

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK
STATE OF THE PARK REPORT

CHAPTER 11. RECREATION

Vision for recreation

A National Park which offers maximum opportunities for all to enjoy its special qualities through a wide range of recreational activities that are compatible with the conservation of these qualities.

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 11/1

To broaden and improve opportunities for recreation and provide support and advice to recreational users who seek to enjoy Exmoor's special qualities.

Indicators:

Length of signposted cycle routes; percentage of length of Rights of Way and permissive paths open and easy to use; area of land with open access

Objective 11/2

To ensure recreation activities are compatible with the principle of quiet enjoyment and the activities of persons living and working in the National Park and seek to achieve harmony between the recreation and conservation purposes of the National Park.

Indicators:

Number of complaints about recreational events

Objective 11/3

To protect and improve the quality of experience for people who seek Exmoor's special qualities in particular opportunities for exploration, solitude and closeness to nature.

Indicators:

Level of satisfaction of visitors seeking quiet enjoyment

Objective 11/4

To enable the public to enjoy quiet recreational activities at a minimum risk to themselves.

Indicators:

Number of call-outs for Exmoor Search and Rescue Team involving recreational accidents

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

- 1 -

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY, EXMOOR HOUSE, DULVERTON, SOMERSET, TA22 9HL

Website: www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk E-mail: info@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk

ARE VISITORS COMING TO THE NATIONAL PARK FOR OPEN AIR RECREATION?

Current situation:

A large proportion of visitors to Exmoor is coming for the scenery

A small proportion of visitors to Exmoor is coming for outdoor pursuits

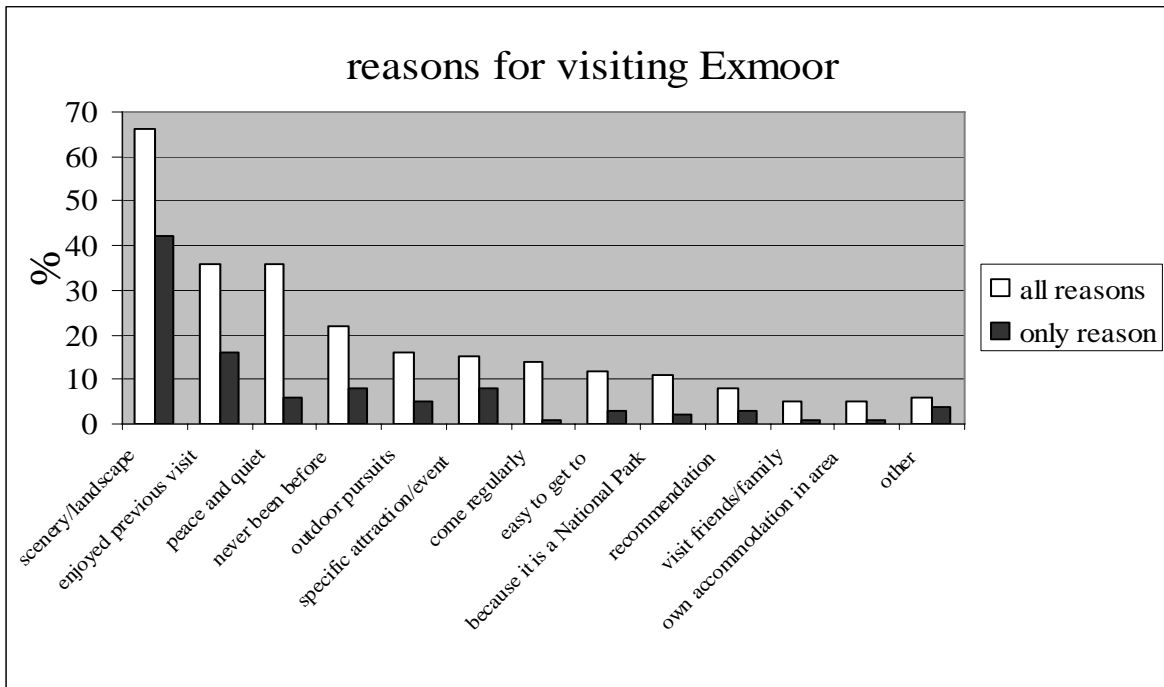
Trends:



It is not known how the reasons for visiting Exmoor are changing

Most people are visiting Exmoor for the scenery.

Most visitors to Exmoor are coming for the scenery and tranquillity, with the object of 'getting away from it all'. Although National Parks are promoted for their potential for outdoor pursuits, these are not the main reason why people come to Exmoor. However, 'getting away from it all' often involves some activity such as walking and the foot and mouth crisis showed how at least the perception of Exmoor as a place for pursuits such as walking and riding is important. Our knowledge of the reasons why people come to Exmoor is mainly from the 1994 All Parks Visitor Survey. Other surveys have not asked questions in the same manner so assessment of trends is difficult. Comparison with the 1979 Exmoor Tourism Survey, however, suggests an increasing percentage coming for outdoor activities and increasing percentage of repeat visits.



Most visits to the countryside are for similar reasons and National Parks are not exceptional in this respect. Scenery is the main motivation for holidays anywhere. National Parks may be perceived to be the most beautiful and tranquil parts of the countryside but such considerations are relative and much depends upon the perceptions and experience of the visitors. Awareness of National Parks, however, is a factor and in the 2005 QUEST Visitor Satisfaction Survey

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

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK STATE OF THE PARK REPORT

it was found that over 10% of holiday visitors to Exmoor had been influenced by its National Park status in deciding to visit. It is not surprising that visitors interviewed in beautiful countryside will say that they are there for the beauty of the scenery. Likewise, as visitor surveys tend to be undertaken on roads or in car parks, it is understandable that those engaged in outdoor pursuits will be underrepresented.

- *In 1991 an opinion poll showed that beautiful scenery was considered the most important attribute of destinations for long holidays in Britain, with those surveyed giving scenery an average score of 3.45 out of 4. In 1992 it was second choice for short holiday destinations with an average score of 3.03. In 1998 visitors were asked to rate the importance of scenery as a motivation for their visit to the West Country out of 10. General visitors exiting the area gave an average score of 7.8 whilst the average score for visitors to beauty spots was 8.7. Source: National Trust, Valuing our Environment*
- *In 1985 26% of visitors to Dulverton went because of the natural beauty (the main reason) but for the same reason larger percentages went to Yeovilton, Glastonbury, Taunton Deane, Wells, Chard and Cheddar. It was found that much of this perception depended on where people came from, ease of access to the site and experience of the countryside. 18% of visitors went to Dulverton because it was considered to be tranquil but this was lower than many other places in Somerset including Cricket St Thomas and Chard. 38% of visitors to Burnham on Sea went for the tranquillity. This was mostly because they were from urban parts of Avon and because Burnham was quiet compared with Weston super Mare, which was the main alternative. Source: Somerset Visitor Survey*
- *In 1998 a survey of all types of visitors leaving the West Country showed that their main activities had been visiting cities and towns (78%), sightseeing in the countryside (69%) and shopping (67%). However, visitors interviewed at beauty spots in the West Country showed predictably different interests with 78% sightseeing in the countryside, 64% exploring country villages and 63% visiting cities and towns. Outdoor pursuits were not the main activities of either, with only 4% of all visitors and 3% of visitors at beauty spots taking part in any sports. However, a moderate proportion of both went for country walks: 39% of all visitors and 59% of visitors at beauty spots. Source: National Trust, Valuing our Environment*

WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE UNDERTAKEN BY VISITORS TO EXMOOR?

Current situation:

A large proportion of visitors to Exmoor are engaged in leisurely pursuits such as sightseeing, sitting and watching, eating and drinking, shopping and visiting attractions

A moderate proportion of visitors to Exmoor is involved in leisurely walking, which is the main active pursuit

Trends:



The proportion of visitors engaged in active pursuits appears to be increasing slightly

Most visitors to Exmoor are engaged in leisurely pursuits

The National Park Authority conducted annual visitor surveys at recreation sites between 1979 and 1983 and again in 1987 with the intention of ascertaining how the pattern of tourist activity was changing. It was decided that changes from year to year were not great and surveys need not be made less than five years apart. Unfortunately some questions were not presented consistently and it is difficult to assess recreational trends. For instance, in 1979 walking was shown to be the main activity, with 58% of visitors participating. In 1983 only 18% were shown to be walking. In 1994 49% suggested they were undertaking short walks, 54% medium walks and 12% long walks. The difference was due to whether interviewees were allowed to provide more than one answer and whether the list of potential answers contained relatively inactive pursuits such as sightseeing and shopping. However, roughly similar surveys

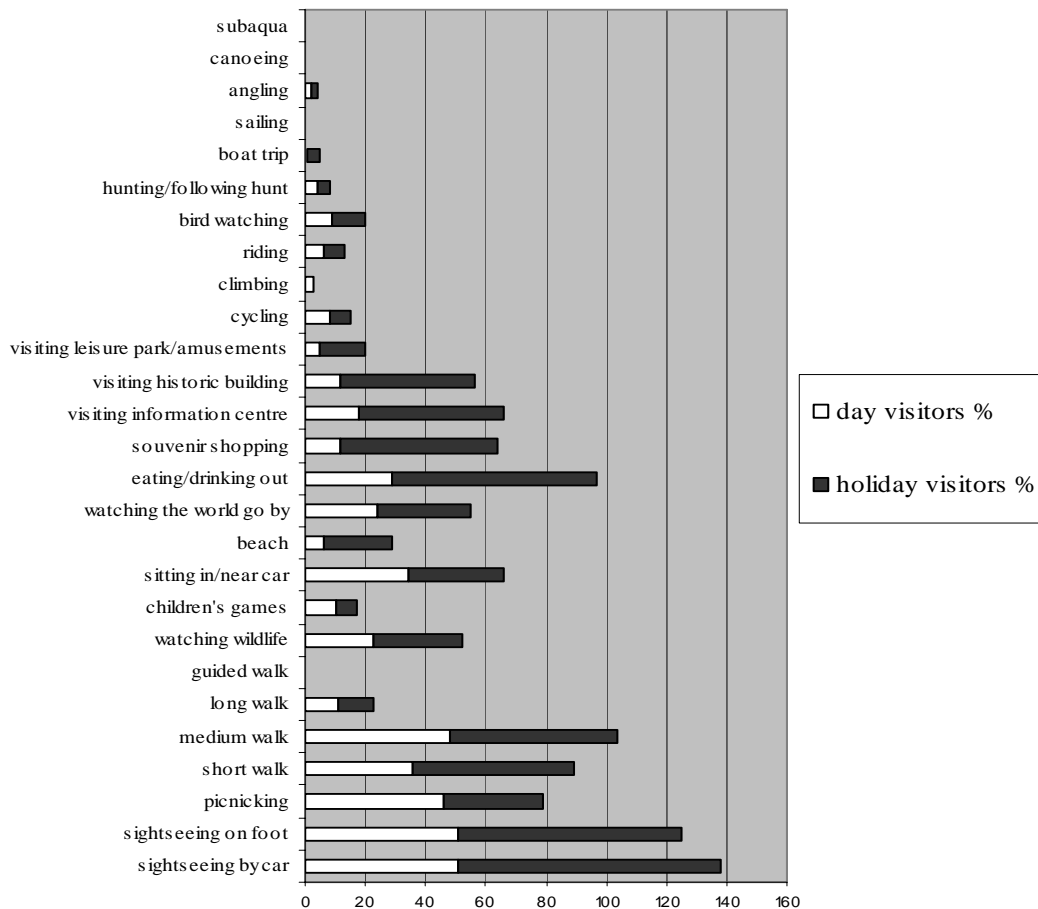
Working to ensure that Exmoor remains beautiful for all to enjoy, in harmony with a thriving community

- 3 -

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK STATE OF THE PARK REPORT

were taken in 1983 and 1987. These showed that the majority of tourists holidaying in the area were not pursuing an active interest or hobby at all. The proportion remained similar between the two surveys (62% in 1983 and 61% in 1987). The main activity was walking, which increased from 18% in 1983 to 21% in 1987. In 2005 23% of holiday visitors were undertaking some sort of outdoor activity, with 79% of them (18% of all visitors) walking. Just over 5% of them were involved in riding and just over 3% in field sports, the next most popular categories. The survey was, however, undertaken in winter and many activities are seasonal.

activities undertaken on visits to Exmoor



There is a perception that visitors are becoming more active. Nationally there has been an increase in the numbers of people walking, with a 7% increase between 1987 and 1997. There has clearly been more footpath erosion in recent years but this could be due to a number of factors such as wetter weather, more livestock and extending of the tourist season into wetter periods. Visitors are, however, more mobile than previously and able to start their walks or cycle rides from more remote locations. It is possible that activities are becoming more widespread as people are seeking quiet locations. There are, however, no statistics to back such perceptions.

Day trippers are more active than staying visitors

There is a difference in activity between staying visitors and day trippers. In a survey of the Devon part of the National Park in 1966 it was the day trippers who were less active than the staying visitors. As Dartmoor received a much greater proportion of day trippers, it was shown that the number of trips (52,500) to the Devon part of Exmoor for active pursuits greatly exceeded the number of similar trips to the whole of Dartmoor. Much depends, however, on what is classed as an activity. The main organised activities in 1966 were hunting, youth hostelling, pony trekking, adventure training, youth activities, rambling and camping. Nowadays, with camping and hostelling not counted and

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

- 4 -

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY, EXMOOR HOUSE, DULVERTON, SOMERSET, TA22 9HL

Website: www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk E-mail: info@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK STATE OF THE PARK REPORT

other activities included, the day trippers are generally more active and over half are visiting with the intention of pursuing a particular activity. Roughly the same proportion, however, are engaged in outdoor pursuits, with the same proportion of walkers, fewer riders and more anglers. The day trippers are much more likely to be pursuing other interests such as cycling, picnicking, photography, visiting sites of historic interest and attending particular events.

Locals also use Exmoor for recreation

It must be remembered that locals also make use of the recreational facilities of Exmoor and can have impacts as great as or greater than those of visitors.

- *On average in Britain people make 42 journeys a year walking for pleasure and 80% of those journeys are from their own homes. The average distance walked is 0.7 miles. Source: Office for National Statistics*
- *The average person makes 1057 journeys of all kinds per annum. 28% of these are for leisure and the average journey length is 7.2 miles. Source: Office for National Statistics*

ARE RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES ON EXMOOR COMPATIBLE WITH QUIET ENJOYMENT?

Current situation:

Most recreational activities do not spoil people's enjoyment of the special qualities of Exmoor

Occasional noise from organised events appears to be the main factor spoiling enjoyment

Trends:



- *It is not known if the level of enjoyment is changing*

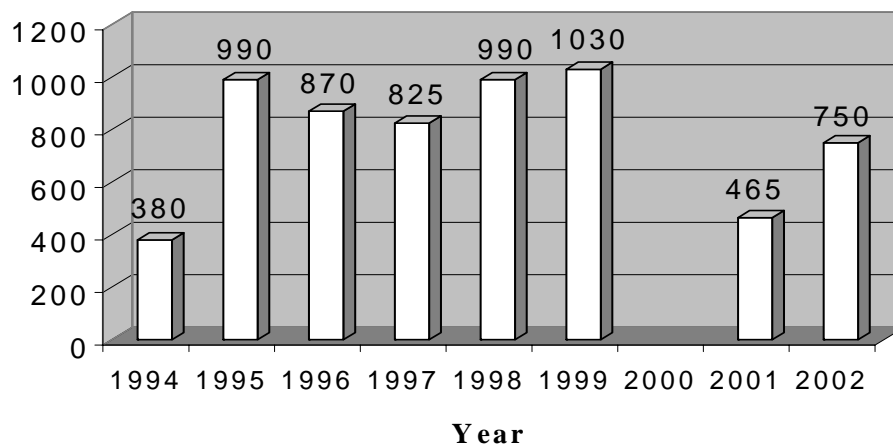
Most recreational activities on Exmoor involve motorised transport.

The single most popular recreational activity on Exmoor is sightseeing by car. Most other activities in themselves do not involve motors but motor vehicle transport is usually involved to and from those activities. Traffic noise, however, is generally not a problem on Exmoor except on the busiest roads. The strategy should be to reduce the distance travelled to activities by encouraging visitors to undertake the activities in the area where they are staying and to choose accommodation which is in an area suited to their needs. Visitors should be encouraged to look in detail at the areas where they are staying rather than to travel long distances to visitor attractions.

There are few complaints about noise from recreational activities. The most notable ones have been for popular music festivals. There are a few complaints about shooting but this mainly takes place outside of the tourist season. There are also some problems with off-road driving. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is on the increase. Motor vehicle competitions are generally well organised and controlled, with a few exceptions, and there are few complaints about them. The number of such activities does not appear to be increasing.

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK STATE OF THE PARK REPORT

Number of Off-Road Vehicles approved for Competitions on
Exmoor



HOW SAFE IS OUTDOOR RECREATION ON EXMOOR?

Current situation:

Exmoor appears to be a relatively safe area for outdoor recreation

Trends:



It is not known how safety is changing on Exmoor but there appear to be fewer fatal accidents

Exmoor appears to be a relatively safe environment compared with other upland areas in Britain

There are no statistics about accidents on Exmoor to persons engaged in outdoor recreation. However, there appears to be relatively few accidents. There have been few fatalities in recent years although during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s there appears to have been about one fatality per year on average. Most of these were on the coast. The cliffs are very high and the rocks loose and are not generally suited to climbing. However, most accidents are on the shore rather than the cliffs. The tides, freak waves and the slipperiness of the rocks seem to be the chief hazards. However, there have always been riding accidents and there seems to be an increase in white water canoeing on rivers and this is also a cause of accidents. Most people visiting Exmoor are not engaged in such hazardous activities, which is probably why there are so few accidents. However, most accidents seem to occur when people engaged in non hazardous activities are unaware of the hazards of the environment.

Most call-outs of the Exmoor Search and Rescue Team are for missing persons and persons who have become ill rather than those who have had accidents but it may be possible to use their records to learn from the few accidents which do happen.

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

Actions

These actions are from the Exmoor National Park Management Plan

Action 11/1

Develop methods of measuring enjoyment of special qualities

Action 11/2

Monitor social exclusion/inclusion

Action 11/3

Monitor recreation events and their impact

Action 11/4

Undertake risk assessments of properties

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.