

Exmoor National Park  
Historic Environment Report Series No 2

# EXMOOR'S MOORLANDS HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH PRIORITIES 2011-15



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Historic Environment Report Series

This report series includes interim reports, policy documents and other information relating to the historic environment of Exmoor National Park.

Further hard copies of this report can be obtained from the Exmoor National Park Historic Environment Record:  
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01398 322273

**FRONT COVER:**  
Long Stone

©Exmoor National Park Authority



The boundary of the former Royal Forest at Hoccombe Water

## **EXMOOR'S MOORLANDS HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH PRIORITIES 2011-15**

### **SUMMARY**

This document sets out the research priorities for the historic environment on Exmoor's moorlands. The priorities it lists were identified by those actively engaged in research on the moorlands at a workshop held in Dulverton in February 2011. The document also assesses the efficacy of some of the methods and techniques that may be used in delivering the research priorities.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Historic Environment Research Framework for Exmoor 2010-15 (Exmoor National Park Historic Environment Report Series No 1, 2010) establishes both the broad and specific research priorities for Exmoor National Park and sets out a vision through which those priorities should be delivered. It also recommends closer scrutiny of particular themes or areas if necessary, and the establishment of a historic environment research group to guide research.

### **THE MOORLANDS**

A priority for Exmoor National Park Authority for 2010-12 is the management of the moorlands. Two other significant initiatives are also now in place which will have a bearing on the historic environment of the moorlands. These are, firstly, the Exmoor Mires Project 2010-15, which seeks to improve water quality by rewetting substantial areas of blanket bog on Exmoor. Funded by South West Water, and run by a Board of project partners, the works will be delivered by a team of three including a Historic Environment Officer to co-ordinate the archaeological elements of the project. Secondly, the Exmoor Moorlands Landscape Partnership Scheme (2011-14) which, through Heritage Lottery Fund support hopes to reconnect people with their moorland heritage. The scheme reflects a strong partnership as well as a team of 2.5 staff including a Moorland Heritage Officer.

A number of the priorities of the Research Framework are focused on moorland, and these include in particular Exmoor's relict prehistoric landscapes (priority 4, page 22). This acknowledges the significance and rare survival of this kind of landscape in England and the lack of study and, therefore, understanding, which Exmoor's prehistoric landscape has received hitherto. The moorlands

undoubtedly contain the richest concentration of such sites and in particular they preserve large numbers of fragile sites which elsewhere have been effaced by later farming practice.

In recent years a number of research projects have focused or covered aspects of the historic environment of the moorland areas (egs. Victoria County History, English Heritage surveys, Exmoor Iron project, National Mapping Programme) and current research includes work on valley mires (Heather Adams, University of Plymouth), Mesolithic landscapes (Paula Gardiner, University of Bristol), Neolithic and Bronze Age landscapes around Lanacombe (Mark Gillings and Jeremy Taylor, University of Leicester), an archaeological study on reclamation (Cain Hegarty as part of the National Mapping Programme on Exmoor). The lack of earlier research has meant that perceptions and understandings of the development of the moorland and its prehistoric archaeology in particular are changing rapidly. There is also an ongoing process of discovering previously unrecognised monuments, which both alters current distributions as well as adding novel (to Exmoor) monument categories.

The Research Framework also sets out other research priorities which are in part specifically relevant to moorlands, such as priority 1 Chronology (p 21), priority 5 Re-assessment of Museum Collections (p 22), priority 6 Landscape Based Research (p 22) which advocates a fine-grained approach to Exmoor's landscape and in particular the use of Historic Landscape Characterisation and LiDAR. Priority 7 Resource Exploitation (p 23) advocates research into particular resources such as those on the moorlands. Other priorities include: Priority 8 Farming (and of particular relevance to the moorlands, reclamation), Priority 9 Communication and Transport (including packhorse ways particularly in and around the Royal Forest). Priority 10 (p24) Ritual and Religion, (especially 'stone settings and standing stones generally, burial mounds: barrows and cairns...'). Priority 11 Estates and Designed Landscapes, (includes Simonsbath House at the heart of the reclamation of the Royal Forest). Priority 13 Social History, (including the development of tourism on Exmoor). Priority 14 Offence and Defence, (and especially the remains of WWII training grounds, which have a predominantly moorland distribution).

## **HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT MOORLAND PANEL**

In 2010 a group of historic environment professionals and others with an active research or management interest into the historic environment of Exmoor's moorlands was set up to reflect on the Historic Environment Research Framework. They comprise:

Vanessa Straker, Nick Russell (English Heritage);

Richard Brunning (Somerset CC);

Graham Wills, Faye Glover, Jessica Turner, Rob Wilson-North (Exmoor NPA)

Jason Ball, Faye Balmond (Exmoor Moorlands Landscape Partnership Scheme)

Jane Marchand, Andy Crabb (Dartmoor NPA)

Ralph Fyfe (University of Plymouth);

Mark Gillings, Jeremy Taylor (University of Leicester)

Paula Gardiner (University of Bristol)

Hazel Riley (formerly English Heritage)

Richard McDonnell (Moorland Board)

Rachel Thomas (Exmoor Society)

The Historic Environment Moorland Panel met on 4 February 2011 in Dulverton.

The brief was:

- i. to reflect on the Research Framework and the progress of current research
- ii. to develop priorities for research on the historic environment of the moorlands
- iii. to consider the efficacy of a range of techniques used in the investigation of aspects of the moorland historic environment.

The Panel was divided into three groups to focus on, a) palaeo-ecology, b) prehistoric landscapes, c) the later moorland landscape. As a result of the day's deliberations, a range of priorities were advanced which should be seen as building on the Historic Environment Research Framework for Exmoor 2010-15 and providing a more fine grained level of research priorities for moorland. Alongside these priorities are set out a range of techniques which should be used to deliver the priorities.



Discussing the excavation of a prehistoric cairn at Lanacombe



Holdstone Down (© English Heritage; 26643 009)



Palaeoecological sampling in progress



Green Barrow after a moorland burn, March 2010





Moorland cultivation, probably medieval in date, near Landacre Bridge



Nutscale Reservoir



Exe Cleave (© English Heritage 26646 048)

## THE PRIORITIES FOR RESEARCH

### Aspects of the Current State of Knowledge and Gaps in Understanding

Recent discoveries have highlighted the fact that there are still significant upstanding archaeological field monuments that have not yet been recognised. As understandings of the moorland's historic environment develop, there is a need to reassess specific areas through walkover surveys. This will inform the use and development of more varied and therefore iterative methodologies, including geophysical techniques, LiDAR and palaeo-ecological surveys. Current research projects provide a unique context in which to develop these methods, but we should be aware of extrapolating too much on what is still a very small body of studied data from the moorlands. There is a particular need to integrate the assessment of museum collections of artefacts, especially flints, into this process.

The extent and depth of the peat is broadly known, but the peat is only dated in some places. There is a lack of detailed analysis on particular periods (ie high resolution analysis), and chronologies are typically based on a limited number of radiocarbon dates. There is a lack of environmental analysis other than on pollen, and generally scientific techniques have tended to be narrowly applied so that where preservation permits, in future, work should encompass testate amoebae, plant macrofossils, insects and wood analysis (including dendrochronology). Better understanding of chronology should focus on implementing well-thought out scientific dating strategies. These should aim to improve resolution of radiocarbon dating for monuments, monuments types and palaeoenvironmental sequences. Other forms of dating such as tephrochronology and Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) should also be considered where appropriate.

There is a lack of published data and what there is, is confined mainly to grey literature. Information is not available locally except through the Exmoor National Park Historic Environment Record and here it should be strongly developed. All data must be related to the Historic Environment Record to enable cross-referencing of separate sources of data, such as monuments, geophysical surveys, artefacts in museums, radiocarbon dates and palaeo-ecological samples.

Much more work is needed to develop an understanding of what kinds of prehistoric monuments lie concealed by blanket bog. Very little is currently known about this kind of archaeology, yet potentially these monuments are the best preserved and have unsurpassed palaeo-environmental contexts.

There is a need to understand the use of the moorlands at later periods. For example the origin and development of the Royal Forest is still far from clear, as is the development of the commons around the Forest.

It is clear that 19th century reclamation on Exmoor is of national significance. There is a need to re-iterate that significance and despite the Reclamation of Exmoor Forest by CS Orwin, Exmoor, the Making of an English Upland by Mary Siraut (2009) and E MacDermot's History of the Royal Forest of Exmoor', as well as various studies by Roger Burton and the forthcoming study on the archaeology of reclamation (English Heritage forthcoming 2012), there is still a need for an accessible and integrated narrative on the history and archaeology of the Royal Forest and its reclamation.



**The deserted medieval village at Badgworthy Water (© English Heritage 26646 019)**

## SPECIFIC PRIORITIES FOR RESEARCH

RESEARCH PRIORITY	METHOD
Identify upstanding prehistoric field monuments	Carry out targeted walkover surveys; LiDAR analysis.
To identify prehistoric monuments and structures concealed within or under the peat	Carry out geophysical survey. This should focus on gradiometry for large areas, but must include resistivity and GPR for specific applications. However, any strategy for geophysics should bear in mind the variability of the results of these techniques on moorland and should confirm results by selective excavation (some of this work best done by machine to remove moorland vegetation).
To understand the distribution of Mesolithic occupation and to characterise flint working sites	Walkover surveys; geophysical techniques; selective excavation
To characterise prehistoric settlement on Exmoor and place it in its sub regional context.	Need to develop Historic Landscape Characterisation as a tool to support this work. Focus on some key areas: Codsand, Chapman Barrows, Little Hangman, Myrtleberries, Valley of Rocks, Badgworthy Catchment,, Hawkcombe Head, North Hill, and carry out prospection and excavation and build in palaeo-environmental study.

RESEARCH PRIORITY	METHOD
To use conservation work on prehistoric sites as opportunities to increase understanding of monuments.	Carry out excavation and environmental analysis where possible on damaged sites as part of conservation work; Heritage At Risk; Local List; Exmoor PALs
To understand the impact of destructive agencies on significant aspects of the moorland heritage, including Scheduled Monuments, Exmoor PALs and sites on the Local List.	Monitoring work, such as Heritage At Risk surveys, PALs condition surveys etc; evaluation work, such as trial pitting on sites to assess the impact of bracken. Consider prioritising work on the Local List, Monument Management Scheme and other condition surveys. Consider prioritising designation requests for moorland sites to reflect the current state of knowledge.
To date the spread of blanket bog and to identify the reasons for its spread	Palaeo-ecological techniques
To date and characterise Exmoor's woodland in the past	Palaeo-ecological techniques; dendrochronology on bog oaks
To develop a proxy climate record (for example at the Chains for the last 5,000 years)	Specific analyses: testate amoebae, isotopes, humification, macro fossils.

RESEARCH PRIORITY	METHOD
To understand the environmental context of Mesolithic occupation and effect of farming communities in the Neolithic period	High resolution analysis of valley mire peat cores; should include high resolution analysis of short parts of peat sequences and include many radio-carbon dates to give good temporal resolution. Should coincide with current excavations
To understand the environmental context of particular archaeological monuments	Ditto
To understand the development of the Roman/post Roman/early medieval landscape.	Ditto
To fully understand specific archaeological field monument categories on Exmoor, such as barrows, field systems, linear features etc (through actual data rather than chronological and typological analogy with elsewhere)	Geo-archaeological analysis; analysis of waterlogged/charred macro-fossils from excavations for all dates and periods. Selected excavations.
Seek to extend resources for research	Explore local funding streams (Maltwood, MacEwan Trust etc, Collective Doctoral Awards (CDAs).
To understand the nature of 19th century reclamation	Walkover surveys and ground truthing of air photographic and LiDAR data is needed. Selected, large scale topographic surveys are also needed

RESEARCH PRIORITY	METHOD
To understand the social history of reclamation	Detailed local history research is needed, which builds on the work of the VCH and Roger Burton.
To understand the impact of WWII and other events during the 20th century on the moorlands	Oral history recordings as part of the Exmoor NP Historic Environment Record and Landscape Partnerships Scheme 'Views of the Moor' project. In particular seek to complete a hill farming family history project using oral histories.
Link the 'Treeless Forest' project which forms part of the Landscape Partnership Scheme to the work of the VCH	
Seek to communicate the moorland narrative through improving knowledge of and interpretation/presentation of exemplar sites.	Focus on key sites such as Chapman Barrows, Larkbarrow, Old burrow, Little Hangman, Hoar oak, Wood Barrow/ Longstone Barrow, Badgworthy, Shoulsbury.
<p>Understand the date and morphology of the southern commons 'medieval' relict field systems and ridge and furrow. Why are they distributed mainly on the south of Exmoor?</p> <p>Resolve the '<i>Molinia</i> debate' in the Royal Forest. Was the medieval Forest swaled?</p>	<p>Detailed topographic surveys, palaeo-ecological sampling, evaluation trenching.</p> <p>Palaeo-ecological sampling and dating at key valley mire sites.</p>



RESEARCH PRIORITY	METHOD
Resolve the origin and location of telling houses	Large scale topographic surveys and evaluation trenching.
Understand the range of mining features on the moorland, especially in the light of work by Exmoor Iron at Roman Lode.	Large scale survey; LiDAR analysis, geophysical survey, palaeo-ecological sampling, small scale excavation.
To properly understand the form of the boundary markers of the Royal Forest (including the 19th century boundary)	Condition surveys, map regression. Link to the 'Treeless Forest' project.
Understanding the full extent of Knight structures, especially small scale structural features which are vulnerable to destruction	Under the 'Treeless Forest' project carry out surveys to identify and record such structures
To understand the chronology of reclamation and to identify pre-reclamation features from the medieval and earlier periods which are obscured by 19th century developments (ie Emmett's Grange 'early phases' like barrows, enclosure etc)	Detailed ground surveys, map regression, geophysical surveys etc.
There is a need for more focused work on marginal field systems like those on Codsand, Cheriton Ridge and Lanacombe to understand chronology, function and character	Detailed ground surveys, geophysical surveys, LiDAR, palaeo-ecological sampling and evaluation trenches

Rob Wilson-North  
28 March 2011