

**EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK
STATE OF THE PARK REPORT**

CHAPTER 10. LIVING CULTURE

Vision for living culture

Thriving and varied local cultures retaining the traditions and skills necessary to maintain a distinctive landscape. A high quality of life for those communities reflected in social, recreational and spiritual activities and the expression of their culture through creative works.

Objectives and Indicators

Objectives relate to the Exmoor National Park Management Plan

Indicators may be shared with those from other plans or organisations

LP - Exmoor National Park Local Plan

BVPP – Exmoor National Park Best Value Performance Plan

AC – Audit Commission

CA – Countryside Agency indicators used in their ‘*State of the Countryside Reports*’

RWP – The Government’s Rural White Paper ‘*Our Countryside*’

NPA – ‘Headline’ indicators developed by the National Park Authorities’ Data Working Group

RO – Indicators developed for the South West’s Regional Observatory

Objective 10/2

To ensure the continuation and development of distinctive Exmoor cultures.

Indicators:

Number of locally distinctive cultural events taking place within the National Park each year

Objective 10/3

To integrate the conservation of Exmoor's landscape and its cultures and retain traditional craft skills.

Indicators:

Number of people attending courses in traditional skills within the National Park each year

IS EXMOOR RETAINING ITS DISTINCTIVE CUSTOMS?

Current situation:

Exmoor retains a small proportion of its distinctive customs

Trends:



The number of distinctive Exmoor customs taking place is slowly declining



The number of parishes in which remaining customs take place is slowly declining

Working to ensure that Exmoor remains beautiful for all to enjoy, in harmony with a thriving community

- 1 -

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EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK STATE OF THE PARK REPORT

Following the Environment Act of 1995 National Parks were given the new purpose of ‘conserving and enhancing the cultural heritage’ of those areas. The Government expanded on this in its Circular 12/96. It stated that the character of National Parks is “reflected in local traditions which have influenced farming and other land management practices. It is also reflected in the local building materials and vernacular style, monuments and landscape . . . and in the words, music, customs, crafts and art which mark the individual characteristics of each Park.”

It is clear, therefore, that the aspects of culture of concern in the National Park context are those which result in local distinctiveness. However, there is little of Exmoor’s culture which can be said to be culturally distinct from surrounding areas. Its culture is very much part of broad West Country and Bristol Channel cultures. With many of the arts its culture is part of an even broader national or international culture. Most writers, artists and craftsman have an individual style which is distinctive but cannot necessarily be called a local style. Such aspects of culture are of interest to the National Park if they support National Park purposes by, for example, using local materials, promoting sustainable tourism or interpreting Exmoor. A widely practised skill such as hedge laying, thatching, stone walling or coppicing is likely to be of concern because, regardless of whether it is locally distinctive, it supports such purposes. For their culture, however, such skills are only of National Park concern if they are in some way special to Exmoor. This does not mean unique to Exmoor but special in that Exmoor has a significant proportion of the resource or a particularly good example of that cultural activity. The term ‘heritage’ is also significant. It means something which has been or can be passed on from generation to generation. Thus the distinctive style of one artist is unlikely to be of concern in terms of National Park purposes unless it is copied by succeeding generations and becomes part of a broader local culture.

- *In 1997 a survey was undertaken of customs, songs and dances of Exmoor. 23 customs were recognised as being special to Exmoor in that they were unique to the area, unique variations of more general customs or more general customs for which Exmoor was a stronghold. There were 101 parish records of such activities. Source: Folk South West*
- *All the above activities were taking place in the 19th century. In 2004 there were 8 activities continuing, with 32 parish records. Source: Exmoor National Park Authority*

ARE COUNTRY SPORTS A DISTINCTIVE PART OF EXMOOR’S CULTURE?

Hunting with hounds is arguably a sport with which Exmoor is commonly associated. It is, however, something which is found throughout Britain. According to Baily’s Hunting Directory there are in England and Wales:

- 6 packs of deer hounds, 1 of which hunts fallow deer, 2 of which hunt roe deer and 3 of which hunt red deer. Of these 1 regularly hunts within the National Park but all 3 red deer hunts are close to Exmoor.
- 186 packs of foxhounds, 4 of which regularly hunt within the National Park. There are also 4 packs of harriers hunting foxes, 1 of which regularly hunts within the National Park. 3 of the harrier packs also hunt hares.
- 112 packs of hounds hunting hares, including 12 of bassets, 20 of harriers and 80 of beagles, 2 of which regularly hunt within the National Park.
- 19 packs of mink hounds, 1 of which hunts occasionally in the National Park
- There are also several gun packs, particularly in the West Country but numbers are unknown as they are not registered.
- There are no packs of draghounds or bloodhounds in the Exmoor area.

Of the different types of hunting with hounds, deer hunting is the most locally distinctive in that it is mostly confined to the West Country and stag hunting in particular is mostly associated with Exmoor. It could also be argued that Exmoor has a significant proportion of fox hunting with harriers and that the Minehead Harriers are unusual in

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- 2 -

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hunting foxes with harriers and not hunting hares. Hunting with hounds is very much part of the culture of Exmoor and is ingrained in the landscape through the protection of moorland for such purposes, the copses and plantations for cover, the hunting gates etc It also provides inspiration for much of Exmoor's poetry, literature, song, painting, crafts, customs and events.

It cannot be said, however, that it is a universal part of the culture. An opinion poll by NOP in 1985 concluded that only 17% of all Exmoor residents approved of stag hunting and 42% of Exmoor's farming community. Stag hunting, however, attracts supporters from a wide area beyond Exmoor. Nationally, the Standing Conference on Countryside Sports estimated the number of subscribers to all hound packs at 26,000 in 1983, of which 1,991 were subscribers to staghounds. Between 1963 and 1997 the number of packs declined by 31%, so there are likely to be fewer subscribers now. Roughly 900 subscribe to the Devon and Somerset Staghounds, which hunt on Exmoor. However, many more people regularly follow hunting than are subscribers, a total of 50,000 nationally estimated by the Countryside alliance. A much greater number will watch the start of hunt meets on Boxing Day. Certainly several hundred follow each meet of staghounds on Exmoor. The Savage Report of 1993 estimated that for each subscriber of the Devon and Somerset Staghounds:

- *73% of households owned horses, averaging 2.8 per household but less than half were used for hunting*
- *60% follow the hounds on horseback, averaging 48 hunting days per year per subscriber*
- *85% went to at least one hunt social occasion each year*
- *48% helped at hunt functions*

Actions

Some of the actions are objectives and actions from the Exmoor National Park Management Plan

Objective 10/1

To identify, record and understand aspects of cultural heritage which are 'special' to Exmoor.

Action 10/1

Develop oral and visual archives and a register of Exmoor archives

Action 10/2

Identify important skills for maintaining the landscape

NB The information contained in this report is based upon the best information available at the time. Although every effort has been made to confirm its accuracy and ensure that it has been used in the proper context, Exmoor National Park Authority cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information