

CHAPTER 14. VISITOR FACILITIES

Vision for visitor facilities

Sufficient numbers and standards of environmentally sustainable facilities which meet the needs and expectations of everyone wishing to enjoy Exmoor's special 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 14/1

To improve the quality and sustainability of facilities appropriate to the needs of visitors wishing to enjoy unspoiled countryside.

Indicators:

Percentage of accommodation registered with ETC, AA or RAC quality assurance schemes

Objective 14/2

To recover the cost of repairs from users of the facilities where usage results in damage to the environment.

Objective 14/3

To provide a range of accommodation to suit the needs of those coming to Exmoor to enjoy unspoiled countryside and outdoor recreation compatible with National Park purposes.

Indicators:

Day visitors who could not find suitable accommodation; occupancy of different types of accommodation

Objective 14/4

To improve accessibility to visitor facilities on Exmoor for people with disabilities and impaired mobility.

Indicator:

Percentage of accommodation within the National Park registered as meeting National Accessible Scheme criteria for disabled people; percentage of public toilets accessible to disabled visitors; length of public and permissive paths suitable for wheelchair use

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

**ARE VISITORS SATISFIED WITH THE QUALITY OF EXMOOR'S VISITOR
FACILITIES?**

Current situation:

A high proportion of visitors is satisfied with car parks, footpaths, eating facilities, publications and information centres

A moderate proportion of visitors is satisfied with toilets, picnic sites, information boards and public transport

Trends:



The number of facilities for visitors appears to be rising

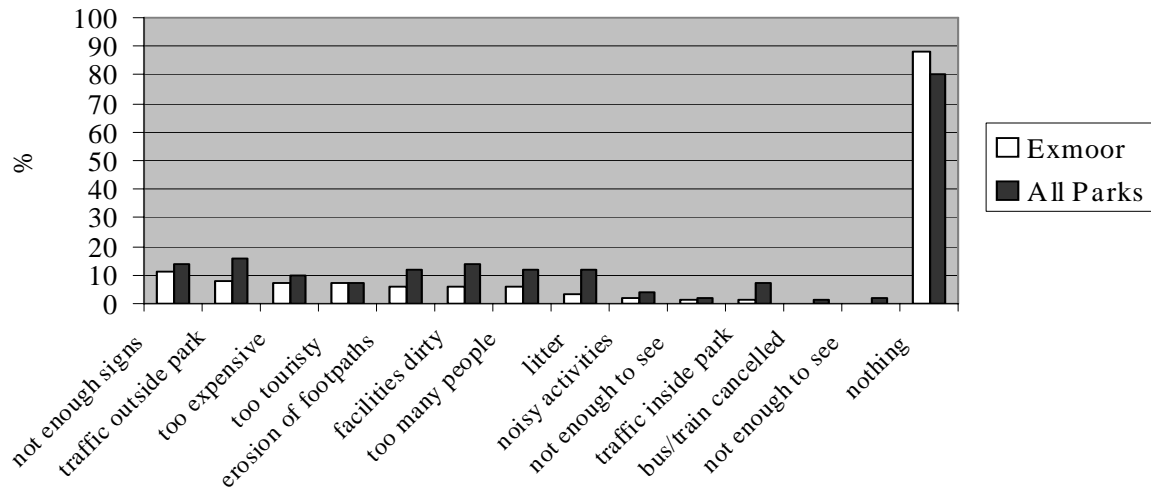
Little spoils the enjoyment of the majority of visitors to Exmoor

In the 1994 *All Parks Visitor Survey* visitors were asked if anything spoiled their visit to the National Park. All National Parks came out well from this survey, with 80% of visitors finding nothing to spoil their visit and with the main complaint (16%) being about the traffic getting to the National Park rather than a problem within it. Exmoor fared particularly well in the survey, with 88% of visitors finding nothing to spoil their visit and most complaints being less than half the average percentage for National Parks. The only aspect spoiling enjoyment where Exmoor had the same percentage of complaints as other National Parks was that it is too touristy and the number of signs may be a factor in this. The main complaint (11%), however, was about lack of signs. This is a common complaint: it was the second commonest complaint in all National Parks and in the 1988 Somerset Visitor Survey, after the traffic getting there. In the latter survey, however, Exmoor received the fewest complaints and greatest number of compliments of any part of Somerset.

The 2005 QUEST Visitor Satisfaction Survey analysed complaints in more detail. Complaints about signs were largely from motorists about signs being too small to read or catch their attention. When driving to the start of a walk in particular they found the roadside footpath signs difficult to read from a car. In general the routed wooden footpath signs were difficult to read when they became weathered. Lack of signs was mainly a problem where there were open areas criss-crossed with permissive paths. In such places the large number of signs necessary would probably be intrusive. There was a common feeling that short circular walks should be waymarked in a separate colour for each walk. The survey was conducted in winter, so some complaints were about the weather. Understandably, there were also complaints about attractions and facilities not being open in winter. When asked what improvements people wanted, most said none – leave it as it is. Most liked the general lack of commercialisation and many singled out the commercialisation that did exist, the ‘nick-nack’ shops in places like Dunster and Lynmouth being particularly disliked. A few complaints were about food: that it was expensive, did not cater for special diets and opening hours were too restricted.

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK STATE OF THE PARK REPORT

Aspects spoiling enjoyment



Exmoor National Park Authority undertook a number of visitor surveys in the 1970s and 1980s. Visitors were asked about aspects spoiling their visits and these were noted but not analysed, so it is not possible to ascertain any trend in lack of satisfaction. There has, however, been a noticeable drop in complaints about the quality of toilet facilities as they have been improved and lack of public telephones, due mainly to the increase in mobile phones. Complaints have always been few but, of those, complaints about signs have always ranked amongst the highest. As surveys tend to be conducted in car parks, complaints about car park signs are amongst the commonest. This is particularly common in settlements where there are car park signs but they are often missed because of distractions. It is clear from surveys that few visitors rely entirely on maps and signs are important to them. Many who are not confident about using maps for walking wish to be able to follow set circular routes which are signposted at each junction and which have waymarks colour coded separately for each particular route.

- In 1979 surveys most visitors were happy with facilities and did not want any changes. Most liked the tranquillity and the unspoiled nature of the area although a few would have liked more refreshment facilities. A few also wanted more accessibility for cars, such as parking at the edge of a beauty spot where they could sit in the car and look at the view or picnic areas where they could drive their car right up to their picnic table. They also wanted to be able to park their cars in the centres of villages, near the shops, and not on the edge. **Source: Exmoor National Park Authority Recreation Site Surveys 1979***
- In 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1987 surveys most visitors were happy with facilities and did not want any changes. Specific complaints each tended to amount to less than 1% of the sample. These again centred around lack of signs. Others included over-commercialisation of settlements, animals fouling public spaces and lack of refreshment facilities. Suggestions for improvements often reflected the fact that many of Exmoor's visitors are elderly. There were requests for more seating everywhere but particularly in car parks, greater accessibility for cars, more handrails and more even surfaces to car parks and walkways, more dropped kerbs and ramps and better access for disabled persons. There were also several requests for more litter bins and more access to the water's edge by rivers for paddling and boating. **Source: Exmoor National Park Authority Visitor Survey Analyses***

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- 3 -

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EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK STATE OF THE PARK REPORT

- In 1985 surveys were undertaken at a variety of sites throughout Somerset. At Dulverton, the only site surveyed on Exmoor, 86% of visitors found nothing to spoil their visits. Car parking, traffic, untidiness and lack of interpretation were the main complaints. It is possible to compare satisfaction with expectation at these sites. At Dulverton 26% came because of the natural scenery and nobody came for the walking but, on arrival, 37% enjoyed the scenery, 15% enjoyed the walking and 5% enjoyed nothing. In contrast, at Cheddar 49% came for the natural scenery and 45% for the tourist attractions whereas 11% enjoyed the scenery, 48% enjoyed the tourist attractions and 1% enjoyed nothing. 63% of visitors to Cheddar found something to spoil their visits. The most common complaints were about over commercialisation and untidiness. Although 95% of visitors found nothing to spoil Wells, 41% of them found nothing to enjoy there either. 36% had gone to Wells for the scenery and 27% for the history and heritage but only 18% had enjoyed the scenery and 8% the historic buildings. **Source: Somerset Visitor Survey***

Most visitors are satisfied with the number and quality of facilities provided for them on Exmoor

A survey undertaken in 1983 by the Exmoor Association of Parish councils and meetings showed a considerable rise in facilities for tourists over the previous decade. In 1983 61% of Exmoor parishes had public toilets compared with 34% in 1973 and 51% had public car parks compared with 34% in 1973. In 2002 53% of parishes wholly or partly within the National Park had public toilets and 65% public car parks. The differences between 2002 and 1983 are likely to be due to definitions and inclusion of parishes as there does not appear to have been any loss of toilet facilities in this time and an increase is more likely, although the rate of increase has slowed. Generally, it is the parishes around the boundary of the National Park with the fewest facilities. Surveys have found that visitors are generally happy with the quality as well as the quantity of the facilities provided for them on Exmoor.

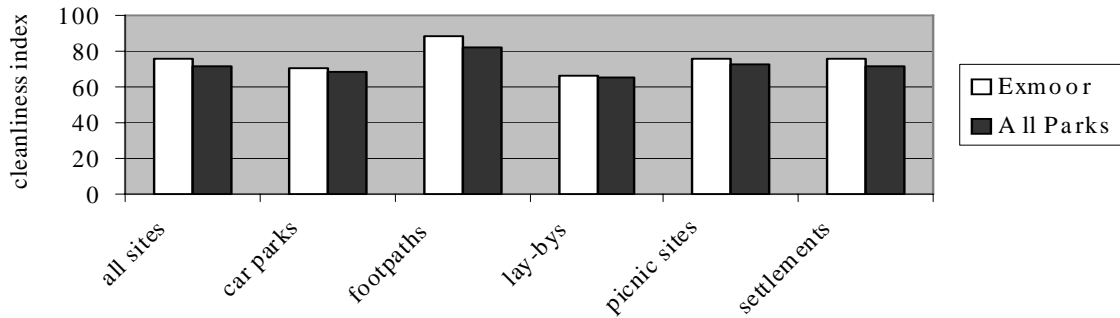
Satisfaction with visitor facilities (1994 All Parks Visitor Survey)

facility	respondents using facility	good	adequate	Poor
car park	94%	66%	31%	4%
toilets	84%	41%	52%	7%
footpaths	83%	70%	29%	1%
cafe/pub/restaurant	75%	66%	28%	6%
information boards	68%	58%	35%	6%
National Park leaflets	59%	76%	21%	3%
visitor/information centre	58%	77%	18%	5%
picnic site	41%	60%	34%	6%
public transport	9%	50%	21%	29%

When asked what they are particularly happy about on Exmoor, the most common responses are related to the scenery, tranquillity and unspoilt nature of the area. Cleanliness also comes high on the list. In 1997 the Tidy Britain Group undertook a survey of outdoor visitor facilities in all National Parks and, whilst the cleanliness of all was high, Exmoor was shown to have better than average cleanliness for each type of facility.

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

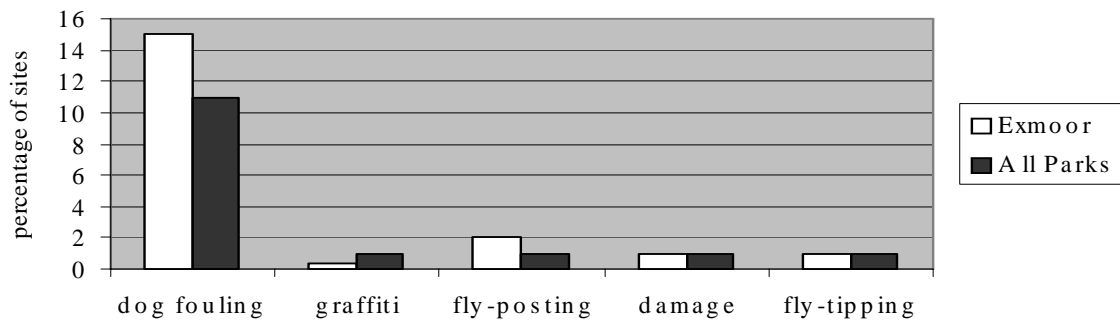
**Comparison of cleanliness in National Parks,
1997**



In the same survey facilities were graded for their cleanliness and Exmoor was shown to have over twice the average proportion of top (Grade A) sites, where there was no litter at all. Footpaths were shown to be particularly clean, whilst lay-bys were generally the least clean areas. As well as litter, the group looked at other factors affecting the quality of the environment. On Exmoor dog fouling was the single greatest factor, particularly within settlements but also within car parks and on footpaths. Along with fly-posting, this was also the only adverse factor for which Exmoor rated worse than the average for National Parks. Fly-posting was also particularly noted in settlements on Exmoor. Such problems, however, only affected a small percentage of sites. Dog fouling was also singled out amongst complaints in the 2005 QUEST Visitor Satisfaction Survey, visitors suggesting that locals were not doing enough to pick up dog excrement, even when bins were provided.

The survey analysed the types of litter found. Exmoor had less of all types of litter than the average for National Parks, which were generally very clean. On Exmoor smoking related litter was the most frequent type, closely followed by sweet wrappers. Drinks containers and fast food packaging were a problem mostly confined to lay-bys. Exmoor did not have any sites in the group's lowest category (Grade D), which has significant accumulations of rubbish. The few sites which were in the next lowest (Grade C) category, which has widespread rubbish, were mainly lay-bys on Exmoor and lay-bys also had the largest proportion of its sites in the group's Grade B category.

**Adverse environmental quality indicators,
1997**



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HOW DOES THE AVAILABILITY OF ACCOMMODATION IN THE NATIONAL PARK AFFECT TOURISM?

Current situation:

The stock of accommodation on Exmoor is high for the size of the National Park.

A relatively high proportion of visitors to Exmoor stays within the National Park or immediate area surrounding.

Most visitors staying in the Exmoor area are in self-catering accommodation but the proportion in serviced accommodation is higher than average.

The cost of accommodation on Exmoor is high compared with other National Parks.

Although more visitors stay in self catering accommodation, serviced accommodation contributes more to the Exmoor economy.

Trends:

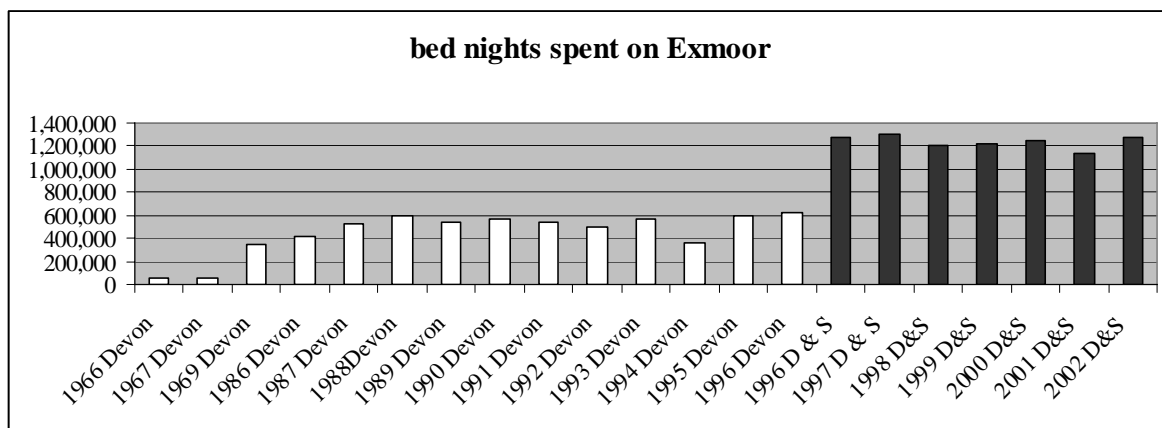


The number of nights spent by visitors in the National Park each year appears to remain roughly the same.

The proportion of visitors staying in serviced accommodation appears to be increasing.

Although the overall numbers of visitors to Exmoor appear to be in decline, the numbers staying within the National Park appear to be stable:

Devon County Council undertakes a regular survey of accommodation providers within the National Park on behalf of the National Park Authority. Since 1996 they have surveyed providers both in the Somerset and Devon parts of the National Park. Hence figures from those dates are combined. The figures show variation from year to year but the trend since the mid 1980s has been for bed nights spent within the National Park to remain roughly the same:



If visitor numbers are declining, this would suggest that the decline is mainly from day trippers and visitors staying outside of the National Park. However, visitor surveys suggest that the proportions of day trippers and staying visitors have remained roughly the same.

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

Contrary to the general trend towards self catering accommodation, on Exmoor an increasing proportion of accommodation has been in the serviced sector:

The general trend towards self catering accommodation in Britain does not seem to have been reflected in surveys of Exmoor. Although many more visitors to Exmoor stay in self catering accommodation, there has been a trend towards serviced accommodation:

- *Accommodation surveys suggest that between 1979 and 2000 the proportion of bed nights spent in the serviced sector rose from 24% to 36%. The proportion of visitors is higher than this as the average length of stay in the serviced sector is lower. This is supported by data from the National Park Authority's own surveys. Sources: Edinburgh University TRRU survey, Devon County Council accommodation survey*
- *According to visitor surveys, the proportion of visitors staying in serviced accommodation increased from 35% in 1980 to 47% in 1987. Source: ENPA visitor surveys*
- *In 1994, the average proportion of visitors staying in serviced accommodation in National Parks was 33% but Exmoor had the highest proportion for any National Park at 45%. Source: All Parks Visitor Survey*

Most of the capacity in the serviced sector is in medium sized establishments. There is a shortage of hotels suitable for conferences and other large events.

- *In 2002, of the serviced accommodation, 382 bedspaces were in units of 1-6 bedspaces; 1209 in units of 7-20 bedspaces; 897 in units of 21-50 bedspaces and 445 in units of over 51 bedspaces. Source: Devon County Council Accommodation Survey*

Currently available figures for changes in accommodation capacity on Exmoor are from two very different surveys and it is difficult to draw conclusions. Indications are that, although it has increased slightly in the last couple of years, particularly in touring pitches, overall capacity has decreased considerably since the 1970s. Recent estimates for flats and houses are likely to be underestimated because of the increased variety of methods of advertising. Capacity in caravan and camp sites was regularly exceeded in the early 1970s, leading to much unauthorised camping on Exmoor, a situation which no longer occurs. Surveys in the Devon part of the National Park show the number of static and touring caravans, tents and chalets increasing rapidly up to 1974 and decreasing thereafter. The figures suggest that the increasing proportion of visitors staying in the serviced sector is due to the decreasing proportion in caravanning and camping:

- *Between 1975 and 1982 the numbers of touring and motor caravans steadily decreased by 22% and the number of tents by 26%. Source: ENPA annual ground and aerial surveys*

Capacity (bedspaces) of tourist accommodation in Exmoor National Park: Somerset and Devon County Councils

	<i>Serviced</i>	<i>Flats and houses</i>	<i>Holiday park units</i>	<i>Touring pitches</i>	<i>Total</i>
1988	3582	2189	611	3036	9418
2002	2933	1311	570	3410	8224

There is a concentration of serviced accommodation in the Devon side of the park and of camping and caravanning pitches in the Somerset side. Figures also show that it is the latter which is the most inconsistent sector of accommodation, being most dependent upon the weather:

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

Percentage of visitor nights spent at different locations in Exmoor National Park, 1979

Type of accommodation	Lynnton/ Lynmouth	Porlock	Winsford	Dulverton	Barbrook	Dunster	Remainder of Exmoor	Total
Serviced accommodation								
Licensed hotel	26	6	2	6	6	2	6	9
Guesthouse	15	7	2	0	13	19	3	7
Bed and breakfast	2	4	0	0	3	5	5	3
Farm bed and breakfast	0	3	8	0	0	0	8	5
Unserviced accommodation								
Tent	18	22	48	0	8	0	23	21
Touring caravan	11	29	13	63	7	0	15	18
Rented property	14	1	22	24	20	53	23	18
Static caravan	5	12	4	0	31	0	8	8
Visiting friends and relatives	6	5	1	0	5	20	1	4
Own property	0	6	0	7	0	0	1	2
Farm cottage	0	4	0	0	0	0	5	3
Study centre/youth hostel	1	0	0	0	6	0	1	1
Other	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	1

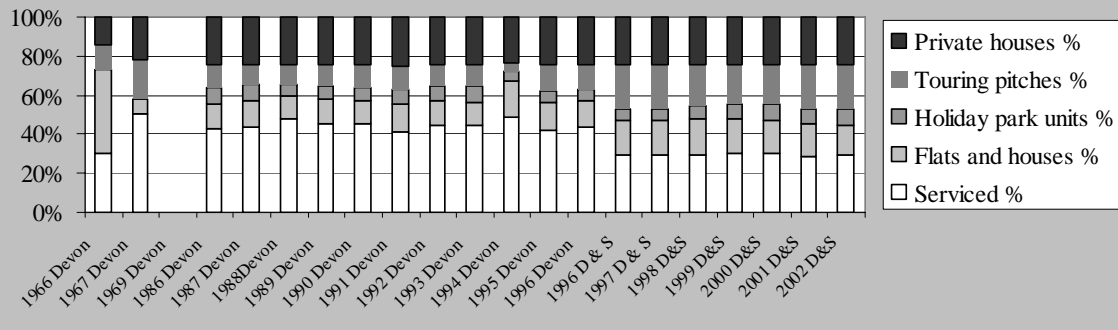
Capacity of accommodation on Exmoor is not affecting the numbers of staying visitors:

Most sectors of accommodation on Exmoor have spare capacity throughout the year. Self catering flats and houses are limited in number and sometimes reach capacity in peak season, so that the proportion staying in such accommodation remains relatively stable whereas throughout the season there is an over-capacity in the serviced sector and in camping and caravanning and these are most likely to absorb an increase in visitors in a good season. This does not mean that there needs to be an increase in the capacity of self catering flats and houses: more needs to be done to spread the load throughout the season, as there is plenty of spare capacity outside of the peak season:

- *In 2000, which was a poor year for visitors because of wet weather, there was much spare capacity in serviced accommodation and touring pitches throughout the year, whereas holiday park units and self catering flats and houses were almost at full capacity in peak season. Source: Devon County Council accommodation survey*

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK STATE OF THE PARK REPORT

Proportion of bed nights spent in each accommodation sector



Serviced accommodation bedspace occupancy rates by month (2000) based on establishments open during that month

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
18.3%	22.2%	27.0%	45.8%	39.3%	44.8%	55.3%	57.4%	50.1%	44.4%	24.6%	22.9%

Occupancy of self catering accommodation, 2000

	Flats and houses	Holiday Park units	Touring pitches
January-February	21.3%	N/a	9.7%
Spring/ Easter (March-April)	46.0%	37.8%	31.7%
Early season (May-June)	68.4%	75.0%	31.1%
Peak season (July-August)	87.3%	92.8%	56.7%
Late season (September-October)	70.5%	79.6%	21.1%
November-December	33.8%	N/a	N/a

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK STATE OF THE PARK REPORT

Tourist spending in Exmoor National Park, 2000. Source: Devon County Council accommodation survey

Accommodation type	Annual nights	tourist	Daily spending per night £	Total annual spending £m	Annual income to local area £m
<i>Serviced</i>	374,800		48.79	18.29	9.09
<i>Flats and houses</i>	214,000		28.76	6.16	2.38
<i>Holiday park units</i>	100,800		28.70	2.89	0.75
<i>Touring pitches</i>	250,600		17.92	4.49	0.94
<i>Private houses</i>	303,700		25.33	7.69	2.18
TOTAL	1,242,900			39.52	15.34

The cost of accommodation on Exmoor is high:

The cost of accommodation on Exmoor is amongst the highest in the National Parks:

- *In 1994 holidaymakers staying in the National Parks spent an average of £14.29 per person per night on accommodation, including food and drink. The cost on Exmoor was £18.90, 2 pence below the highest figure, which was for the Lake District. The daily spending of all visitors was, however, relatively low: £7.40 compared with £12.90 in the Lake District. Source: All Parks Visitor Survey*

ARE EXMOOR'S VISITOR FACILITIES ACCESSIBLE TO VISITORS WITH DISABILITIES AND IMPAIRED MOBILITY?

Current situation:

A low proportion of Exmoor's accommodation is suited to disabled visitors

A moderate proportion of Exmoor's visitor attractions has some facilities for disabled visitors

A low proportion of Exmoor's eating and drinking establishments has any facilities for disabled visitors

A high proportion of Exmoor's public buildings has some access for disabled persons

Trends:



Existing facilities are continually being improved for access to disabled persons although there are few new facilities

Exmoor is generally not easily accessible to persons with disabilities:

Most providers of accommodation on Exmoor would claim that their premises were accessible to disabled persons. However, accessibility is a matter of degree and few are fully accessible to such persons. Claims vary greatly and few premises are inspected to recognised standards.

- *In 1997 the Moor Access Group undertook a survey of facilities for disabled persons on Exmoor. They found that only one accommodation unit within the National Park was accessible to a wheelchair user travelling independently, according to English Tourist Board and Holiday Care Service criteria. That*

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- 10 -

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EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK STATE OF THE PARK REPORT

accommodation has since returned to a private residence. There was one self catering unit accessible to wheelchair users with assistance and one unit accessible to persons with limited mobility able to manage up to three steps. In addition there were five self catering units claiming to have some special provision for disabled persons. **Source: Accessible Exmoor**

- Somerset County Council undertake annual surveys of tourist providers in that county. Responses on facilities for disabled persons vary greatly from year to year and cannot be relied upon. On average about 47% of accommodation providers have stated that their premises are accessible to disabled people but, of those, 51% stated that they provided special facilities in 1999 but only 18% in 2001. In 1999 15% stated that they provided information for disabled persons whereas 79% did so in 2000 and 17% in 2001. A similar variation is apparent in those claiming their facilities are inspected by an approved body although an average of 50% of those claiming to be accessible also claim to have some form of inspection. Less than 1% of these on average claim to have any special facilities for visitors with impaired sight or hearing. **Source: Tourism in Somerset – The Facts**

Most visitor attractions within the National Park have some facilities for disabled persons but, again, it is a matter of degree and few are fully accessible.

- In 1997 the Moor Access Group found one out of fourteen riding establishments within the National Park specifically catering for disabled persons, plus two establishments offering carriage rides. Wimbleball Lake offered special fishing and boating facilities and four other visitor attractions offered special facilities. There were no eating establishments within the National Park offering both level or ramped access and toilets for the disabled, although nine establishments with level access were identified. **Source: Accessible Exmoor**

Partly because of legal requirements, most public buildings within the National Park are accessible to wheelchair users. This includes all health centres, surgeries and hospitals in the area. Public rooms at the National Park Authority's headquarters are accessible, as are their Visitor Centres. Most village halls are also accessible. Improvements are continually being made and accessibility is increasing, although some old buildings still present problems.

Actions

These actions are from the Exmoor National Park management Plan

Action 14/1

Survey the accessibility of visitor facilities

Action 14/2

Monitor the supply and demand for visitor accommodation

Action 14/3

Survey the quality of toilet facilities

Action 14/4

Develop a definition of sustainability appropriate for assessment of tourist facilities

Action 14/5

Conduct surveys to find the needs of visitors and the aims of their visits.

Action 14/6

Survey the reasons why people do not come to Exmoor

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.

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

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- 12 -

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