



EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK

Exmoor National Park Authority

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT REVIEW 2003

February 2004

The purposes of Exmoor National Park Authority as set out in the Environment Act 1995 are:-

*'...to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, **cultural heritage** and wildlife of the area... and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities by the public...'*

INTRODUCTION

2003 has seen Exmoor National Park Authority's historic environment team engaged in a wide variety of work programmes, covering the breadth of the historic environment: archaeological sites and landscapes, historic buildings, the evidence of past environments concealed within waterlogged deposits, both on the beach and on the moors.

At the heart of it is the day to day routine of consultations arising from planning applications and agri-environment scheme consultations, as well as giving advice to landowners and property owners. The team is also involved in the development of policy at National Park, as well as regional and national level through a wide variety of mechanisms, such as management groups, steering groups and other fora, as well as through formal responses to consultations. We are also deeply involved in major conservation, research and interpretation projects across Exmoor, playing a vital role in fostering and facilitating the work of others in the conservation of Exmoor's finite and fragile cultural heritage, and making Exmoor's past accessible to all.

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

In May 2003, Exmoor National Park Authority hosted a workshop in Dulverton to 'ideas-storm' priorities for research into the historic environment. A draft Research Framework has now been produced and is available at www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk. It is hoped that this framework will guide and co-ordinate research over the next five years. We welcome your comments and feedback on this document.

EXMOOR'S HISTORIC COAST

The papers from the 3rd Exmoor Archaeology Forum held in June 2002 and entitled 'Exmoor's Historic Coast' have now been brought together and will be circulated to all who attended that event; they are available from the Exmoor National Park Authority (price £6).

MONUMENT PROTECTION PROGRAMME

The revision of the statutory list of Scheduled Ancient Monuments continues, and Jackie Duck who is carrying out the work on the ground for English Heritage writes: Around 35 sites considered to be of potential national importance were visited throughout 2003. Of these sites, 24 have been recommended for Scheduled Ancient Monument status (this includes 11 new sites being added to the list), and others were highlighted for an alternative form of action.

A broad range of sites were inspected across a range of differing landscapes. These included a group of late prehistoric hillforts and defended enclosures all located in commanding positions above the Barle Valley; a round barrow cemetery with numerous single barrows of Bronze Age date and an early prehistoric stone circle, one of only two in the region, all situated in open moorland on Winsford Hill and Withypool Hill. Other sites inspected were a deserted medieval settlement and associated field system on the steep wooded slopes of Ley Hill and a rare example of an iron working site on the valley floor in Horner Wood. Among the most notable monuments reviewed were Tarr Steps, a medieval clapper bridge with over 17 spans which has been described as one of the finest in the country and the Caratacus Stone, an historically important inscribed stone dedicated to a descendant of the 1st century hero, one of just a few such stones to be recorded across southern Britain.



Road Castle, an Iron Age enclosure near Exford, was visited during 2003 as part of English Heritage's Monument Protection Programme

(photo Damian Grady; copyright, English Heritage)

AIR PHOTOGRAPHY PROGRAMME

This joint English Heritage/Exmoor National Park Authority funded project continued in winter 2002/spring 2003 with photography on at least 30 targets across Exmoor. This project provides valuable information for the management of sites and also reveals previously unrecorded sites. This year the Iron Age enclosure at Timberscombe was photographed following scrub clearance and a new management regime implemented by the National Park Authority's Field Services Team. The site was captured in a series of stunning images showing both the details of the site as well as its landscape setting.



Timberscombe hillfort looking south

(photo Damian Grady; copyright, English Heritage)

WALKS, TALKS AND HEDGES

The Historic Environment team led a number of walks during 2003, including walks around Old Burrow, Countisbury, Porlock Beach and around the newly restored Simonabath sawmill. A hedge walk, led by the National Park archaeologist and ecologist, in conjunction with the North Devon Archaeological Society took place in June. The walk explored the hedges, boundaries and landscape around Parracombe. 19 lectures and talks were also given by National Park Authority staff.



Guided walk on Porlock Beach (photo Jessica Cowley)

NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGY DAYS 2003

National Archaeology Day is a nationwide event in which families are encouraged to take part in archaeological activities. In 2003 the event was held on 19-20 July when the National Park Authority staged 'Be a Building Detective in Dunster'. This was a quiz based on a walk around the medieval town of Dunster, looking for clues about the town's past through its historic architecture.

NAD has proved so successful in Somerset that a number of events, including some of those within Exmoor National Park, will be brought together to promote a longer programme of events which will be the 'Somerset Archaeology fortnight'. The dates are 17th July - 1st August; a full list of events will be on the www.sanhs.org website.

The Archaeology Fieldschool open day at Hawkcombe Head will be on 27 July 2004, when there will be site tours, flint knapping demonstrations and guided walks of the wider prehistoric landscape.

AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SCHEMES

This year we continued to provide a thorough consultation and advisory service for agri-environment schemes (with funding from English Heritage). Agri-environment schemes play a significant role in helping to protect Exmoor's cultural heritage. For example, working with the ESA and the landowner, the huge wheel pit at Newlands, near Exford has been conserved. Newlands is an important industrial complex, dating from 1829 and consisting of two large lime quarries and two lime kilns. The water wheel was installed to pump water from the lime quarry, to lift limestone from the pits via an inclined plane and to work farm machinery. Colton Pits is another industrial complex, this time related to the iron industry. It comprises an extensive area of open cast mining, possibly dating from as early as the Roman period through to the 19th century. For the last forty years the site has been under a coniferous plantation. Under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and with the full and helpful co-operation of the landowner and Tilhill Forestry, the site has now been cleared of trees. The land will be returned to pasture to better protect the archaeological interest of the site.



Colton Pits - careful tree felling ensured that no damage occurred to the distinctive mining pits which may date from the Roman period (photo Jessica Cowley)

CONDITION SURVEYS ON BADGWORTHY LAND COMPANY LAND

During 2003 we completed a condition survey of prehistoric standing stones on moorland owned by the Badgworthy Land Company. The work was carried out by a student from the University of Bristol's MA in Landscape Archaeology, Katherine Dray. The report identified five sites in need of conservation work, where stones had either fallen or large erosion holes had developed around their bases. The report also identified two sites that had been completely destroyed within the last 10 years. Standing stones and stone settings have been part of Exmoor's landscape for thousand of years, but recent changes in land use and grazing patterns have meant that many sites have become vulnerable. It has

been estimated that over 10% of Exmoor's stone monuments have been completely destroyed during the last century. This survey forms one of a series of such condition surveys designed to better focus our scarce resources onto protecting sites that need it the most.



Katherine Dray and Rob Wilson-North carrying out a condition survey of standing stones near Badgworthy Water (photo Jessica Cowley)

CONSOLIDATION WORK - STANDING STONES AND THE LONGSTONE

In July 2003 staff of the National Park Authority's Field Services Team carried out the consolidation work needed on vulnerable stones identified during monitoring work. This consolidation focused on Brendon Common, Cheriton Ridge and The Longstone. The Longstone is one of the most distinctive standing stones on Exmoor due to its unusually large size and wonderful setting. A deep erosion hole had developed around the stone. In winter this hole fills with water and the ensuing freeze/thaw process had led to some surface flaking at the base of the stone. The erosion hole was de-turfed and filled with sterile riverwashed gravel; erosion matting was placed on top of this and then the turf replaced. Intervention of this kind is needed to prevent further deterioration of the standing stones and ensure their continued survival.



Simon Lazarus, Richard Floyd and Rob Turner of the Field Services Team carrying out consolidation work at the Longstone (photo Jessica Cowley)

GET INVOLVED! ARCHAEOLOGY VOLUNTEERS ON EXMOOR

In 2004 we will establish a group of volunteers that will be devoted to carrying out conservation work and monitoring of archaeological sites throughout Exmoor. The tasks will be as diverse as scrub clearance, helping at archaeological open days, fieldwork, helping on excavations or monitoring the condition of sites. We are looking for people with an enthusiasm for Exmoor's past and who are able to spare a few days throughout the year. If you would like to help and want to find out more: please contact Jessica Cowley on 01398 322289.

BARLYNCH PRIORY

The ruins of Barlynch Priory are one of only two medieval monastic houses within the National Park. Following earthwork survey, geophysical survey and standing building recording, a delicate programme of consolidation work has been carried out under the Monument Management Scheme (funded jointly by English Heritage and the Exmoor National Park Authority), by local firm Corbel Conservation Ltd. The fragmentary ruins of this former Augustinian House are now conserved, and, with the help and co-operation of the owner, there will be limited public access to the site in 2004 (please contact the National Park Visitor Centre in Dulverton for details).



A conservation team at work on the ruins of the Augustinian priory at Barlynch near Dulverton

(photo Heather Lowther)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MANUAL

Exmoor National Park Authority has a statutory requirement to produce a Local Plan to guide the nature and location of development. As part of the process, staff in the Historic Environment team have been working with colleagues in Community Planning to produce 'The Conduct of Archaeological Work and Historic Building Recording' within Exmoor National Park. This document sets out - for the first time - the proper processes by which the historic environment is addressed in the planning process.

WEST SOMERSET MINERAL RAILWAY HERITAGE PROJECT

During 2003, The Exmoor Society has led a project team drawn from national agencies, local authorities including the National Park Authority, museums and other groups to work up a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to help conserve and interpret the remains of the railway and the remarkable iron mining landscape, stretching along the Brendon Hills and to the sea at Watchet. A bid was submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund in November 2003 for a Project Planning Grant, and that bid has been successful, which will enable the planning stage of the project to proceed during 2004.



A contemporary photograph of the West Somerset Mineral Railway - one of a large collection forming a valuable, and yet largely untouched, resource.

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT DATABASE

The increase in consultations from external organizations such as DEFRA and The Forestry Commission has meant that the Historic Environment team have become more reliant on high quality information held digitally by the National Park Authority. Over the last year the system has been significantly enhanced and now a fully integrated data set has been developed with sites in Somerset being geo-referenced within GIS MapInfo. We hope to continue with improvements to this database during 2004.

In 2003, the second full year of the project, **Exmoor Iron** gathered momentum, building on the work of the first year and developing new areas of investigation. A pattern of activity is emerging with winter and spring taken up with cataloguing and analysing the data and finds from last year's dig, planning the next year's excavation campaign and getting out into the field to carry out surveys while woodland and moorland vegetation is low. Summer and autumn months are dedicated to excavation, with all the essential preparation on-site and then the packing up afterwards. The success of this year's season at Sherracombe Ford was due in part to the glorious Exmoor weather – five weeks of unbroken sunshine – and also to the enthusiasm and commitment of the digging team of students and volunteers, including returnees from last year.

In addition to planned activities, and thanks to this year's drought, we had the unexpected opportunity to investigate and record a large Roman period smelting site, normally partially concealed by the waters of Clatworthy reservoir. The year also saw the project participating in Brayford's highly enjoyable Roman Fun Day and co-hosting the annual conference of the Historical Metallurgy Society. GJ

THE EXCAVATION SEASON

Sherracombe Ford 2003

This year's dig at Sherracombe concentrated on continuing the detailed investigation, begun in 2002, of the large working platform cut into the lower valley-slope. The platform is known affectionately as the 'factory floor' and is associated with the massive deposit of iron smelting slag and other waste that was examined last year.

The work included excavating through the dense, compact smithing floor that occupies much of the centre of the platform. The process of formation of the smithing floor would have involved semi-liquid slag being squeezed from

the raw metal blooms (taken from the adjacent smelting furnaces) during forging, falling onto the floor around the blacksmith's feet and his anvil and then being trampled underfoot to form the compacted surface over many generations of bloom smithing. Systematic sampling of the floor will provide a unique opportunity to analyse the development of this massive industrial artefact.

Surrounding the smithing floor, were a number of furnaces, not simultaneously operational and most now represented only as basal 'footprints' of intentionally truncated structures. However, two significant survivals were revealed. The first, a complex furnace 'setting', buttressed by substantial dry stone revetting and showing a succession of radiating red and orange burning horizons, each representing a separate smelting campaign. The second surviving furnace, clearly abandoned at the end of its useful life, indicates a C-shaped permanent structure with an open front, which was presumably enclosed for each smelt or smelting campaign.

The 2003 excavations also examined a number of the other platforms on the site, posing the basic questions – were they contemporary with the main working platform and, if so,

was their function technological? Three platforms were investigated and in broad terms, the further from the main production platform(s) the less metal-working evidence was encountered, with the most up-slope platform representing domestic occupation only and revealing an enigmatic slate box. However, pottery finds from all the platforms indicate occupation during the 2nd to 4th centuries AD, suggesting they belong to a single industrial complex that was active during the Roman period. GJ



Sherracombe excavations: view from one of the smaller platforms (Photo Gill Juleff)

A Volunteer's View

It was another excellent season for the Exmoor Iron Project at Sherracombe Ford with amateur archaeologists and students alike taking part in various aspects of the fieldwork, including, surveying, geophysics, geochemistry, recording, planning and, of course, excavation. The team was great and all had an excellent sense of humour, (very important in this line of work), with some wonderful names too! We all worked very hard and soon became an efficient team thanks to the expert supervision of Martin Gillard and Seán Goddard. The excavation revealed furnace areas, pottery, slag and charcoal, even a 'slate box'. The solid 'factory floor' from last season was eventually lifted with the help of a variety of heavy-duty cutting and drilling tools. The fantastic weather this season certainly proved to be the icing on the cake and there were many bronzed bodies to be seen!

It is thanks to projects like Exmoor Iron that small groups, such as the Tiverton Archaeological Group (TAG) get a chance to be directly involved in field archaeology. We have had the opportunity to learn more and meet members of other groups, such as the North Devon Archaeological Society (NDAS) and I personally have made many new friends. Also, contact with the numerous specialists involved on this project has provided TAG with two years of excellent talks and we never get tired of hearing about it, roll on next season! AT

A Student's Perspective

Fear, nervousness, excitement and 'how hard do archaeologists really have to work?' were the thoughts floating through heads before leaving for our first taste of excavation at SF2003. Four weeks later we were a collection of confident archaeologists.

This season gave us the chance to put into practice what

we had learnt in the classroom (although I don't recall that sharing accommodation with mice was ever mentioned!). From wielding a mattock to



Sampling the very hard smithing floor. Firstly, chalk out 25cm blocks, then imagine that a nine inch angle-grinder (1) will slice through the top allowing the blocks to be knapped out with a bolster. When this fails, hire a twelve inch diamond-tipped saw (2) and repeat the process. When this fails, admit we don't know how deep it is and hire a very long hammer drill (3) to be sure! (Photos Gill Juleff)

carefully excavating very delicate features, and from surveying to planning, we have all gathered important skills. The excitement of unearthing finds never waned and the complexity of trench A2 had us all intrigued. A series of evening lectures also helped us to put everything in context and I don't believe any of us will forget the view from Five Barrows Hill.

It was an excellent season, with some amazing archaeology and some strong friendships, and equally strong calf muscles, being made! SC

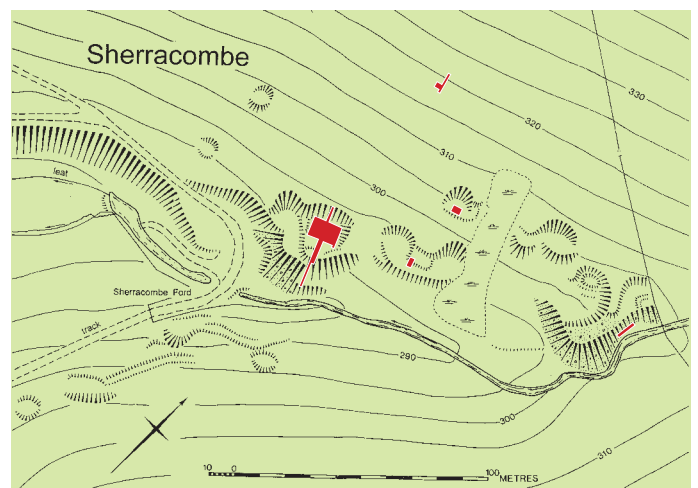
Roman Lode 2003

A second season of excavation at Roman Lode focused on the area surrounding the only significant signal detected during geophysical survey. The geophysics suggested a well-defined 'heating event'. A 2x2m trench was excavated within the 'hummock and hollow' terrain, a few metres away from last year's excavation. The sequence of mining evidence revealed, repeated that seen in 2002. The distinctive topography is formed not by waste from ore sorting as first thought but by the subsidence of the fill within a number of mining pits or shafts. Excavated to a depth of over 2m the pits were not bottomed. The most exciting discovery, typically occurring during the last

few hours of excavation, was of a small area of intense burning and concentrated charcoal at the edge of one of these mining pits. This hearth is the source of the geophysical signal and radiocarbon dating of charcoal samples taken from it will give us a much-needed opportunity to date the earliest activity at Roman lode. GJ



The furnace evidence: intact furnace lining, above, and the multi-coloured 'rainbow' effects of many high temperature events in the clay baulk, shown left. (Photos Gill Juleff)



Sherracombe Ford showing all excavation trenches (after RCHME)

THE EMERGING PICTURE

Sherracombe Ford Pottery

Two seasons of excavation have yielded a small assemblage of Roman pottery. Analysis is continuing but dating of the pottery suggests that smelting began at Sherracombe in the later 2nd century, a date around AD 160 being most likely when radiocarbon evidence is considered. It then continued at least to the mid-3rd century, although there are hints at activity both before and after this range.



Cooking pots and large storage vessels dominate the assemblage which also includes bowls, flagons and amphorae. This suggests some domestic activity on the site. Storage vessels also found unconventional re-uses such as a water trough for quenching hot metal during the smithing process.

Although much of their pottery was locally-produced, a significant portion comes from further afield such as Poole Harbour and West Dorset, while more originates in South Devon. Some was even imported including a few pieces of samian-ware from central France and even amphorae from southern Spain, probably for olive oil. LB

The Changing Environment

One of the most exciting advances in our developing understanding of the Exmoor landscape in recent years has been the collaboration of archaeologists and palaeo-environmental specialists, and the synthesis of the palaeo-environmental record with the emerging archaeology. This multi-disciplinary approach is leading to a much better understanding of how the modern Exmoor landscape has developed through many centuries of change.

Between 1997 and 2000 I undertook a novel (palaeo-environmental) research project focusing on the lowlands and the uplands of the South West. The work highlighted some significant differences between the development of the Exmoor landscape and the surrounding lowlands through prehistory. This led to a second (two-year) palaeo-environmental research project (funded by the Leverhulme Trust) focused on the development of the Exmoor landscape through late-prehistory into the later Medieval period.

This project used pollen taken from a range of peat bogs across the upland fringe to examine changes in environment. It has allowed the archaeologists within the Exmoor Iron Project to understand better the location and types of natural woodland resources available in the past. During the Romano-British period there would have been substantial oak and hazel woodland within the sheltered combs, and it is likely this was carefully managed, probably for charcoal fuel production, as part of the significant iron production that was

occurring on Exmoor in that period and later. This fruitful collaboration will continue to challenge us to evaluate, and re-evaluate, the importance of iron-working in shaping the character of modern Exmoor. RF

SURVEYS

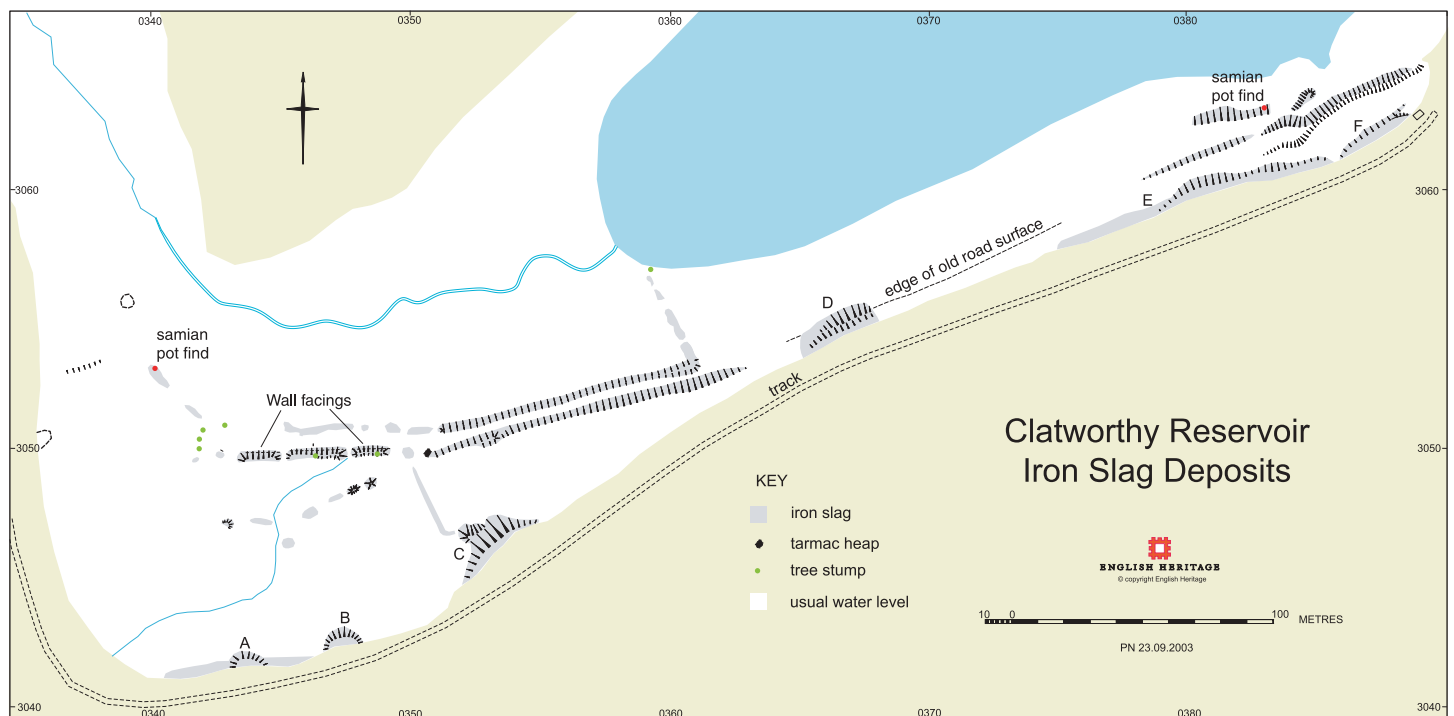
The existence of large quantities of iron smelting slag along the banks of Clatworthy reservoir has been known for some time, as has the occurrence of Romano-British pottery associated with the slag. However, the project was alerted to the fact that the rapidly receding waters of the reservoir in the summer drought was revealing a greater extent of evidence than has been seen for many years.

Clatworthy Reservoir

An earthwork survey to map the position and extent of the slag deposits was undertaken by the English Heritage Archaeological Investigation team based at Exeter.

The slag is distributed over much of the south-east flank of the reservoir west of the fishermen's lodge and is found in two distinctive types of deposit. There are *in-situ* dumps (A-F); these contain tap and furnace slag and are primary deposits associated with iron smelting. As the dumps are only very slightly rounded, rising to a maximum height of 0.2m, it is likely that they would have been barely perceptible as earthworks before the inundation of the reservoir and erosion of soil. More slag is present as secondary deposits to the south-west, associated with the wall banks which once flanked Westcott Lane running east-west across the side of the hill, and with field boundaries running north and south. Slag was apparently used to form the core of the walls, which were faced on both sides with stone. These walls were flattened before the flooding but vestiges remain of both the facings and the rubble/slag core.

At the eastern end of the area, linear slag deposits are also associated with what was the course of Westcott Lane. Some of this slag is also likely to represent vestiges of grubbed out hedges. However, one particularly large 'cake' of slag appears too heavy to have been moved as wall building



Clatworthy reservoir survey (English Heritage)

STOP PRESS

FURNACES ON DISPLAY

As this newsletter goes to press plans are being drawn up to re-open part of the 'factory floor' at Sherracombe for a period of temporary display. The large furnace setting, its surrounding features and the second intact furnace will be viewable for the summer months before permanent backfilling in September.

material. It seems likely therefore that some of this deposit is an *in-situ* slag mound, which was later disturbed and robbed by road and hedge builders.

The picture that emerges from this work suggests iron smelting on a scale similar to that seen at Sherracombe but with a significant amount of the slag having been reused for boundary construction in the immediate area. PN

Barle Valley survey

Three iron-smelting sites in the valley of the River Barle west of Dulverton at Shircombe Slade, New Invention Wood and Blacklake Wood have been recorded in previous years. The latter two sites yielded radiocarbon dates in the medieval and post-Roman periods respectively, making Blacklake Wood a site of national significance given the scarcity of iron-working sites of this date.

The presence of these sites suggested that the area was worthy of further investigation. Over the course of the last year, intensive reconnaissance survey has been undertaken. Our suspicions were confirmed when, on the very first day of work, a further slag heap, with very subtle surface earthworks, was discovered. Subsequently, in August, a test pit was dug into the deposit, which showed that it was *in situ* and also yielded pottery dating from the 13th to 14th centuries making the smelting activity broadly contemporary with that at New Invention Wood.

Although no further smelting sites were discovered, a host of other features were detected in the valley including charcoal production platforms, quarries and pits, a possible mine shaft and disused field boundaries and tracks. Their presence suggests that the woods of the Barle Valley have been the scene of intense activity in the past. All in all, not a bad result for a walk in the woods! LB

OTHER ACTIVITIES

HMS conference

In September the Historical Metallurgy Society held its annual conference on Exmoor. Exmoor Iron and the National Park hosted the conference, which was based in Dunster. Over 60 HMS members attended the weekend, which included formal presentations and field trips and coincided with the excavations at Sherracombe and Roman Lode. Delegates enjoyed a picnic lunch at



Lee Bray with HMS delegates at Roman Lode (Photo Gill Juleff)

Sherracombe on an exceptionally warm, sunny day. A second field trip included visits to Colton Pits, Clatworthy and Horner Wood, all sites being investigated by Exmoor Iron.

Brayford Roman Fun Day

In July 2003, the Brayford History Society organised a 'Roman Fun Day' of activities in the village to coincide with National Archaeology Days. The venture was largely inspired by the work of Exmoor Iron in the Sherracombe/Brayford area and the driving force behind the organisation of the day, Jim Knights (a regular volunteer on the project and the provider of tools, transport and refreshment). The local school ran a number of projects on Roman clothing and food while members of the History Society re-enacted the first contact between Roman soldiers and local Celts. One of the highlights of the day was an experimental iron smelt using a furnace constructed from local materials carried out by ACE Archaeology. The event was well attended and hugely enjoyable.



Brayford village hall transformed as a Roman fort gatehouse (above) for the archaeology fun day with Jim Knights (in the toga) acting as Roman 'governor'. Seen here receiving the local Celtic 'Chief'. Experimental iron smelting (left). (Photos Gill Juleff)

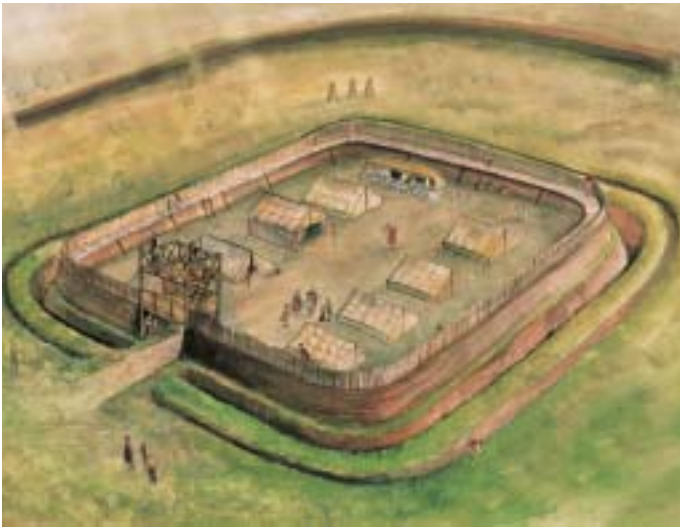
4th Exmoor Archaeology Forum – Exmoor's Roman Iron Industry

This year's Exmoor Archaeology Forum, hosted by Exmoor National Park Authority, was held in South Molton on 29 November, and was entitled 'The Archaeology of Exmoor's Roman Iron Industry'. The programme for the day included presentations by project personnel and contributors on the excavations at both Sherracombe and Roman Lode, the geophysics and geochemical surveys at both sites, the wider Roman background to metal production on Exmoor and the impact of iron working on past environments, in particular woodland resources exploited for fuel.

Contributors: Lee Bray, Seána Cummings, Ralph Fyfe, Gill Juleff, Phil Newman and Anne Todd

REVEALING EXMOOR'S PAST

We are currently working on an exciting reconstruction project which seeks to pull together information about the Roman fortlets at Old Burrow and Martinhoe and present it in digital form to schools. Funding from Exmoor's Sustainable Development Fund and support from North Devon Museum, will enable us to reveal how archaeologists have discovered more about these sites. The centrepiece will be a 3D digital reconstruction which allows the viewer to travel around one of the sites as well as reconstructions of Roman objects found during excavations there.



Reconstruction of Old Burrow Roman fortlet

(copyright Exmoor National Park Authority)

VICTORIA COUNTY HISTORY - EXMOOR

The Exmoor Victoria County History is looking at the area of the former Royal Forest including parishes south-eastwards including Dulverton. The project focuses on settlement: that is, when settlements (including farms) began and when some disappeared - and, crucially, the factors influencing these developments. So far the project has begun to identify deserted settlement sites on the ground as well as identifying settlements named in medieval documents - such as those in the Carnarvon archives - which no longer survive on the ground. The project is already throwing up puzzles, such as High Leigh St Mary, which was, perplexingly, extra-parochial in 1841, but is now part of Oakford parish.

UNEARTHING THE STONE AGE - THE EXMOOR ARCHAEOLOGY FIELD SCHOOL

In July 2003, the 2nd Exmoor Archaeology Fieldschool took place. This year the excavations continued on the 6000 year old (Late Mesolithic) hunting camp at Hawkcombe Head near Porlock. Following the successful Fieldschool in 2002, excavations continued around the spring heads in both Ven Combe and Hawkcombe Head itself. This year the results of the excavations exceeded our expectations and revealed two former hearth sites and the remains of a possible building. All of these features indicate settlement - perhaps on a limited, seasonal basis - and yielded charcoal which will enable them to be dated by C14 dating techniques.

The Fieldschool is a joint project between Exmoor National Park Authority and the University of Bristol, and is funded mainly through the University's Widening Participation Office. It is designed to encourage young people to progress on to higher education. This year the Fieldschool was attended mainly by students from North Devon and Bristol with some students coming from further afield.

The Fieldschool will run again in 2004 with an extended three week season, and will also include a week's excavation for Year 11 students, funded by the Government's Higher Education Funding Council for England - it will be the only Fieldschool of its type in the country. For those interested in attending the Fieldschool in 2004, please go to www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk or archaeology@bristol.ac.uk.



Hawkcombe Head excavation

(photo Paula Gardiner)



Flint finds from Hawkcombe Head (photo courtesy of Chris Chapman)

SIMONSBATH SAWMILL

The conservation of Simonsbath sawmill has been completed, and the mill was officially opened in June 2003 by HRH the Countess of Wessex. Training programmes have been undertaken for the operation of the sawmill by National Park Authority staff and timber from Exmoor's woodlands will be processed there to produce gates, stiles and fence posts for use around the National Park. Additional timber, when required, is sourced from local Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified suppliers in order to encourage the responsible management of Exmoor's woodlands and to reduce the environmental impacts of transporting it. Most of the National Park Authority's woods are managed to standards approved by the FSC with independent verification. ENPA's main woodland management objectives are for conservation and public enjoyment.

CONSERVING FARM BUILDINGS

DEFRA's Environmentally Sensitive Area Scheme is making a major contribution to the conservation of traditional farm buildings on Exmoor. Traditional buildings entered onto the scheme must be repaired to a conservation standard with appropriate materials and skills. This grant scheme acknowledges the contribution that traditional buildings make to Exmoor's special qualities and landscape, as well as often providing specific habitats for wildlife.



Farm building repairs carried out under DEFRA's ESA scheme (photo DEFRA)

LISTED BUILDING SURVEY

In 1996 all listed buildings within Exmoor National Park were surveyed in order to assess their condition. In 2003 this survey was updated and analysis of this information will help to guide the protection of this valuable and distinctive part of our heritage. The results of the current survey are in digital format which should also speed up the process of listed building consultations.



Recently listed early 17th century house in Wootton Courtenay (photo Mark Clitherow)

THATCH

Thatch is one of the oldest roofing materials and is still in use today on both ancient and modern buildings. During 2003 Exmoor National Park Authority carried out a survey to identify all the thatched buildings on Exmoor and to record information about them. Some properties have smoke blackened thatch and blackened beams which date from medieval times when most buildings were open halls. Smoke blackening, therefore, is an indicator of the former arrangement of the building. A study of thatch can also reveal the seeds and plant matter of crops and other plants that were present in the landscape when the building was thatched. Traditionally roofs were usually repaired piecemeal. This favours the survival of early thatch on some roofs, and 'excavation' of the thatch can sometimes reveal these early layers. The modern process of complete rethatching not only leads to the loss of important historical material but can result in unnecessary costs.

We hope to convince owners that, firstly it is more economical to repair thatch than to replace it all, and secondly, that roofs should be repaired in the traditional way. The appropriate material on Exmoor is wheat that has been carefully harvested to avoid crushing the stem and then combed to remove debris. The material is known as combed wheat reed and the National Park Authority is hoping to promote its local production.



Combed wheat reed thatch being applied (photo Heather Lowther)



Traditional Somerset ridge
(photo Mark Clitherow)



Non-Somerset ridge
(photo Mark Clitherow)

DESIGNED LANDSCAPES PROJECT

Much of Exmoor was 'improved' in the 19th century, and the estates which drove this process, created gardens and parklands as well as enhancing the landscape in a number of ways, such as building towers and planting native woodlands with exotic species. These activities have played a significant part in shaping how Exmoor looks today, and yet little work has been done to help us understand these 'designed landscapes'. In December 2003 work began on a pilot project to examine the designed landscape at Simonsbath and Ashcombe. It is hoped that the results of this project will lead to a more extensive survey of designed landscapes across the rest of Exmoor.

PORLOCK BEACH

Observing the process of coastal change at Porlock Beach has continued with quarterly monitoring visits from a consultant archaeologist and monthly visits by members of The Exmoor Society. Several animal bones have been recovered from probable Bronze Age contexts on the beach and these will be identified and dated in due course. In 2003 Mark Blathwayt (the owner), discovered a large piece of timber embedded in beach clay and this has just been dated to between 780 and 1020 AD. Despite the surprising date, the piece of timber remains unidentified.

MAINTAINING AN ANCIENT TRADITION

In 2002 Bridgetown Cricket Club was voted the Prettiest Cricket Ground in England by Wisden. However, the thatched roof of the pavilion was in urgent need of repair so, with financial support from Exmoor National Park Authority, Master Thatcher Keith Payne applied a new top coat to protect the old thatch beneath and the job was finished with a traditional flush ridge.



Thatching Bridgetown Cricket Pavilion
(photo Heather Lowther)



A piece of worked timber from Porlock Beach found during 2003 and dated to c. 900AD
(photo Richard McDonnell)

BRONZE AGE PARRACOMBE

Terry Green, Chairman of the North Devon Archaeological Society writes:
On the edge of the moor between Parracombe and Challacombe is a barrow cemetery known as Chapman Barrows with further Bronze Age sites scattered around. In the vicinity, excavations by North Devon Archaeological Society are revealing one of the settlements to which the barrows may relate. The site is a hillslope enclosure at Holworthy Farm, where excavations are uncovering evidence for the date and function of the site. The bank of the oval enclosure is apparently built with stone gathered from field clearance, within are the traces of a possible round house. The base of a pottery vessel - provisionally identified as Middle Bronze Age Trevisker ware - has also been found, along with flint scrapers typical of that period. Around the enclosure, the traces of small "Celtic" fields have been revealed by geophysical survey. The results so far point to the enclosure as a middle Bronze Age farmstead with round house and adjoining fields. These exciting results have led to the decision to carry out a further season of excavations at the site in July 2004. Anyone wishing to take part in the dig on a volunteer basis should contact 01598 740359.



The Holworthy pot ready for transport: a moment of triumph for members of North Devon Archaeological Society, July 2003

(photo: Janet Daynes)



Bronze Age Trevisker ware vessel (conserved and partially reconstructed) found at Holworthy in July 2003

(photo Terry Green)

PINKERY CANAL

The Pinkery Canal runs across the former Royal Forest for about 9kms, and consists of a dry channel or ditch. There has long been considerable controversy about why it was built. The 'canal' name is part of the enigma. During 2003 Exmoor National Park Authority commissioned English Heritage to produce the first metrically accurate survey of the Pinkery Canal. Nathalie Barrett, who produced the detailed report, concludes that 'while this embanked ditch is most likely to have been intended as a leat to provide water power for an unfinished scheme, the possibility that it may actually have been intended to provide water transport should not be discounted.'

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT TEAM

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Further information about the projects in this review can be obtained from the Historic Environment team or from:
www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk



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