

# **Paddlesteamers, Postcards and Holidays Past**

## **The history of Exmoor's nineteenth-century tourist boom**

### **A Suite of Teaching Resources for students in Keystages 2 and 3**

When the Napoleonic Wars put an end to the Grand Tour of Europe, taken by the wealthy sons and daughters of Britain's ruling classes to broaden their horizons, they needed to look closer to home for their inspirational holidays. By this time, their elders had got into the habit of partying on the continent, and they, too, were seeking out their own country's scenic hotspots in order to continue taking extended holidays with their sketchbooks and their servants.

It couldn't have happened at a better time for Exmoor. The Industrial Revolution had mechanised farming and the spinning and weaving cottage industries that underpinned their rural economy, putting the area's labourers and homeworkers out of work. To make matters worse, suddenly the seas were empty of the shoals of herring that for centuries had provided a livelihood for the rest of the population. At the end of the eighteenth century, all they had left to exploit for a living was the scenery.

Fortunately, scenery was just what nineteenth-century tourists were after. Romantic poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth spearheaded a cultural revolution that sought inspiration in dramatic landscapes, and word soon spread that their seminal anthology "Lyrical Ballads" arose from the breathtaking scenery they were exploring around Exmoor and the Quantocks.

Some of the influential holidaymakers inspired by their poetry to visit Exmoor fell in love with the area and moved in, along with their fortunes, their dynamism and their city contacts, and they set about working with local businessmen to improve the area's transport links and infrastructure. The result was a booming tourist economy.

### **The Project**

The "Paddlesteamers, Postcards and Holidays Past" teaching resources explore the history of that tourist boom. The project is designed for students in Keystages 2 and 3, with suggested tasks that cover the full curricular range. As well as plenty of background information, there are itineraries for class visits to seven key sites in the history of Exmoor's tourism. Four of them are based around Lynton and Lynmouth and could be included in a single day's whistle-stop excursion, with the other three being representative of historical tourist destinations away from the twin villages.

Each location has information and tasks for students to work through with their teacher, before and after the visit as well as during the tour. These documents complement one another and should all be used in the classwork, even if it is not possible to visit each site. There are also teacher's notes to accompany these documents, giving further information and including suggested extension tasks and links to other relevant web-based resources.

There are many other tourist honeypots across the moor, of course, and students are encouraged to find these for themselves in the classroom, through a close inspection of the 1:25000 Ordnance Survey map, following their work on the project's main theme: "What makes a beautiful landscape, and how does it provide inspiration?"

## Inspiration

The key to Exmoor's continuing success as a tourist destination is the inspiration that visitors find in the landscape and the lifestyle; and the main purpose of these teaching resources is to enable students to find this inspiration for themselves.

A teacher's role in the education of the next generation is to provide students with information, interpretation and inspiration. The National Curriculum prescribes the information element of this formula in its very comprehensive schemes of work; but they fall into the category of plans that make excellent servants but very poor masters. It is very easy for over-loaded teachers to get bogged down in the detail and forget that the best way to help students understand a subject is to inspire them to want to know more! Full information specific to the project is of course included here; and links are provided to some of the many relevant websites covering related topics.

The interpretation factor is provided by every teacher as part of their delivery of a subject, and there has been no attempt to talk down to students in the project. Words, phrases and concepts that will inevitably be outside most students' experience are included in the knowledge that teachers will be able to explain them simply within the context of the subject. Resources and links are given where these might be helpful.

While the background reading and site visits together provide extensive information, their purpose is to get students' brains spinning creatively, right across the curriculum. Numerous questions, not all of them completely relevant to the task in hand, are included to get students thinking about the subject for themselves. They are required to keep journals and sketchbooks, as Exmoor's earliest tourists did, and explore the ambience and atmosphere of each location, as well as the factual data. The routes taken by Coleridge and Wordsworth and their cronies on their tours of the landscape are examined, as well as work produced by these nineteenth-century luminaries while they were here.

Links to the literature, art, architecture and music of the Romantic period are included to provide contextual inspiration, and in each discipline students are encouraged to produce creative work of their own in the same style. Lorna Doone, Gothic novels, "penny dreadfuls" and Neo-Gothic architecture help students to understand the appeal of wild places in the days of Exmoor's early tourism, and the legend of young ladies being turned to stone for dancing on a Sunday gives rise to a "Chinese whispers" storytelling task. Using modern techniques to produce facsimiles of the earliest magazines provides plenty of practice in computerised and manual design. Timetabling stagecoaches and their links with trains, as part of this, introduces the need to sort through information and make it accessible to "Victorian tourists", both on paper and online.

Although another important theme of the project is the universal need for people to express themselves in some way, its application is not confined to the expressive arts. The topic of Exmoor's tourism lends itself to providing inspiration in the other subjects too.

Students of Design and Technology are introduced to the evolving technology of transport during the nineteenth century; because this was critical in linking an isolated area to the fashionable world wanting to explore it. Considering the relative merits of paddles and screwthreads in powering Victorian steamships gives an opportunity for further work, according to the students' needs. Exmoor's steep gradients and its rugged terrain – both of which contribute so much to its scenic beauty and therefore its popularity with visitors of all eras – provided interesting challenges for early engineers to overcome. Lynmouth's cliff railway is an inspiration in itself, being the world's only carbon-neutral railway today, and the Victorian hydroelectric power station above Watersmeet was a world-first enterprise, in the way that it used off-peak electricity to pump the water back up to the reservoir on Summerhouse Hill, ready to the next day's generate power. All these engineering topics also give opportunities for students of maths and physics to work on gradients and energy.

Darwin produced his "Origin of Species" as our tourist boom was gathering pace, and a suggested task in a couple of the locations is to catalogue and identify their wildlife from scratch, as a

Victorian explorer of Exmoor would have had to do. Ferns were the big attraction to naturalists heading here at the time, as we find out at Watersmeet, but goats and Exmoor ponies add colour, and the whitebeam endemic to Exmoor introduces the topic of rare and endangered species – a subject approached from a different angle in considering the tropical plants that borough and estate gardeners introduced, and the problems that they are giving landowners today. The Victorian fashion for sea-bathing and “taking the waters” raises a number of topics for scientific debate and investigation, including the origin and nature of the water that fed Glen Lyn’s “mineral factory”. RD Blackmore’s witch “Mother Melldrum” adds further interest in the consideration of witches, herbalism and alternative medicines.

Mary Anning was busy finding fossils on the Dorset coastline at this time, too, and many amateur naturalists and antiquarians were running around the countryside, trying to map its story. The project touches on the importance of Hollow Brook, near Heddon’s Mouth, as a key location for geologists, because of its fossils and the information they gave about rocks formed during the Devonian period. This leads on to EA Newell Arbour’s surveys of Exmoor’s coastal geomorphology, and the attempts of twentieth-century mountaineers to overturn his declaration that it was not possible to explore these cliffs without a boat. Students of cookery and nutrition are challenged in our own project to plan the food that these expeditioners might have taken for their five-day traverse of the coastline. (There are other ideas for food and nutrition elsewhere in the project, too, and their role in the success of Exmoor’s tourism).

Warnings about the dangers of climbing are of course included, alongside details of professional adventure companies for those students who are inspired by the descriptions of Exmoor as a climbing destination. The steamship excursion that ran in 1910 to view Scott’s “Terra Nova”, before she set off for the Antarctic, provides the excuse to give weblinks to companies mounting modern-day expeditions for young people inspired to do some serious exploring themselves.

In the meantime, they are all exploring the Exmoor landscape first-hand, equipped with OS map, compass and full instructions on staying safe. It is suggested that visits to Heddon’s Mouth and Doone Valley include navigation practice, as required by the National Curriculum, and there is so much practice in using OS maps in the classroom that they will be experts in the skill by the time they have finished! Mapping in general is a major part of the project, from international mapping of the European capitals included in the Grand Tour, through national work based on the destinations of tourists’ postcards, steamships and rail journeys and distances walked by eighteenth-century visitors on walking tours, to finding the grid reference of the memorial stone to RD Blackmore in Doone Valley.

There is also a lot of other geography work, based on the shape of the landscape and how it has been changed, by both natural processes and the people living and working here, and the effect these have had on its scenery and therefore its appeal as a tourist destination. History is, of course, the other main component of the project, which could be used as a local study in itself. Much of Exmoor’s earliest development as a tourist destination took place during – and because of – the Age of Enlightenment, and there is plenty of historical detail throughout the project. The inclusion of the dubious Doune brothers in real life is intended to make students think about the concept of verifying information, from whatever source, including (especially) material found online.

There is a passing reference to KS3 Citizenship studies in the story of Victorian capital projects relating to tourism – railways etc – and the role of both citizens and Parliament in their funding and implementation. Shareholders, profits, budgets and keeping accounts are given some thought, as is the role of local governments in bye-laws protecting the countryside from the ravages of fern collectors. There are numerous topics for debate at both Keystages, some controversial, and a great many open-ended lines of enquiry, catering for all interests and abilities, right across the range of subjects.

As well as a selection of online resources to be used as part of tasks within the project, there is a section devoted to curriculum links. This gives a breakdown of subjects covered, by subject and by site visit, matched against National Curriculum Schemes of Work.