

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK
STATE OF THE PARK REPORT

1. LANDSCAPE

Vision for the landscape

Increased areas of wild landscape, including moorland, native woodland, bracken, scrub and mires. Sustainable farming practice conserving landscape features such as hedgebanks, orchards, unimproved grasslands and farm woodlands. Fewer eyesores and buildings combining local materials and good design.

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 1/1

To promote the conservation and enhancement of Exmoor's special landscape.

Indicators:

Visible changes from aerial photography used in Monitoring Landscape Change; percentage of land defined as being relatively remote/wild/unspoilt; net annual change in the area of land managed in line with National Park purposes.

Objective 1/2

To maintain the integrity of Exmoor's geology and soils for the purposes of conservation and understanding.

Indicators:

Percentage of Exmoor's geological SSSIs in favourable condition (AC)

IS THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF EXMOOR'S LANDSCAPE BEING CONSERVED AND ENHANCED?

Current situation:

A small proportion of the National Park is in public ownership

A moderate proportion of the National Park is semi-natural habitat

A moderate proportion of Exmoor's Sites of Special Scientific Interest is in favourable condition

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Trends:



More of Exmoor's Sites of Special Scientific Interest are recovering than declining, although most are showing no change

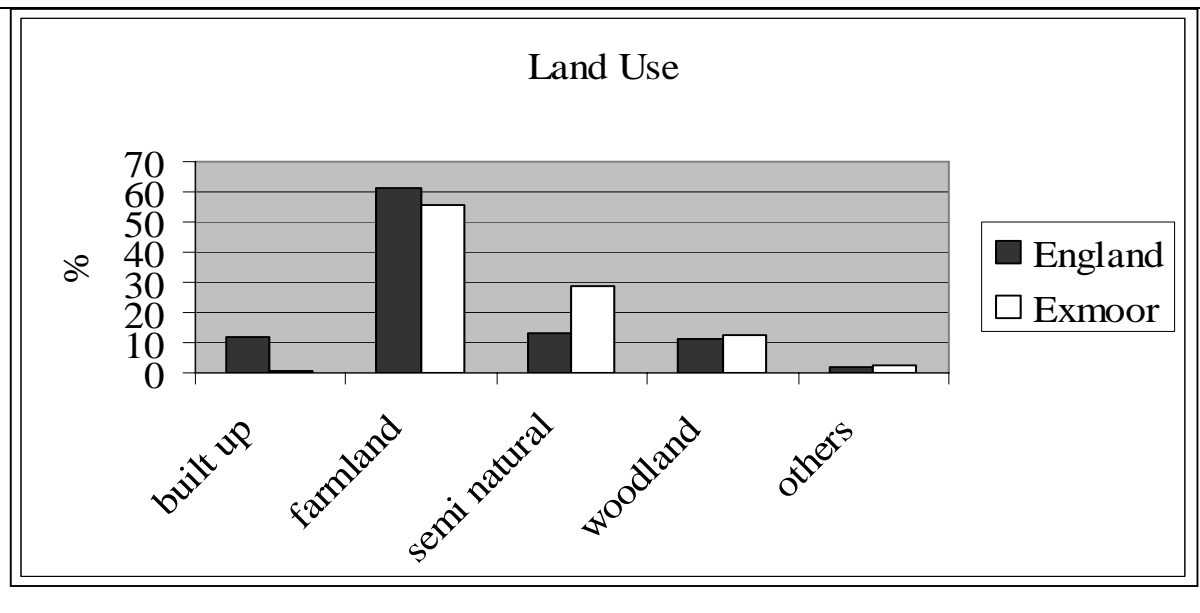


It is not known how the beauty of Exmoor is changing

Most of Exmoor is farmland

The landscape of Exmoor has constantly changed. We know that the natural vegetation of Exmoor is largely broadleaved woodland although the composition of that woodland would change with climate and soil structure. Deforestation by man began in the Neolithic period about 4,000 years ago and continued until the mid 19th century, when only 7% of Exmoor was wooded. Most of the current moor and heath was created as a result of deforestation and climate change in the Iron Age, about 2,500 years ago. Moor and heath has waxed and waned ever since and it is not clear when it was at its maximum extent on Exmoor. Much reclamation in England was spurred on by the population growth from the mid 18th century onwards and the improvements in agriculture necessary to feed the growing population, including the clearing of woodland and the reclamation of upland pastures. This activity may have affected some 30 per cent of the agricultural area of England from the mid-17th to the mid-19th centuries. By the beginning of the 20th century moor and heath formed nearly 50% of the National Park area and by the end of the century it formed 27%. Land use on Exmoor now does not differ greatly from that in the country as a whole. The main differences are that there is a smaller proportion of built up area and a larger proportion of semi-natural habitat (mostly moor and heath) than in England as a whole.

Land use (area)	Acres	Hectares	% of Park
Farmland	95,686	38,724	55.8
Moorland (also farmed)	46,987	19,023	27.5
Woodland	20,881	8,454	12.2
Cliff and foreshore	1,940	788	1.1
Urban area	1,497	606	0.9
Water (ponds, reservoirs)	410	164	0.2
Other (roads, gardens etc)	3,788	1,521	2.3



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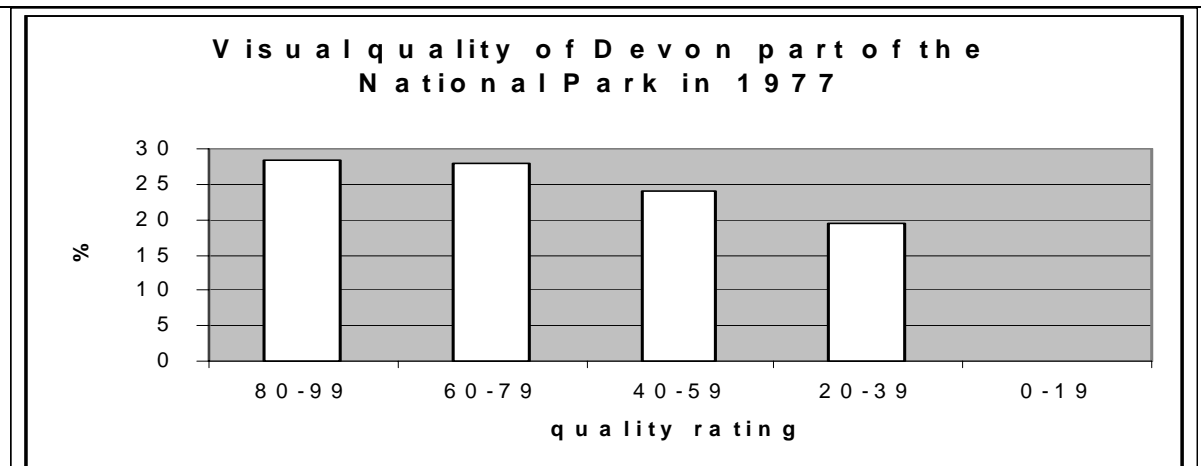
What cannot easily be quantified is the beauty of the countryside which makes Exmoor special and qualifies it for National Park status. Exmoor was the eighth National Park to be designated. Lord Strang, Chairman of the National Parks Commission in 1954 when it designated Exmoor as a National Park, gave the following reasons why Exmoor should be confirmed as a National Park:

- *It was an extensive tract of country, larger than the Pembrokeshire Coast, which was already a National Park and larger than some others suggested by the Hobhouse committee.*
- *Natural beauty was a matter of taste but Exmoor could offer hills and a very fine coast comparable in beauty to existing National Parks such as the North York Moors.*
- *Exmoor had few eyesores compared with existing National Parks.*
- *Exmoor did not have large centres of population on its doorstep but within a 50 mile radius it had more population than Dartmoor, which was already a National Park, and was one of the closest of the proposed National Parks to London.*

Curiously, the main reasons against confirmation were that Exmoor was so unspoilt and unthreatened that it did not need to have special protection. It was not argued that it did not meet the criteria for National Park status, except, perhaps, that it did not serve a large population. The inspector concluded that the landscape was of greater quality than an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, as objectors suggested it should be, and recommended confirmation as a National Park. The reasons for its designation and confirmation remain unchanged.

Nationally work is being undertaken on an overall indicator of landscape quality which reflects changes in agriculture, development and rural tranquillity. The Countryside Agency has divided England into 181 Character Areas, of which Exmoor forms one. The boundary of this area extends westwards from the National Park boundary to include parts of North Devon with similar fewer in number and Exmoor is combined with the Quantocks in one area. The Countryside Agency is now sub-dividing the Character Areas to provide more detailed assessments of character on which quality measurements can be based. This is currently in draft stage.

Beauty is very subjective but there have been many methods of assessing the visual quality of landscapes, mostly from trying to reach a consensus of opinion from a variety of people viewing the landscapes. They can also be assessed by giving positive scores to elements of the landscape deemed to be beautiful and negative scores to elements deemed to be eyesores. Exmoor is unusual amongst National Parks in having no major visual intrusions such as mines, quarries, industrial sites, trunk roads, pylons or large, uniform blocks of forestry. A study by Exeter University in 1977 gave a quality score for each kilometre square within the Devon side of the National Park. The resulting map showed a falling off of quality towards the edge of the National Park but no squares within the lowest quality rating and over half of the area was above average quality.



The landscape of Exmoor is always changing. National Park designation should result in that change being managed in ways which suit the purposes of conservation, enhancement, enjoyment and understanding.

The existing Quality of Life indicator for the quality of countryside concentrates on landscape features such as hedges, walls and ponds, as they are relatively easy to measure and reflect the condition of the countryside as a whole. Nationally the rapid decline in the length of hedgerows seems to have been halted in the 1990s although many

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are still becoming relict. There has been a slight increase in banks and grass strips around fields. The length of walls is still decreasing. The number of ponds appears to be increasing in lowland areas. Hedges and banks are particularly important in the west of the South West Region (the highest density in England), whereas Dartmoor and Exmoor are characterised by relict hedges and walls (amongst the highest density in the country). Between 1990 and 1998, there has been an increase in the number of boundaries in most of the Region, but these have tended to be fences. The more traditional and characteristic hedges, banks and walls remain in decline, although the decline has been slowed through agri-environment schemes.

The biggest changes to Exmoor's landscape over the last century have probably been the loss of moorland, orchards, ponds and hedgebanks; the change from mixed to pastoral farming; the increase in size of agricultural buildings and the increase in woodland, particularly conifer plantation. More recently game crops have had a great impact on the landscape, although this has not been quantified.

- *A survey by the National Park Authority taken from the Second Series of Ordnance Survey maps showed that up to 80% of Exmoor's orchards were lost in the 20th century. Old Ordnance Survey maps also clearly show that in the 19th century almost every farm had its pond and a similar proportion of ponds must have been lost.*

Survey work has been undertaken on the land use of Exmoor from time to time. Unfortunately, techniques have varied and some techniques have proved inaccurate so it is difficult to give precise details of changes. The surveys do, however, give an indication of trends. Land Utilisation Surveys were undertaken for Exmoor in the 1930s and 1960s. Not all of the information was published, although the original hand-drawn maps exist and research would provide useful information on the great changes from the agricultural depression through the Second World War to the introduction of agricultural grants.

A desk and field study by Exeter University in 1976 compared land use in the 1970s with the 1950s in the Devon part of the National Park and the Countryside Commission's Monitoring Landscape Change project compared aerial photography from the 1971-75 with 1989 for the whole of the National Park. The following gives a comparison of the main trends emerging from these studies:

Little overall change in:

1950s-1970s (Devon Exmoor)	1970s-1980s (whole National Park)
parkland	broadleaved woodland
orchards	improved pasture
open water	coastal land
	developed land
	ponds
	trees or groups of trees
	lengths of walls

An overall increase in:

1950s-1970s	1970s-1980s
farmland	cultivated land (+11.2 sq km, gained from improved pasture)
coniferous forest	coniferous forest (+6.3 sq km, not including clear felled/newly planted land but gained mainly from the growth of timber on such land)
broadleaved woodland	open water (+1.6 sq km, mostly from pasture and by Wimbleball Lake)
built up area	length of fences (+63.6 km)
scrub/unused land	

An overall decrease in:

1950s-1970s	1970s-1980s
heathland	upland heath (-5.3 sq km, lost mainly to heath mosaics)
	grass moor and rough pasture (-4.7 sq km, lost mainly to improved pasture)
	bracken (-4.6 sq km, lost mainly to pasture and scrub)
	length of hedges and banks (-232.3 km)

Considerable movement in and out of:

1950s-1970s	1970s-1980s
enclosed farmland	enclosed farmland (gross change 108.1 sq km)

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heathland	moor and heath (gross change 23.2 sq km) clear felled/ newly planted land (gross change 15.3 sq km) coniferous forest (gross change 15.9 sq km)
scrub/unused land broadleaved woodland	

Creating a National Park does not mean creating a museum and there has been much change for Exmoor since National Park designation in 1954. Change can be for the better and National Park status should help to steer change towards certain purposes. Success, however, depends upon a vision of what is desirable in the landscape. For example, a moorland Site of Special Scientific Interest on Exmoor could be in favourable condition for upland heath but unfavourable for blanket bog. Without a vision of how much of each is desirable it is not possible to measure success. However, the National Park Authorities have reached a common definition for a measure of the amount of land managed in line with National Park conservation objectives. This definition has developed gradually and it is not possible to assess trends but for the financial year 2001/2 it was estimated that 24,160 ha or 34.9% of Exmoor National Park was managed in line with such objectives. The target for 2002/3 is to increase this total by 3.4%. Part of this definition includes land owned or managed by the National Park Authority. Because of tenancy agreements it does not necessarily follow that land owned by the Authority is managed in accordance with National Park purposes. However, the proportion of public ownership of semi-natural habitats on Exmoor is slowly increasing. Public ownership of other land within the National Park has, however, generally been decreasing.

ARE EXMOOR'S GEOLOGICAL SITES OF INTEREST AND SOILS BEING PROTECTED?

Current situation:

Exmoor has few geological exposures in land and those on the coast are often difficult to access. The extent of soils with natural profiles on Exmoor is unknown.

Trends:



The number of inland of geological exposures is declining through vegetation and infilling.



It is not known how the extent of soils with natural profiles is changing on Exmoor or how the types of soils are changing.

Little is known about the condition of the geological and soils resources on Exmoor.

There are three geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest totally within the National Park: Dean Steep, West Lyn and Glenthorne. Another, fragmented site stretches westwards beyond the National Park from Combe Martin Bay. These are small areas representing about 0.2% of the area of SSSIs on Exmoor. There is also a geological interest in three of the general Sites of Special Scientific Interest, which incorporate former Geological Conservation Review sites: West Exmoor Coast and Woods, Watersmeet and North Exmoor. These form the highest tier of geological protection.

Between 2001 and 2002 the SSSIs were surveyed for condition. There were some access problems, particularly with foot and mouth disease in 2001, and not every part of each SSSI was surveyed. The condition of the geological interest in the general SSSIs was not assessed. However, Glenthorne and the West Lyn gorge were considered to be in favourable condition and Dean Steep unfavourable. Dean Steep is an exposure of Devonian sandstones in a road cutting which has now grown over with scrub. The problem is that the scientific and educational value of the site has been lost because the rocks can no longer be seen.

There are many County Geological Sites, now superseded by Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS), on Exmoor. Such sites are divided into 'exposure' and 'integrity' sites. The former are chosen because of their educational value and relative ease of access and the latter are limited features which would be irreplaceable if

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destroyed. Most Exmoor sites are in the 'exposure' category and their value depends upon continued access and the feature remaining visible. They have no special protection but are noted on the Local Plan map so that consultation takes place should they be affected by development proposals. Generally it is when sites are threatened that their condition is assessed. This rarely occurs on Exmoor and unless there is a new survey little is known about their current condition. Sites on Exmoor tend to suffer from neglect. There is no active quarrying and the few inland exposures tend to grow over or be infilled. Temporary new exposures often arise from new developments, particularly from laying foundation for large farm buildings and there is a need to record such exposures in the same way that archaeological records are taken.

- *In 2003 there were 21 Regionally Important Geological Sites within the Devon part of the National Park, 15 of which were in Sites of Special Scientific Interest.*

There is no mineral extraction in the National Park, although there have been many mines and quarries in the past. There are only a handful of sites that have or have had planning permission for quarrying, although there have also been temporary permissions for exploratory drilling. All of the permissions have been for sandstone quarrying. Exmoor has roughly 80% of Somerset's resource of sandstone suitable for road aggregate. Such rock is said to have a high Polished Stone Value and is a valuable commodity. As much of Exmoor's heaths is on these sandstones, they are mostly protected for their wildlife value. Slate was one quarried at Treborough for roofing. The pebble beds around the Roadwater and Yarde area were once worked for lime, as were small outcrops of limestone throughout the National Park area. There is a problem of there now being no sources of local stone for the building or repair of traditional buildings in the National Park.

Soils have no protection, although the North Exmoor SSSI is designated partly for the value of its peat deposits in showing the vegetation history of the area. Much of the value of such sites on Exmoor has been lost through peat digging, drain cutting and burning. Few areas of undisturbed peat remain and they should be carefully recorded. Detailed soil surveys have only been undertaken for Exmoor and Lynton and Lynmouth parishes and little is known about the soils of other parts of Exmoor or the current condition of any soils within the National Park. The boundaries of soils are often mapped from their vegetation but on Exmoor it is important to survey areas of former moor and heath to assess the potential for its restoration and the soil structure is an important factor in this, so more detailed mapping exercises need to be undertaken. It is unlikely that this will happen in the near future but it is hoped that the National Soils Resources Institute will undertake a survey of soils at risk from erosion. Peaty soils are probably at the greatest risk from erosion. Moorland fires and more frequent flooding increase that risk. The soils on the Morte Slates break down to fine clays which can easily be washed away.

ACTIONS

Some actions are from the Exmoor National Park Management Plan

Action 1/1

Monitor semi-natural habitats, resulting in changes to Section 3 map

Action 1/2

Conduct a detailed landscape character assessment

Action 1/3

Survey designed landscapes

Action 1/4

Survey designed landscape of Exmoor Forest

Action 1/5

Monitor landscape change and develop the use of digital aerial photography for this purpose

Action 1/6

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Assess local distinctiveness

Action 1/7

Monitor and resurvey designated geological sites

Action 1/8

Encourage survey of Exmoor's natural soils

Action 1/9

Develop landscape, geology and soils research strategy

Action 1/10

Define and map tranquil areas

Action 1/11

Define and list eyesores

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.