

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**23 APRIL 2002****WEST SOMERSET MINERAL RAILWAY****Report of the Head of Conservation and Land Management****Purpose of Report:**

To update Members on progress with efforts to conserve and enhance the former West Somerset Mineral Railway

Legal Implications including Human Rights Act, 1998:

s61 Environment Act 1995

No Human Rights Act, 1998 implications.

Financial Implications:

The Authority has allocated £3000, from its revenue budget towards the cost of conservation work on the Railway in 2002/03

National Park Purposes:

The West Somerset Mineral Railway lies at the heart of a remarkable industrial landscape probably spanning 2000 years of iron exploitation on the Brendon Hills and the Incline on the railway, in the ownership of the Authority, is perhaps the National Park's most impressive industrial monument. The efforts to conserve and enhance these features and to encourage public understanding and enjoyment of them help further the National Park's first and second purposes in line with National Park Management Plan objectives 9/1, 9/2 and 9/3.

Recommendation:

The Authority is asked to NOTE the work carried out in 2001/02 to safeguard the remains of the former West Somerset Mineral Railway and confirm its support for continuing efforts to secure its conservation, understanding and enjoyment.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Resources Committee on 5 March 2002 Members asked for an update on recent efforts to conserve the West Somerset Mineral railway and, in particular, the Incline now in the ownership of the National Park Authority. This report details conservation and other works carried out by the Authority at the Incline during 2001/02 and also outlines other conservation work related to the West Somerset Mineral Railway and to iron mining on the Brendon Hills.

2. THE WINDING HOUSE

- 2.1 During 2001 extensive consolidation work on the Incline Winding House was carried out. This involved the rebuilding of parts of the structure, repointing and the replacement of lintels where they had failed. Finally, the walls were capped with a turf capping to prevent water ingress.
- 2.2 Fencing has been erected around the Winding House, and this will be completed during 2002.
- 2.3 The Exmoor Mines Research Group has been carrying out a limited programme of excavation within the Winding House to establish the exact position and form of the drums and other internal arrangements.

3. THE INCLINE

- 3.1 The cable ducts that run from the Winding House to the top of the Incline had also been identified as requiring attention. The upper cable duct was therefore cleaned out and the stone lining repaired where necessary. The structure was then covered with timber baulks which will both ensure that the structure is inherently safe as well as assisting its preservation.
- 3.2 The remains of the Brake House which lie close to the top of the Incline were sealed with conservation grade matting (Terram) and buried to preserve them.
- 3.3 The National Park Authority volunteers cleared large amounts of scrub from the upper section of the Incline below the Winding House.
- 3.4 Specialist tree surgeons were called in to deal with dangerous trees along the Incline. A large amount of timber was cleared from the course of the line.

4. THE INCLINE – PROGRAMME 2002/03

- 4.1 The work programme for 2002/03 includes
- completing the final phase of consolidation within the Winding House.
 - completing the fencing at the Winding House.
 - carrying out drainage works to prevent water scouring out the Incline trackbed.
 - carrying out safety fencing works.
 - removing some trees from around the Winding House for safety reasons.
 - producing on site interpretation.

5. BEARLAND VENTILATION FLUE

- 5.1 Following a request from the National Park Authority and the Exmoor Mines Research Group, Bearland ventilation flue was designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument by the Secretary of State.

6. COLTON PITS

- 6.1 In 2000 a tree felling application was received by the National Park Authority for an area of land at Colton Pits to the north-east of Raleigh's Cross. An archaeological survey was commissioned by the National Park Authority in order to understand fully the extent and significance of the archaeological remains there. The survey revealed the site to be a complex area of early iron mining, possibly dating from the Roman or medieval period, and according to English Heritage, unique on Exmoor. The site is very extensive, largely complete and exceptionally well preserved.

6.2 The owner agreed to look at ways of protecting the site, and following negotiations with National Park Authority staff has put the area forward for Countryside Stewardship. The intention is to revert the area to heathland, thereby maximising the conservation benefit of this project.

7. **INTERPRETATION**

7.1 National Park Authority staff and the Exmoor Mines Research Group produced an exhibition of the West Somerset Mineral Railway for the Association of National Park Authorities' Annual Conference. The exhibition was shown at the Dunster Visitor Centre.

8. **OTHER CONSERVATION INITIATIVES**

8.1 National Park Authority staff have met with colleagues from Somerset County Council to explore a joint project to produce a Conservation Plan for the course of the railway and its associated structures. This could form the basis for a bid for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund or other sources. Other meetings have taken place with Watchet Museum staff and members of Old Cleeve Parish Council.

Rob Wilson-North
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