

F Understanding and enjoyment of Exmoor's special qualities



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“By 2020 there is increased public awareness and enjoyment of Exmoor National Park, particularly by young people and non-traditional users, leading to greater understanding of Exmoor and its way of life and a wider appreciation of the contribution that National Parks make to quality of life”

F. Understanding and enjoyment of Exmoor's special qualities

- 7.1 To fully understand and enjoy Exmoor National Park, people need, ideally, to have a first hand experience. Virtual experiences, electronic or paper based information and interpretation can help raise awareness of Exmoor's special qualities, but a *visit* enables the opportunity to enjoy, learn about, understand and value the environment in which that visit takes place. Ultimately, this should lead to informed choices, behaviours and attitudes that care for Exmoor National Park and the communities that live and work here.

The national and regional significance of understanding and enjoyment of Exmoor's special qualities

- 7.2 As a National Park designated under the original National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (1949), the value and importance of Exmoor to the nation has been formally recognised and acknowledged for more than 50 years. This significance is ever more relevant as changes to, and pressures from, modern life continue to take place.
- 7.3 The opportunities that Exmoor offers are rare in southern England and surveys support the view that the area remains an important environmental asset for a wide range of people. 20% of visitors come from the South East of England; 40% from the South West of England; visitors from 20 different countries and 62 different counties were identified in the latest survey (2006). 80% of these are repeat visits – an indication that Exmoor is valued, cherished and enjoyed.
- 7.4 Over 10,000 young people a year get involved in some event or activity based on Exmoor's special qualities as part of a school or youth group and 2,500 young people from all backgrounds stay at the National Park Authority's Pinkery Centre each year, gaining a deeper understanding of Exmoor through a residential experience.
- 7.5 Increasingly, people who would not normally think of visiting for a variety of reasons are being able to take opportunities through 'outreach' projects. This is revealing the delights of Exmoor to a range of new audiences within, on the boundaries of and beyond the National Park.

Trends and issues affecting understanding and enjoyment of Exmoor's special qualities

Public awareness of Exmoor National Park

- 7.6 Only a small proportion of the general public has first hand knowledge of Exmoor. Outside the south and west of England few people can locate Exmoor on a map or name it as a National Park. For example, a national survey in 2004 indicated that awareness of Exmoor as a National Park is moderate compared to other English National Parks with 7.2% of respondents naming Exmoor when invited to name a National Park (e.g. compared to highest of 28% for the Lake District; with Dartmoor 15%; Northumberland 2%; Broads 0.6%).
- 7.7 More encouragingly, a survey by South West Tourism indicated a high awareness of Exmoor compared to other tourism destinations in the South West region with very positive associations amongst people who knew about Exmoor. The people who do visit are generally very appreciative of Exmoor and many are repeat visitors.
- 7.8 Exmoor's location, relatively remote from large conurbations, means that extra effort needs to be made to visit the National Park compared to National Parks that are nearer large cities. Therefore, initial awareness-raising amongst non-visitors needs to be through a variety of media and formats.
- 7.9 However, in terms of information provision and dissemination, some of this locational disadvantage has been reduced by the development of the internet and information technology. This has increased our ability to communicate information about the National Park to a global audience. Exmoor National Park Authority's website receives more than 75,000 'hits' per month (April 2006) and many of these are likely to convert to interest in the National Park and a wish to visit and experience Exmoor first hand.

- 7.10 In deciding how best to target its resources at raising public awareness of the special qualities of Exmoor, the National Park Authority has identified priority audiences for active engagement:
- Local, resident communities and those in the greater Exmoor area
 - Existing visitors who want to deepen their knowledge and experiences
 - Those people who are most likely to appreciate the special qualities that Exmoor has to offer – the varied landscape, tranquillity, opportunities for inspiration and active recreation, and access to local communities and a truly rural way of life, but may not be aware of the opportunities that exist
 - Young people (i.e. under 25 years of age)
 - Under-represented groups, i.e. groups or individuals whose use of Exmoor does not reflect the proportion of that group in the UK population
 - Non-traditional users, i.e. groups or individuals who would not normally consider an 'Exmoor experience' as a first choice

Reaching young people

- 7.11 Reaching young people ought to be relatively straightforward during their time in a formal education setting and much excellent work has been undertaken with schools by National Park Authority staff and other organisations such as The National Trust, Youth Hostels Association (YHA), Field Studies Council and Exmoor Society over many years. The National Park Authority has given a priority to reaching young people in local schools and colleges to encourage a deeper understanding and appreciation of the area in which they live.
- 7.12 Reaching young people living close to Exmoor and in some of the larger conurbations in the region is another priority so that they know of the National Park, how to get here, and ways in which the area can be enjoyed and looked after.

Overcoming barriers

- 7.13 It is clear that the National Park is underused by certain groups. It may be that they have not heard of Exmoor or feel excluded from visiting because of disability, low spending power or lack of transport or that they exclude themselves because they feel that Exmoor has nothing to offer them. The activities that Exmoor appears to offer, such as walking, canoeing, riding and fishing tend to attract people from particular age, sex and social groups.
- 7.14 Exmoor attracts a low proportion of people from ethnic minorities compared with the proportion within the National Park's main catchment area in southern England. The challenge is to learn why people from some backgrounds tend not to visit Exmoor and look for ways to overcome any barriers. It is important that people realise that National Parks are so called because they are for the benefit of the whole nation. Encouraging more visits from underrepresented groups will be a priority for the National Park Authority in the current Management Plan period.
- 7.15 The Countryside Agency undertook a Diversity Review in 2005 on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and has published a draft strategy called 'Outdoors for All?'^[22] to provide the basis for a range of initiatives to ensure equality of opportunity for all members of society when accessing the countryside. Exmoor National Park Authority, Natural England and others support the aims of the strategy and will be seeking to take forward programmes for Exmoor National Park during the period of this Management Plan.

Providing information – meeting user needs

- 7.16 Visitors to Exmoor tend to spend much of their time in unplanned activity - exploring Exmoor by car, sightseeing and stopping for breaks at places convenient for eating or taking a short walk. Surveys show that where published information is available, it is frequently looked at after a day out rather than before or during the event.
- 7.17 Nevertheless, for visitors to enjoy Exmoor in a sustainable way they need information such as timetables and maps in order to be able to use public transport, guides to interesting places and activities, details of places selling local produce and so on. It is possible to have some influence over what people see and do, and where they go in the interests of visitor management and enjoyment. The amount of influence any one organisation can have, however, is limited and organisations concerned with tourism must work together to promote the most sustainable use of Exmoor.

- 7.18 For many years, the National Park Authority has run a network of National Park Centres to provide information about the National Park to visitors and local people. During 2006, the Authority undertook a fundamental review of its National Park Centre network and is developing a new strategy to be delivered over the timeframe of this Management Plan. The emerging strategy envisages a range of key channels through which information can be provided to visitors during their time in the National Park – figure 7.2

Figure 7.2 – Channels for communicating to visitors about the special qualities of the National Park during their visit

- **National Park Centres** – run by the National Park Authority and providing a comprehensive range of information about the National Park. The strategy proposes two major centres, one likely to be in Lynmouth to reach visitors exploring the Exmoor coast and on the Devon side of the National Park, and another at a more central location to interpret the Exmoor landscape and historic environment
- **Local Information Centres** – based in settlements within the National Park and run by local partnerships to provide a service to local businesses and information to visitors about the locality and wider National Park, e.g. the Centre at Porlock
- **Local Information Points** – based in villages and smaller settlements with National Park information provided through local shops or other businesses
- **Gateway Centres** – such as those proposed at Minehead and Aller cross near South Molton, that are located outside but close to the National Park and can help advise visitors about the National Park and surrounding areas
- **National Park Authority Ranger Service** – providing a presence at more remote areas of the National Park such as Tarr Steps and Valley of Rocks, during busy periods
- **Shows and events** – providing a presence at local shows and events with information about the National Park

- 7.19 Provision of information about Exmoor to people living outside the National Park is principally the role of the tourism development organisations such as Visit Exmoor and the North Devon Marketing Bureau. However, the National Park Centre review has considered a number of additional options including ideas for a mobile National Park Centre that can be based in locations at distance from the National Park to encourage more people to find out about and visit Exmoor.

A deeper understanding

- 7.20 Most visitors to Exmoor come to enjoy unspoiled countryside and outdoor recreation, and their awareness of countryside and environmental issues is generally high. However, the level of understanding of the special qualities of Exmoor is low. The role of people in creating and managing the special landscape of the National Park is not always well understood and there is often confusion over environmental issues and a mixed understanding of conservation objectives and methods. More positively, most visitors and local residents share a real enthusiasm to find out more about Exmoor and about aspects in which they have a particular interest.
- 7.21 Traditionally, public agencies have provided information in a wide variety of formats – exhibitions, interpretation panels, leaflets, books, CDs, videos, guided walks, talks and events – without always having a clear understanding of the interests and preferences of the audience. It is important to develop new and exciting ways to provide interpretative material through as many avenues as possible such as in accommodation, on public transport, at eating places and wherever people wait.
- 7.22 Local residents, particularly those working in the tourist industry or who come face to face with the public in other ways, are best placed to interpret Exmoor to others particularly if they receive support to provide information about the National Park that is accurate and consistent. Modern communication technologies offer new ways to provide the information people want, at times of their choosing and in a format they prefer. Better use of feedback from information users will help to ensure that information provision is effective and provides good use of limited resources.
- 7.23 Provision of opportunities for volunteering can make a substantial contribution to a deepening understanding and enjoyment of the National Park. A greater involvement of the community on Exmoor in volunteering to practically assist with the achievement plan objectives will help bring substantial advantages in the community's commitment to support the Plan. The National Park Authority has an active volunteering programme as do organisations such as The National Trust that actively encourages and supports volunteer involvement in our work. There is scope to build on these achievements during the period of this Management Plan.

Desired outcome for understanding and enjoyment of Exmoor's special qualities

“By 2020 there is increased public awareness and enjoyment of Exmoor National Park, particularly by young people and non-traditional users, leading to greater understanding of Exmoor and its way of life and a wider appreciation of the contribution that National Parks make to quality of life”

Objectives and targets for understanding and enjoyment of Exmoor's special qualities

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

Objective F1

To raise awareness of Exmoor and its special qualities and ways in which they can best be experienced and enjoyed

Targets:

F 1.1	Awareness of Exmoor in national polls will be increased to at least 12% by the end of 2010. Lead organisation: Visit Exmoor
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Objective F2

To provide opportunities for young people from all backgrounds and abilities to learn about and enjoy Exmoor National Park leading to greater understanding of Exmoor and its way of life

Targets:

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| F 2.1 | Every pupil attending a school located within the National Park will have contact with an Authority led activity at least once a year over the period of the plan, and all schools in the National Park will have adopted the concept of the 'Exmoor Curriculum' based on the model developed at Dulverton Middle School by the end of 2012. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority |
| F 2.2 | All young people living in the greater Exmoor area will have the opportunity to derive a better understanding of Exmoor and experience ways in which the National Park can be enjoyed at least once during their school years as a school activity or outside of school during the period of the plan. Lead organisation: Greater Exmoor Environmental Education Forum (GEEEF) |
| F 2.3 | Opportunities will be provided for at least 2,000 young people from Exmoor and nearby urban areas including Bridgwater, Ilfracombe and Barnstaple to take part over the period of the plan in shared and common experiences designed to expand their horizons through appreciation and enjoyment of Exmoor's special qualities. Lead organisation: Greater Exmoor Environmental Education Forum (GEEEF) |
| F 2.4 | Opportunities will be provided for 250 to 300 students a year over the period of the plan to receive a range of vocational training opportunities to levels 1, 2 and 3 enabling them to benefit from their location close to or within the National Park and based at a new Skills & Enterprise Centre (New Horizons) open in September 2008. Lead organisation: West Somerset Community College |

Objective F3

To provide opportunities for people from under-represented groups to learn about and enjoy Exmoor National Park leading to greater understanding of Exmoor and its way of life

Targets:

F 3.1	Opportunities to experience and enjoy Exmoor will be provided to 10 new groups each year over the period of the plan, where they have not considered visiting a National Park or are not aware of the opportunities, but would be interested in visiting Exmoor for the first time. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority
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F 3.2 A strategy will be in place by the end of 2009 for assessing and removing the barriers encountered by people from under-represented groups that prevent or impede their visiting and enjoying Exmoor. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority

F 3.3 A range of affordable visitor accommodation such as campsites, camping barns and Youth Hostels will be maintained across the greater Exmoor area over the period of the plan. Lead organisations: Exmoor National Park Authority and Youth Hostels Association

Objective F4

To provide information about the National Park's special qualities and how they can be understood and enjoyed to people during their visit to the National Park

F 4.1 A major National Park Centre will be provided at Lynmouth on the site of the former Lynmouth Pavilion by the end of 2010 to interpret the Exmoor coast; provide a base for educational activities, and provide an exciting destination for the visiting public. Lead organisations: North Devon District Council and Lyn Community Development Trust to ensure that a suitable building is provided and Exmoor National Park Authority to equip and occupy the Centre

F 4.2 A second major National Park Centre will be provided at a central location in the National Park by the end of 2012 to interpret Exmoor's moorlands and the importance of farming and historic environment (see also target C5.3), and to provide a base for educational activities and an exciting destination for the visiting public. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority

F 4.3 A network of Local Information Centres will be established at main villages across the National Park by the end of 2012. Lead organisations: Exmoor National Park Authority with local tourism associations and other partners

F 4.4 Appropriate information about Exmoor National Park will be provided at new Gateway Centres at Minehead and Aller Cross, South Molton, as and when these centres are in place. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority

F 4.5 A high quality network of 12 Local Information Points will be supported across the National Park over the period of the plan based in local shops and business in smaller settlements. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority

Objective F5

To provide opportunities for people to develop a deeper understanding and enjoyment of Exmoor and its special qualities to engender a sense of responsibility resulting in behaviour that sustains such qualities

Targets:

F 5.1 An annual programme of opportunities will be provided over the period of the plan to help people deepen their experiences of Exmoor's special qualities and how they can be best understood and enjoyed, e.g. including residential courses, guided walks and talks etc. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority

F 5.2 An 'Exmoor Resource' will be developed by the end of 2012 to provide access to high quality information, statistics, research reports, archive material, etc., about the National Park. Lead organisation: Exmoor Society

F 5.3 A wide range of volunteering opportunities will be provided across the National Park in conservation and research projects and other activities over the period of the plan. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority

F 5.4 Information and interpretation about the National Park will be provided over the period of the plan with content that is responsive to user requests and available at times, places and in formats that are convenient for, and reflect, user needs e.g. via internet. Lead organisation: Exmoor National Park Authority