in their local area (encompassing a few miles around each mire). Future investigations at many such mire sites could allow us to build up a picture of the mosaic of environments across Exmoor at different periods in the past, as well as answering questions such as: how were prehistoric people using the landscape around the stone settings they erected? Or, how did medieval farmers exploit the land around their now-deserted upland farmsteads? A recently initiated PhD project (2007-2010) at the University of Plymouth - set up with funding from the Great Western Research Council and Exmoor’s Sustainable Development Fund - aims to establish the extent, and assess the condition and value to archaeological knowledge, of upland valley mires across Exmoor. It will also consider the possible threats to the survival of this important resource and make recommendations for how best to preserve them. The project will involve local volunteers and community groups in collecting data for monitoring programs at key sites, or taking part in assessing the condition of mire sites through walkover survey.

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Heather Adams by email at heather.adams@plymouth.ac.uk

Conserving Scheduled Ancient Monuments – the Monument Management Scheme

We have continued to use the Monument Management Scheme - joint funded by Exmoor National Park Authority and English Heritage - to improve the condition of Scheduled Ancient Monuments in Exmoor National Park. This year the scheme has concentrated mostly on Iron Age hill-slope enclosures which had been previously identified as needing conservation.
Flying through the past
– English Heritage’s National Mapping Programme

The English Heritage National Mapping Programme (NMP) collates and interprets information contained on air photographs in order to produce a map of England’s archaeology from the Neolithic period to the twentieth century. NMP projects typically contribute to understanding in two ways, through the discovery of new sites, or better understanding of known sites, but equally importantly, by providing an overview of the archaeology of landscapes.

During the twentieth century, most aerial archaeological survey was devoted to taking aerial photographs and building collections of them. Millions of these aerial photographs have been archived by the National Monuments Record, local collections usually in Historic Environment Records (HERs) and the Cambridge University collection.

Although many exciting archaeological discoveries have been made from aerial photographs, the majority of the archaeological sites on the photographs have either never been looked at or considered in any detail – in other words, exciting discoveries are still to be made on existing aerial photographs.

Archaeology which is visible on an aerial photograph needs to be interpreted by a specialist and it is usually the case that many photographs are needed to build up a picture of an archaeological site or landscape. This picture is developed by the accurate mapping of the information to provide interpretations of the sites and landscapes.

The NMP survey of Exmoor’s National Park is one of several surveys in the south west of England, including the Mendip Hills and the Quantock Hills.

Helen Winton
Senior Investigator, Aerial Survey and Investigation, English Heritage
AN AERIAL PERSPECTIVE

National Mapping Programme on Exmoor

Work began on the Exmoor National Park National Mapping Programme survey in April 2007 and over the next two years the Exmoor NMP team, based in the English Heritage Office in Exeter, will analyse over 15,000 aerial photographs to produce the first detailed archaeological landscape map of Exmoor National Park. The survey will cover 809 square kilometres (over 300 square miles), including a small area outside the National Park. Along Exmoor’s coast the survey has already recorded evidence for human activity from the Neolithic period to the twentieth century.

The project is making new discoveries as well as improving our understanding of Exmoor’s better known monuments. This kind of enhancement of the National Park’s Historic Environment Record (HER) will:

- increase the value of current and new research on Exmoor.
- aid the management of Exmoor’s historic environment
- help us to respond to new challenges faced within National Parks, such as climate change, the construction of wind farms and the siting of bio-fuel and cover crops.

NMP is also adding to our knowledge of prehistoric settlement and farming on Exmoor. For instance on Stoneditch Hill, just to the west of Combe Martin, a previously unrecognised rectangular hillside enclosure was recorded. Typical of Iron Age or Romano-British farmsteads from lowland areas of Britain, its uplands location is unusual for the environs of Exmoor.

THE WORK OF THE NATIONAL MAPPING PROGRAMME ON EXMOOR

A multi-period landscape palimpsest; medieval field systems encroaching onto the common land surrounding Old Burrow Roman fortlet.

English Heritage (NMR) RAF Photography
RAF 540-910 (F20) 4051 17-OCT-1952

The NMP survey has nearly doubled the number of known earthworks at the barrow cemetery on Kipscombe Hill. The earthworks are mapped in red.

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English Heritage 100019088.2007

This enclosure of possible Iron Age date is visible as a cropmark on only one aerial photograph.

English Heritage (NMR) RAF Photography
RAF 82/1281 0054 29-AUG-1954
Reclamation, farming and fishing

Many field boundaries of medieval origin have been removed since the Second World War.

English Heritage (NMR) RAF Photography
RAF CPEUK1980 (F20) 4050 11-APR-1947

Using a range of sources, such as these infra-red photographs, NMP has recorded evidence for the original medieval strip fields on which many modern boundaries are based.
© Cambridge University copyright reserved.
ENPA CUCAP (Zki-FD 51-2) 02-NOV-1995

A solitary fish trap on Countisbury Cove beach.
Fish wiers are found along the southern side of the Severn Estury as far as Bridgwater bay. There are also two examples at Lynmouth and at Porlock.
© English Heritage (NMR)
NMR SS7650/6 (18280/06) 19-MAR-1999

Field gutter systems associated with three separate farms on the West Lyn River. The water meadow at South Stock was still in use in 1972. Field gutters encouraged an early flush of grass by irrigating steep hillsides.
© Crown copyright. Ordnance Survey
NMR OS/72065 191 15-APR-1972
War on the Moor

The Second World War triangular concrete roads of the tank firing ranges to the west of Minehead are well known, but aerial photographs can shed light on more ephemeral evidence of Exmoor’s role in this conflict. On the north of Brendon Common at Slocomslade, prefabricated structures provided accommodation for troops.

Numerous tracks lead from this camp to a firing range on Brendon Common, which was developing rocket technology for the delivery of chemical weapons. Although never employed for this purpose, these weapons proved invaluable during D-day. The intensity of the testing is illustrated by thousands of small craters, and although the full extent of the range has not yet been ascertained, it clearly extended over great swathes of Exmoor.

Changing perceptions – more Exmoor enigmas

Exmoor NMP has identified a previously unrecognised monument which is not only of national significance, but also of a type not previously recognised on Exmoor. This enigmatic site, perched above the precipitous coastal cliffs of Combe Martin, encloses the summit of Little Hangman. It is visible only on a single air photograph. The site is reminiscent of a tor cairn, as found on Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor, but is significantly different in construction and setting – neither Dartmoor nor Bodmin have a coastline! Its precarious location perched at the top of a 1000 ft cliff seems to have held special significance and is a good example of how the work of NMP is changing perceptions about Exmoor’s past.
The earliest monuments

Exmoor has a wealth of well preserved archaeological sites and landscapes dating from early prehistoric times. Some of the most impressive are barrows and cairns grouped into cemeteries. The most spectacular occur on the high moors, but the NMP survey has also added to the number of known barrows at smaller sites nearer the coast.

Dissemination

The survey’s results will be deposited in Exmoor National Park Authority’s Historic Environment Record at Dulverton and English Heritage’s National Monument Record in Swindon, and as such will be available to everyone. However, it is the nature of aerial survey that the work is never truly finished and there will always be questions that cannot be answered from the photographs alone. Future work will build upon our findings, adding to the bigger picture or providing dating evidence to confirm or disprove our interpretations.

Until then, you can read about the survey’s latest discoveries and see the progress of this, and other National Mapping Programme projects on the English Heritage website (http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.11316)

Using a stereoscope; stereo-viewing gives a 3D birds-eye view effect very useful for seeing archaeological features.

Photograph - Steph Knight

Identifying archaeological features on vertical air photographs taken by the RAF in the 1940’s.

Photograph: English Heritage

Future Events

We will be holding a number of events during 2008-9 to raise awareness of the survey, including showing Exmoor school children what aerial photographs can teach them about their local heritage and, in September 2008, the annual Exmoor Archaeology Forum will focus on the National Mapping Programme and the issues it raises.

Local knowledge can be vital to archaeological research. This ‘landscape graffiti’ can be seen on photographs of 1979.

Are you JW or SC?

© Crown copyright.

Ordnance Survey OS 79/013 198 17-APR-1979

THE WORK OF THE NATIONAL MAPPING PROGRAMME ON EXMOOR
Lanacombe III stone consolidation:
1. Refilling the stone socket
2. Backfilling the erosion hollow

Photographs: Heather Adams

Conserving Scheduled Ancient Monuments - the Lanacombe project

The delicate and diminutive nature of Exmoor’s prehistoric standing stones means that they are more vulnerable to damage and erosion than some of Exmoor’s more robust field monuments.

Two such stone settings are Lanacombe I and III – both Scheduled Ancient Monuments. They lie on the long plateau above a tributary of Badgworthy Water, in the midst of an extensive prehistoric landscape and with long uninterrupted views west to Larkbarrow and towards Madacombe to the east.

Both sites are extensive stone settings arranged in apparently random patterns. In 2006 it was noticed that a stone at each site had fallen, but it is unknown exactly when or how the damage took place. With the damage being relatively recent it was possible to still see the stone holes and so it was viable to re-erect the stones.

A limited amount of excavation would be needed on each site to ensure the secure and accurate placing of the stones. The Exmoor National Park Authority archaeologists and Dr Mark Gillings and Dr Jeremy Taylor from the University of Leicester saw this as an ideal opportunity to research the structure and soil around these elusive stone settings.

In April 2007 work was undertaken at Lanacombe I: the area was surveyed with GPS, a control grid established and a resistivity survey was carried out across the whole site including a small associated cairn. The stone hole was excavated and soil samples were collected. The stone was then re-erected, packing stones replaced, the interface between the original surface and the imported neutral river washed soils was covered with a geotextile and finally covered with the original turfs. Blackthorn was tied around the stone to discourage grazing animals while the soil consolidates. The same process was repeated in August on Lanacombe III. Despite the wet summer, this project work fortunately coincided on both occasions with the only summer weather that Exmoor saw.
The Victoria County History and the work of England’s Past for Everyone on Exmoor

The recent Victoria County History project on Exmoor - England’s Past for Everyone – has been completed. Volunteers, led by Anne Todd, have successfully recorded 27 groups of farm buildings, a selection of deserted farmsteads and the green lanes in Withypool parish. The resulting information has now been accessioned into a database at Exmoor National Park Authority and has been used as the basis for detailed farm building recording by Keystone Historic Buildings Consultants. In turn this information has been used as the basis for cut-away reconstructions of farm buildings produced by Allan Adams of English Heritage’s York Office. During 2008 we hope to carry out an oral history project with farmers who have a detailed knowledge of the functions and detailed uses of their buildings.

Information for local schools has been brought together by Hilary Binding and will be accessible via the England’s Past for Everyone website. Meanwhile Mary Siraut of the Somerset Victoria County History has been completing the publication text and pulling together illustrative material. We hope to see the book – Exmoor: the making of an English Upland – in the shops by Spring 2009.

Meanwhile plans are being developed to carry out a second project on Exmoor. Staff at Somerset Victoria County History and Exmoor National Park Authority have submitted a proposal for a three year project to investigate aspects of the history of Exmoor’s coastline.

1 A reconstruction impression of Roman iron smelting produced for inclusion in Exmoor - the making of an English Upland © Anne Leaver
2 A volunteer on the England’s Past for Everyone project recording historic farm buildings at Ashway Photograph: EPE
3 Ashway Farm elevation drawing from detailed building survey Keystone Historic Buildings Consultants
Heritage Open Days take place in September when buildings of historic interest that are normally closed to the public or charge for entry are open for free to the public. In 2007 Exmoor National Park Authority together with the Moorland Mousie Trust opened Ashwick Music Room for the first time.

It is thought that Ashwick Music Room was built around 1930 by the wealthy eccentric bachelor Frank Green, who had moved to Exmoor on the advice of his doctor. The music room provided on site entertainment for his niece Rosie Wallace and the staff at the house. The music room is a delightful little building situated by the side of the drive to Ashwick House; it is single storey, timber clad, and has a stage, green room and crash bar exit. The most remarkable feature of the building is the intact frescos depicting King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra and prominent politicians of the day.

Volunteers Lindsey and Simon Godden worked incredibly hard to get the building ready for the public. Over a hundred people visited the music room during the two days that it was open and many people were able to share their memories of the Greens and Wallaces including dances in the music room.

The Music Room is included in the Moorland Mousie Trust’s lease of the grounds and stables at Ashwick where they run a conservation and promotion programme for Exmoor Ponies. The building has suffered from lack of maintenance in recent years; the building is unsafe and vulnerable. Heritage Open Day was an opportunity to generate increased interest in the building and highlight its historic importance, not only as a building, but as a reminder of a very formative time in Exmoor’s recent past.

If you have any information about the building or its former owners, please contact Jessica Turner on 01398 322289.
Dunster Tithe Barn - Saturday 1 December 2007

Held right at the beginning of the festive season on December 1st, this was a real Christmas dinner of a day: crammed full of good things, served up with a good dollop of something rich and, just occasionally, a bit stodgy. The forum was held, appropriately enough, in the wonderfully restored tithe barn at Dunster, now, as outlined by Michael Pitt, a meeting place for local groups and societies, and, six months after its opening, making a profit: a good example of an historic building brought back to life and an appetiser for the rest of the day.

Mary Siraut set the historical context for Exmoor’s buildings, presenting some of the work from England’s Past for Everyone (aka the Victoria County History). Mary talked about the origins of Exmoor’s settlements and then homed in on some real people: the story of William Buckingham and his family, who created the farmstead at Landcombe near Hawkridge. Four Exmoor farmsteads followed: Ashway, Stone, Lyshwell and Stetfold Rocks, with John Thorpe showing how the detailed investigation and record of buildings is enhanced by listening to the families who live and work in those buildings and whose memories of the farm often go back through the generations.

Continuing on the farming theme, Isabel Richardson talked about her research on the National Trust’s Holnicote Estate, with some hard facts about farmstead amalgamation and abandonment on the estate in the 19th and 20th centuries: 120 holdings of five acres or more in 1809-1812; 28 farms in 1937 and only 14 by 1970.

By now we were eager for the main course and this was served up in very large spoonfuls by Ian Constantinides who asked the question ‘Conservation – Why Bother?’ I don’t think anyone in the audience needed convincing, but this was a witty and lively presentation, with some wonderful sequences of images which juxtaposed Dunster Castle and Snowdonia with Chekel Burj and Istalik in Afghanistan.

After lunch, Jonathan Rhind gave an update on recent projects on Exmoor churches at Challacombe and Trentishoe and flagged up future work at Lynton Town Hall and the West Somerset Mineral Railway: a very welcome opportunity to find out about work which is often hidden away in client reports.

We stepped back from the buildings and considered their setting in the Exmoor landscape with Caroline Garrett and finally heard about the work which is going on underneath the wrappings on the roof at Dunster Castle with William Wake, Stephen Bond and Mike Heaton.

I left with that Christmas afternoon feeling: replete (with information), a little bit drowsy (a very long day) and looking forward to the next helping of Exmoor’s historic buildings (“Please Sir, can I have some more?”).

Hazel Riley
English Heritage
Archaeological Survey and Investigation
Pastiche or Honest Craftsmanship?

What is best: to copy traditional styles or to produce modern additions to historic buildings using contemporary materials? There is no 'one size fits all' answer – it is best to treat each building on its own merits. For a modest building with good vernacular detail, a contemporary or modern addition in the form of an open plan square-box like structure made from contemporary materials might not be appropriate. However, in some situations such an uncompromising structural addition may work well. In all cases, a careful study of the existing building is essential - come to terms with the building by examining it and allow any development plans to emerge from a sympathetic appreciation of the existing structure. A diligent search for matching materials may produce a better result for modest buildings that already display good detailing. Modern additions are often cited as giving counterbalance to a historic building, but all too often it can weigh it down.

1 The lodge at Luxborough
Photograph: Ross Campbell

2 The Lodge, Luxborough – a sympathetic addition to the historic building
Photograph: Ross Campbell

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT TEAM

The Historic Environment team is based in Exmoor National Park Authority’s Conservation & Land Management Section at Dulverton: Exmoor National Park Authority, Exmoor House, Dulverton TA22 9HL.

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Historic Environment Record Officer
Post currently being recruited

Externally funded project posts

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Further information about the projects in this review can be obtained from the Historic Environment team or from: www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk

Enhancing the qualities that make Exmoor special