

C Exmoor's historic environment & cultural heritage



Photograph - © E. R. J. Davey

“By 2020 there is an enhanced knowledge of the historic environment of Exmoor; increased awareness of the value of its cultural heritage, and the most important historical sites, settlements, buildings and features are conserved and their historical character retained”

C. Exmoor’s historic environment and cultural heritage

- 4.1 People have been shaping the landscape of Exmoor for over 8,000 years since hunter gatherers began to clear Exmoor’s wild woods. Each generation has inherited an increasingly complex and rich cultural landscape. This historic environment provides the evidence for past ways of life, technologies and the exploitation of the natural resources of Exmoor. Archaeological features and historic buildings not only embody our cultural heritage, but also create local distinctiveness and our sense of place. The individual features of the historic environment and the complex historic landscapes of Exmoor provide a record of how people have lived here since the last Ice Age.
- 4.2 Exmoor’s historic landscape includes thousands of individual sites and structures. This historic environment is fragile, vulnerable and irreplaceable. The survival of the physical evidence of our past presents us with a responsibility and a challenge to ensure that we do not inadvertently damage or destroy sites or structures which have been part of Exmoor’s character for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Modern methods of farming, forestry and building as well as some modern recreational activities, pose considerable threats. They can destroy - in minutes - sites and buildings that have survived for millennia.
- 4.3 Only a fraction of the historical resource has statutory protection and most historic sites and structures on Exmoor have no such protection, including such diverse examples as prehistoric houses, barrows, standing stones, industrial sites and landscapes, the evidence of nineteenth century agricultural improvements and many historic buildings. The survival of many historic features depends upon the co-operation of landowners and users, as well as sympathetic management and informed decision-making.

Figure 4.1 – Condition of Scheduled Ancient Monuments on Exmoor
(Based on Scheduled Ancient Monuments At Risk Survey 2005)

CONDITION	PERCENTAGE	No OF SITES
Very Good	22%	44
Good	38%	77
Moderate	21%	44
Poor	14%	29
Bad	5%	11

National and regional significance of Exmoor’s historic environment and cultural heritage

- 4.4 Exmoor contains a remarkable record of landscape change over 8,000 years. Such survival is very rare in England and charts the successes and failures of human endeavour across the millennia. The preservation of sites on Exmoor is generally excellent, and work by English Heritage in 1995 concluded that National Parks are one of England’s ‘great archaeological treasure houses...’ with ‘high levels of survival’.
- 4.5 Exmoor’s historic environment contains specific elements which are of national significance including its Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed Buildings and Registered Parks and Gardens. As well, there are aspects of Exmoor’s historic environment which are of such complexity or rarity that they are of regional or national significance including the extensive survival of prehistoric archaeology (especially on the moorlands); the widespread evidence of agricultural reclamation, and the evidence for early industrial exploitation such as iron mining and smelting.
- 4.6 The remote upland nature of much of Exmoor and traditionally extensive methods of farming have enabled many historic features to survive better than in other parts of the country where land use has been more intensive. There are characteristics of Exmoor’s historic environment which make it of special significance such as the excellent quality of preservation of archaeological sites and historic features (generally better than in the surrounding region, and yet illustrative of the region), and the diverse nature of the historic resource within the National Park.

Trends and issues affecting Exmoor's historic environment and cultural heritage

Improving knowledge of Exmoor's historic environment and cultural heritage

- 4.7 Exmoor's historic environment has benefited from much research in recent years. A major systematic survey of the archaeology of the National Park, undertaken by the former Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England^[16] between 1993 and 1999 made a substantial contribution to increasing understanding. Work carried out on other projects such as 'Exmoor Iron', 'The Settlement of Exmoor' and a number of other, smaller research projects continue to increase our understanding of Exmoor's past.
- 4.8 However, there are still significant gaps in our knowledge of the past which accounts, in part, for the relatively low numbers of Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed Buildings and entries on the Historic Environment Record compared with surrounding districts and some other National Parks.
- 4.9 In order to conserve the historic environment effectively we need to understand its nature and extent and we need to build on the considerable progress that has been made in the past fifteen years. This work relies heavily on the support of English Heritage and local universities as well as the work of archaeological societies and individuals. It is vital to foster and develop a more structured programme of surveys, excavation and research projects which increase our knowledge of Exmoor's historic environment. The data from this work, through efficient management and manipulation, can act as the basis for active conservation work, advice, information and interpretation.

Fragile and irreplaceable archaeology

- 4.10 Only a fraction of the historical resource of the National Park has statutory protection – 204 Scheduled Ancient Monuments, 1026 Listed Buildings, 16 Conservation Areas, and two registered Parks and Gardens – but this does not guarantee that no damage will take place. Exmoor National Park Authority has promoted a programme of condition and monitoring surveys to ensure that knowledge of the state of the historic environment is as detailed and up to date as possible. A survey undertaken in 2005 indicated that 19% of Scheduled Ancient Monuments within Exmoor National Park are 'At Risk' while other survey and monitoring work has demonstrated that some prehistoric stone monuments, which are unique to Exmoor, are being destroyed, often carelessly, due to inappropriate land management techniques.

Figure 4.2 – Statutory and non statutory protection lists for Exmoor's historic environment

LIST	NUMBER OF ENTRIES	DESCRIPTION
Scheduled Ancient Monuments	204	Archaeological sites and historic buildings of national importance
Listed Buildings	1026	Buildings of national importance
Parks and Gardens Register	2	Designed landscapes of national importance
Conservation Areas	16	Settlements of local importance and character
Exmoor Schedule	Estimated 600 when complete	Archaeological sites and historic buildings of local or regional significance
Moorland Sensitivities Map	c. 120	Areas containing historic features which are especially vulnerable or susceptible to damage
Moorland Areas of Exceptional Historic and Archaeological Importance	48	Areas of moorland which contain concentrations of archaeological sites or features which embody the historic environment of the moorlands

4.11 Whilst archaeological sites and monuments form the most visible aspect of Exmoor's archaeological remains, buried sites and soil deposits, which are usually not visible, also contain a wealth of information about the past. Such remains include archaeological sites previously flattened by ploughing, flint scatters, upland valley mires, upland blanket bogs and coastal or inter-tidal deposits.

Figure 4.3 – Current major conservation (C) and research projects (R) and programmes on Exmoor

PROJECT	LEAD BODY	DESCRIPTION	C/R
Exmoor Iron	University of Exeter	4 year fieldwork project 2001-5; analysis and dissemination phase 2006-9	C; R
West Somerset Mineral Railway Project	Exmoor National Park Authority (phase 1)	Phase 1 HLF funded 2007-9; phase 2 to be developed	C
Settlement of Exmoor: 1 Farm buildings survey 2 Deserted farmsteads 3 Green Lanes 4 Commons project	Victoria County History / University of London	Part of national HLF funded 'England's Past for Everyone'; Exmoor project 2005-7; major publication in 2008	R
Hawkcombe Head	Exmoor National Park Authority / University of Bristol	Phase 1: 3 year excavation project 2001-4; phase 2 in development; dissemination phase	C; R
Sustainable Management of Exmoor's Valley Mires	University of Plymouth	Survey and analysis of the condition of valley mires on Exmoor, 2007-9	C; R
Monument Management Scheme	Exmoor National Park Authority / English Heritage	Annual programme of conservation on Scheduled Ancient Monuments	C
National Mapping Programme	Exmoor National Park Authority / English Heritage	Comprehensive and accurate mapping of Exmoor's historic environment from air photographs	C; R
Archaeology Volunteers	Exmoor National Park Authority	Annual programme of conservation projects	C
Holworthy Project	North Devon Archaeological Society	Fieldwork project focused on Parracombe	R
Porlock Beach and Bay Monitoring Programme	Exmoor National Park Authority	Annual monitoring programme; selective sampling and excavation of threatened inter-tidal deposits and artefacts	C
Palaeo-environmental Survey Programme	Exmoor National Park Authority	Annual programme of sampling and analysis on environmental deposits and artefacts, including dendrochronology	R; C
Air photography programme	English Heritage / Exmoor National Park Authority	Annual sortie for monitoring purposes	C; R
Historic Environment Monitoring Programme (HEMP)	Exmoor National Park Authority	Programme of monitoring and condition surveys which focus conservation priorities	C
Exmoor Flood Memories	Exmoor National Park Authority / English Heritage	Oral history project on the 1952 flood	R
Neolithic/Bronze Age Exmoor	Universities of Bristol and Leicester	Fieldwork and excavation on prehistoric stone monuments	R

Artefacts and portable antiquities

- 4.12 Exmoor does not have an extensive tradition of artefact collection, although there are important objects in local museums. However, artefacts are an important part of an area's cultural heritage and the proper study and curation of this resource is fundamental.

Historic buildings and settlements

- 4.13 Exmoor has a wealth of historic buildings but their quality and character can easily be destroyed by unsympathetic or inappropriate renovation, repair, extension, redevelopment, or simply by neglect. Of the 1026 listed buildings within the National Park, 4.2% are considered 'at risk' and each year cases come to light of significant damage to the historic fabric of listed buildings, often when they change ownership and become subject to inappropriate and ill-advised 'modernisation'.
- 4.14 Exmoor's villages are one of its most distinctive and important features. Sixteen settlements have been designated as Conservation Areas and all of these have had detailed appraisals to record key features that contribute to their unique character. However, the historic character of buildings and settlements is easily eroded by small changes over time as well as by new development and insensitive modernisation and there is very little public funding available to help conserve and enhance these areas by, for example, under-grounding unsightly overhead wires, repairing traditional fabric such as cobbling, removing the clutter of signs and conserving traditional shop fronts.
- 4.15 The National Park Authority is able to influence the effect of alterations to historic buildings, the design of new buildings and other works through the planning system. Planning applications are assessed against the policies of the Local Plan. Most are subject to some form of negotiation or amendment and this pre-application process ensures that development taking place within the National Park has received added value in terms of the quality of the end result. New methods of assessing the historical significance of farmsteads within the landscape are being piloted on Exmoor. Published design guidance also provides helpful advice to applicants and a new Design Guide is currently in preparation.

The historic landscape

- 4.16 The historic environment extends beyond individual archaeological sites or specific historic buildings and settlements. The historic landscape is the central backcloth of the historic environment – if often overlooked – and reminds us that the appearance of much of Exmoor's landscape has been defined by human activity. For example, the character of the landscape of the former Royal Forest and the archaeological sites and historic buildings within it, have been defined by its ownership since the medieval period.
- 4.17 Elsewhere, many small hamlets lie at the heart of distinctive patterns of fields and are reached by a network of sunken lanes. The ancient landscape with its deep lanes and intricate field patterns is a key part of local character. Some resources are available to conserve certain elements of this historic landscape character, and these have come chiefly through agri-environment schemes.

Living culture

- 4.18 Culture can be defined as the total knowledge and experience of a community. Some cultural activities are recent and are a vital part of a modern community's life. Some reflect older more traditional aspects of rural life and represent the culmination of traditions that may be tens or hundreds of years old. Culture needs to live, but records of cultural activities need to be kept in order to ensure their survival; this is especially true at a time when rural communities face the most uncertain and challenging future.
- 4.19 There is a need to increase awareness of Exmoor's living cultures by recording and through dissemination to local communities. To understand the living cultural heritage of Exmoor, its internal variety and external influences, there is a need to identify the traditions and practices themselves as well as those who are best able to explain them. There is also a need to expand the oral and visual archive of Exmoor's living culture, paying particular attention to aspects that may be in decline.
- 4.20 Exmoor continues to provide inspiration for creative arts, as it has done for generations. Through support for appropriate projects, the cultural life of the community may be enhanced and its influence extended beyond Exmoor. There is a need to support cultural events and activities which bring communities together. This can build on the wide range of traditional events and encompass new festivals that celebrate the National Park and provide a boost to the local cultural life and economy.

Traditional building and land management methods

- 4.21 Most buildings on Exmoor use traditional materials and building techniques. Similarly, historic field boundaries and hedges are constructed using traditional methods. These features make a significant contribution to local distinctiveness and historic character. It is now widely recognised that the very survival of such features depends upon the knowledge and skills of the people entrusted to maintain and care for them.
- 4.22 To ensure that such features of Exmoor's landscape remain, land and property owners need to be aware of the use of traditional methods and materials, the planning and other processes need to specify the use of such materials and there needs to be an adequate pool of suitably qualified and experienced practitioners to carry out maintenance and other works.

Local breeds

- 4.23 The Exmoor Pony and native and locally developed breeds of sheep, cattle and some crops such as apples, are distinctive elements of traditional farming on Exmoor. Further research is needed to better understand them and to promote them and resources are needed to ensure their survival. (See target E 4.1)

Desired outcome for Exmoor's historic environment and cultural heritage

“By 2020 there is an enhanced knowledge of the historic environment of Exmoor; increased awareness of the value of its cultural heritage, and the most important historical sites, settlements, buildings and features are conserved and their historical character retained”

Objectives and targets for Exmoor's historic environment and cultural heritage

[Key targets identified for inclusion in the Core Plan are shown in boxes]

Objective C1

To undertake a programme of research to improve knowledge of the cultural heritage and historic environment of Exmoor

Targets:

- C 1.1 Understanding of the ages of key monuments will be improved over the period of the plan through dendrochronological sampling, radiocarbon dating, artefact analysis and targeted historical research so that conservation activities can be better prioritised. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority
- C 1.2 The archaeological deposits exposed by sea level change and coastal erosion in Porlock Bay will be preserved by record over the period of the plan utilising rescue excavation and palaeo-environmental sampling as appropriate. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority
- C 1.3 Knowledge about the origins of existing settlements and settlement patterns on Exmoor will be increased by the end of 2011 through a project on Exmoor's coast carried out in partnership with the Victoria County History. Lead organisation: University of London with Exmoor National Park Authority
- C 1.4 Knowledge of Exmoor's earliest hunter gatherer landscapes on the coast will be enhanced and understanding of the complex Bronze Age and Iron Age settlements and society which form such an important part of Exmoor's historic environment will be increased by the end of 2012. Lead organisation: University of Bristol/ Exmoor National Park Authority
- C 1.5 A survey of pollen and plant remains found in peat in Exmoor's deepest valley mires will be completed by the end of 2009 to increase understanding of Exmoor's past environments and identify priorities for conservation. Lead organisation: University of Plymouth
- C 1.6 Understanding of the character of Exmoor's historic farmsteads, especially their economic and social basis, will be increased over the period of the plan. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority

- C 1.7 Digital mapping of archaeological features and landscapes from air photographs will be available for the whole of Exmoor by the end of 2010 as part of the National Mapping Programme to help increase understanding of Exmoor's changing historic landscape and its archaeology. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority

Objective C2

To conserve and retain the historic features and character of Exmoor's landscapes

Targets:

- C 2.1 100% of owners of Scheduled Ancient Monuments will be aware of the status and importance of these assets by the end of 2007 so that they understand the need to seek consent before undertaking works that will affect the fabric of their protected structure and/or its setting, to help reduce the number of cases of illegal works and retrospective consent applications. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority / English Heritage

- C 2.2 100% of Scheduled Ancient Monuments will be in stable or improving condition by April 2009. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority/English Heritage

- C 2.3 A local list of archaeological sites – the Exmoor Schedule – will be prepared and their owners will be advised of their importance by end of 2008 in order to seek their support for the conservation of their historic value. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority

- C 2.4 Phase 1 of the conservation and interpretation of the remains of the West Somerset Mineral Railway and associated structures will be completed by August 2009 (HLF funded project due to commence in April 2007). Phase 2 will follow and will be completed by 2012. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority.

Objective C3

To conserve and retain the historic character of Exmoor's settlements and buildings

Targets:

- C 3.1 100% of owners of Listed Buildings will be aware of the status and importance of these assets by the end of 2008 and will understand the need to seek consent before undertaking works that will affect the fabric of their protected structure and/or its setting, to help reduce the number of cases of illegal works and retrospective consent applications. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority
- C 3.2 A listing of known historical buildings of local importance will be compiled and their owners advised by the end of 2008 in order to seek their support for the conservation of their historic value. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority
- C 3.3 Action plans for the conservation and enhancement of conservation areas will be drawn up by the end of 2009 based on appraisals of conservation areas within the National Park. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority
- C 3.4 A condition survey for all 16 Conservation Areas in the National Park will be completed by the end of 2011. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority
- C 3.5 The majority of replacement windows in Conservation Areas and for historic buildings on the local list will be of appropriate materials and design from 2008 onwards. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority
- C 3.6 Measures will be in place to ensure that all repairs to Exmoor's thatched buildings use appropriate materials and methods, and to ensure that locally grown wheat reed is available and that guidance exists in the use of the traditional Somerset style by the end of 2009. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority

- C 3.7 The streetscape and historic environment of Dunster will be enhanced and through traffic and parking will be better managed by the end of 2012. Lead organisation: Dunster Working Group

- C 3.8 The built and historic environment of Lynton & Lynmouth will be enhanced over the period of the plan, including the Lynmouth sea front. Lead organisation: Lyn & Exmoor Vision

- C 3.9 The pool of people with skills in building conservation work and renovation will be sustained and increased by encouraging training bodies to offer appropriate courses over the period of the plan. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority

Objective C4

To identify, record and understand aspects of culture and traditions that are special to Exmoor

Targets:

- C 4.1 Local rural life museums and heritage exhibitions that interpret aspects of the life and history of communities in the National Park will be sustained over the period of the plan, e.g. Allerford Rural Life Museum; Doverhay Manor, Porlock; Lyn & Exmoor Museum, Lynton; Lynmouth Flood Exhibition; Combe Martin Museum; Barnstaple & Lynton Railway etc. Lead organisations: Individual museums in partnership with local authorities
- C 4.2 An oral history archive for Exmoor will be maintained and enhanced over the period of the plan. Lead organisation: Somerset County Council

Objective C5

To provide opportunities for people to develop a deeper understanding and enjoyment of Exmoor's historic environment and cultural heritage

Targets:

- C 5.1 Information on aspects of Exmoor's archaeology, historic landscapes and built heritage will be accessible via the internet from the end of 2008 and this data will be expanded to cover all aspects of Exmoor's historic environment with detailed information on specific places by the end of 2011. Information will be kept up to date and developed in response to user feedback. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority
- C 5.2 The majority of property and landowners in the National Park will be using appropriate methods and materials in the repair and maintenance of buildings and other historic features over the period of the plan. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority
- C 5.3 The public understanding of Exmoor's past will be enhanced through the provision of an accessible static education centre by the end of 2012 using up to date media as well as conventional interpretation facilities (as part of F4.2). Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority
- C 5.4 Access to information on Exmoor's iron industry as revealed by the 4 year Exmoor Iron project will be improved by the end of 2008. Lead organisation: University of Exeter
- C 5.5 Access to information on Exmoor's earliest hunter gatherers and their impact on Exmoor's landscape as revealed by the Exmoor Archaeology Field School's excavations at Hawkcombe Head will be improved by the end of 2008. Lead organisation: University of Bristol
- C 5.6 Access to information on the natural processes and the archaeological discoveries which are being made at Porlock beach and Bay will be improved by the end of 2008. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority
- C 5.7 Awareness of Exmoor's historic environment will be increased amongst young people over the period of the plan by working with 10 local schools, young people's organisations and colleges each year, and by setting up training schemes, courses and field schools. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority