



Exmoor National Park

Historic Environment Review

2019



Welcome...

to our latest review of work on Exmoor's historic environment focussing on activities in 2017 and 2018. Looking back, we can see a whole variety of outstanding achievements by individuals, groups and organisations across the National Park. Research in every period is represented, from the earliest hunter gatherers to roadside fingerposts! Many projects are on-going, and new projects are emerging, promising many years of exciting results to come.

A new Historic Environment Record website!

An updated website www.exmoorher.co.uk for the Exmoor National Park Historic Environment Record (ENPHER) was launched in May 2019.



This database records archaeological sites and historic buildings dating from the Palaeolithic to the present day. All types of sites are included: earthworks, ruins, buildings, landscapes, industrial remains, military sites, historic boundaries and routeways as well as artefacts discovered by chance. It includes information on archaeological investigations and designations, together with the supporting resources - books, journals, websites, maps, photographs and illustrations providing the evidence of how these sites developed and changed through time.

The new website is 'mobile friendly' for people out and about and has a direct link to the ENPHER database, meaning that new information is instantly displayed on the website. Data can be searched with a normal text 'search box' or by browsing a map. Users can also explore different aspects of the archaeology of Exmoor, such as different time periods and site types, finds, research and projects, notable figures and Exmoor legends. A useful list of resources, such as external websites, links to local groups and information on our loan box teaching resources is also available.

A leat explored

Research by Dulverton Weir and Leat Conservation Trust showed the leat at Town Mills was once clearly divided by the time it reached Dulverton Laundry, a former Silk and Crepe Mill, but how to investigate this underwater was a problem. Unconventional assistance arrived with the Avon & Somerset Police Underwater Unit.

"We were delighted to be able to help the Trust" said PC Dave Allen, "Dulverton Leat provided an excellent training opportunity for the team, though we were not able to find any evidence of the leat dividing into two we were able to provide the Trust with photographs and a film taken inside the culvert".

The current hypothesis is that the leat divided between Leat Bridge and Holland House, with the second leat being infilled in the 1820s or 1830s. More details of the research can be found in Dulverton Library or on the Trust's website: www.dulvertonweir.org.uk



The Farley Water Landscape Project

Following a successful 2016 excavation, the Mesolithic Exmoor Research Group returned to Farley Hill in 2017 and 2018 for further excavations at the Mesolithic site near the springhead. A geophysical survey in 2017, under the direction of John Oswin of the Bath & Counties Archaeological Society, highlighted several anomalies which were successfully tested by excavation in small trenches. Burnt flint and two postholes were discovered, although no suitable organic material was recovered for dating. To date 529 pieces of flint have been recovered, of which 128 are retouched tools from the late Mesolithic. The majority of the finds are waste products (debitage) and this together with six cores, from which blades were struck, indicate the raw material was brought to the site for knapping. The raw material is beach pebble which was probably collected from Lynmouth beach, Wringcliff Bay or further down the coast at Baggy Point.



Above: Retouched flake
Left: Retouched blades (top row); microliths (bottom row) with utilised flakes and blades.

Eight thousand years ago hunter-gatherers crossed the land, carrying beach pebbles that were suitable for knapping into tools that could be used for hunting and butchering. Arrowheads and composite cutting tools are among those found at Farley Water. Here they lit their fires at the top of a natural combe and erected a temporary shelter for an overnight stay. This was a place where they could observe deer and other animals who might come to the springhead to drink. This small group of hunters may have come from Hawkcombe Head on a day's hunting expedition, or they may have climbed up from the coast at Lynmouth to a landscape that could offer a regular supply of food as part of their seasonal round. Moving between the coastal plain and the high land would open up a variety of resources that were

essential to a subsistence economy. Farley Water is an important late Mesolithic site on Exmoor and will be further explored in 2019.

Dr. Paula Gardiner



An unexpected discovery on Farley Hill



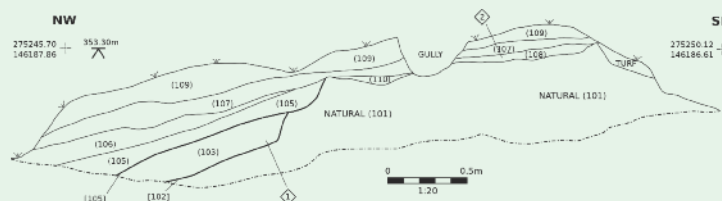
Derry Bryant discovered more than she expected on a volunteer training day run as part of the Heritage Lottery funded 'Heart of Exmoor' project in February 2014. The training was on identifying and recording flint scatters around springheads and included using a hand-held GPS. It was held at the Mesolithic site on Farley Hill and proves you don't always find what you are looking for.



Derry recalls "there had been heavy rain in the previous few days. We walked along the track, and started to find Mesolithic flint flakes and bladelets which had been washed out of the soil. I picked up a bladelet which was lying on top of a low bank beside the track. Looking at the side of the bank I pondered on the natural soil/layers of peat one might expect to see on the moor, when I noted a downward sloping band of red soil. It was noticeably darker than the yellowish sandy natural and included small red stones and charcoal. It looked like a definite cut feature, could it be a fire pit or hearth? This was very exciting!"

The pit was later recorded by Lee Bray and 2 charcoal samples radiocarbon were dated to the early Bronze Age, around 2076 – 1823 BC, indicating a second phase of activity on the site. Derry continues "I was very pleased to think I had found a prehistoric feature on the moor, close to the springhead. It is evidence once again that archaeology on Exmoor is close to the surface, and can be spotted in the right conditions. It's great for a volunteer to be able to add an intriguing find to the archaeological record of Exmoor".

Section drawing of the Farley Hill Pit



A Monument to Endeavour



The Brendon Hills was a busy mining landscape in the 19th century. Impressively, between 1856 and 1861 a railway was built to transport iron ore from the mines to Watchet for shipment to South Wales, incorporating an incline a kilometre long operated via a winding house on top of the hill. The mines were active until 1883 and then intermittently until the early 20th century, with the railway finally being dismantled in 1917.

The incline and winding house are now a Scheduled Monument owned by the National Park. In the past few years unexplained voids had opened up outside the eastern door of Drum Cottage (in the eastern part of the winding house) and in the area of the brake cable duct, requiring the areas to be fenced off for safety reasons. A programme of conservation works began in 2017 with excavations and recording led by ENPA in conjunction with the West Somerset Mineral Line Association. The brake cable duct was found to be constructed of stone side walls capped with half-length sleeper beams, now rotting and collapsing. The position of former steps on the eastern side of Drum Cottage were identified at the site of another void.

In 2018, conifer trees were removed from the northern end of the embankment by the B3224, and the imposing incline revetment wall was cleared of damaging vegetation. The National Park Field Services Team installed new cappings of sleeper beams to the main cable ducts at the top of the incline, along with undertaking routine vegetation control and drain maintenance.



Top: The incline 1875
Above: Winding House step
Below: Winding House brake duct
Below left: Winding house brake duct
Left: Incline revetment



The West Somerset Mineral Line Association are volunteers involved in conserving the industrial sites and explaining the remains to interested people. They lead monthly walks and special walks or talks for interested groups and hold local exhibitions. More information can be found on their website wsmla.org.uk, a valuable resource for walkers and historians with photos and records of all the evidence collected. More volunteers are needed to join this small and friendly group!

Conservation works at Withypool Stone Circle

Visitors to Withypool Hill will notice a dead gorse hedge surrounding the low stones of Withypool Stone Circle. Monitoring for ENPA in 2015 raised concerns about the impact of a widening and eroding track through its centre, and Historic England included the circle on its national register of 'Heritage at risk'.

Although Withypool Hill is open access land there is no designated path or bridleway at this point and it is clear from aerial photographs that the track had developed since the 1980s. Discussions between the landowner, Historic England and ENPA led to a programme of conservation and recording beginning in 2017 with funding from Historic England. Support for the conservation work was voiced at a public meeting held in Withypool in April 2017.

A new survey of the site by AC Archaeology recorded 30 stones, reflecting a loss of 7 from when it was first surveyed by George St Gray in 1906. At around 36 metres it is larger in diameter than the Porlock circle (the only other stone circle recorded on Exmoor), although many of its stones are very small. A geophysical survey indicated possible evidence for pits, post-holes and heating activity in the area of the circle. Archaeological remains such as these lie close to the surface and can be easily damaged or destroyed through erosion and the loss of turf.

Breaking the line of this 6 metre wide route, caused by a combination of people on foot, horse riders and the illegal use of vehicles, is a key aim of the conservation work. It is

likely the route is simply followed by those crossing the summit of the hill, perhaps unaware of the ancient site they are passing through. The temporary ring of cut gorse has been fixed around the circle to give the site time to regenerate its protective turf covering. Access for walkers visiting the circle is possible through side gaps in the dead hedge. Minor works have been undertaken to minimise water erosion down the track and a number of posts have been set up to restrict vehicle access to the hill. It is hoped these simple measures and a greater awareness of the issues will help protect this ancient site into the future.



The dead gorse hedge around Withypool Stone Circle

Counting the Stones

Amongst the earliest built structures on Exmoor are stone settings, from single set stones to geometric patterns and rows. They are also some of the most vulnerable monuments. In 2017, ENPA and Historic England funded the placement of an intern to examine the condition of all of Exmoor's recorded standing stones, the first comprehensive survey since 1989. With the help of dedicated volunteers, over 140 sites were assessed between winter 2017 and summer 2018.

Exmoor boasts an exceptional variety and density of stone settings compared to other areas of Britain. Likely erected between 3000-1500BC, they are rarely over half a metre tall, leading to their nickname – "Miniliths". Some stones stand alone, but many

were placed in groups including circles, rows, and grids, as well as several formations possibly unique to the area, such as the quincunx - a shape similar to the "five" symbol on a die. There is little evidence of their use, but it is likely that they served a religious or ceremonial function.

Environmental evidence suggests the landscape was more wooded at this time.

Over the last 4000 years, many sites may have changed or even disappeared. Standing stones were a readily available source of building material in later periods, uprooted for field drains, boundaries, and gateposts. Most remaining sites are situated in the upland moors, in particular the former Royal Forest (now Exmoor parish), areas that avoided later agricultural improvement.



The long stone on
West Anstey Common.
Photo by Jack Fuller

In 1989, the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England found that a tenth of recorded standing stones and settings on Exmoor had been lost, and a quarter were less complete than they were before. The results of the 2017-2018 survey suggest a much slower rate of decline, even if many are very difficult to find. About 70% of sites had not deteriorated since their last survey. However, 7% of sites had rapidly deteriorated, and others are recommended for minor management changes or intervention.

Off-road vehicles have posed the most significant threat, with several examples of vehicles damaging stones and even knocking them over. Livestock rubbing was the most frequent threat, where repeated rubbing causes erosion at the base of the stone, which if severe can lead to it falling. Bracken and other vegetation cover was also frequently affecting sites, in some way a lesser threat, but concealed

stones are more vulnerable to vehicle damage and there may be below ground damage to the site. Some sites hidden in vegetation have been re-discovered, after being recorded as missing for many years. Other forms of damaging human-action includes paths through sites, the creation of small cairns and littering.

This survey has also provided a review of these special monuments, providing accurate locations and a new photographic record as well as an update to information on the Historic Environment Record. Additional stones and entirely new sites have also been discovered including a standing stone on the slopes of Goosemoor Common and cairns on Porlock Allotment, and some sites are already in the process of conservation.

Jack Fuller

Historic Environment Intern 2017-2018



Jack at Long Stone West Anstey Common



Erosion hollow around a stone in the quincunx on Brendon Common (MDE1257)

Discoveries in the peatlands



2017-18 saw several surveys commissioned by the Exmoor Mires Partnership in advance of possible mires restoration. Prehistoric cairns and post-medieval mineral prospecting pits are the most common new discoveries – along with quietly rusting pieces of twentieth-century agricultural machinery.



Old hay rakes on Castle Common

In March 2017 a walkover survey of Long Holcombe was carried out by Hazel Riley. This was perhaps the most 'productive' of that year's surveys – recording 24 sites in addition to nine on the Exmoor Historic Environment Record (HER). The most striking of these was a Bronze Age cairn 10m wide. Its stony fabric encourages the growth of heath bedstraw and in early summer the cairn is a mass of white flowers. Also notable on this site was the complexity of drainage ditches, implying that the efforts of the Knights to drain the area in the 19th century stretched over multiple phases.



The newly-discovered cairn on Long Holcombe visible as a change in vegetation (Hazel Riley)

Furzehill Common was surveyed in October 2017 by the Cornwall Archaeological Unit. As well as the abundant prehistoric features and peat cuttings already known in the area several previously unknown prehistoric mounds or later peat stacks were recorded. A line of shallow pits with accompanying spoil heaps are likely to be from 19th century iron prospecting; they follow the east-west alignment of similar activity recorded nearby from the 1850s.

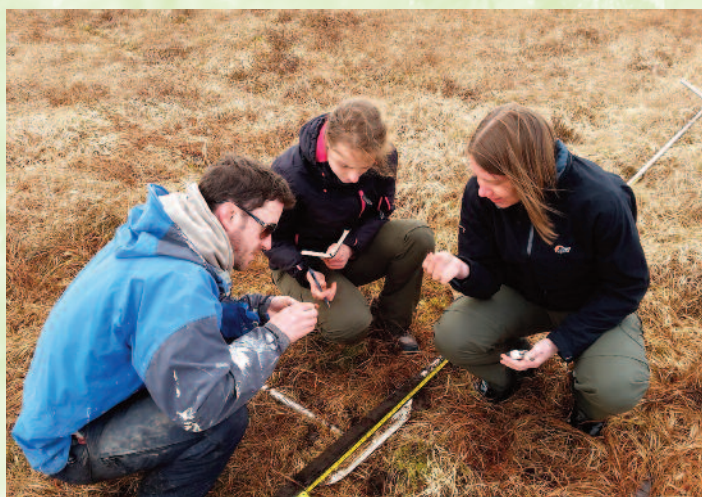
In the autumn of 2017 Hazel Riley also carried out surveys around Hawkridge Common and the western side of Exmoor. Many new features were identified – mainly prehistoric cairns, much later peat stacks and clearance cairns, and also several hollow ways, probably medieval in origin.

Despite the work, many ancient features are still to be discovered, even in and around the areas being surveyed. Field visits by the Historic Environment Officer have turned up several cairns likely to date from prehistory.

2018 saw the start of research into the multi-period landscape of Codsand Moor including geophysical survey and palaeo-environmental analysis. Continuing research into the landscape of agricultural improvement created by John and Frederic Knight is much enhanced by the recently discovered archive of Knight records and correspondence, now in the care of the Somerset Heritage Centre. Both of these research projects are ongoing but the results will enhance our knowledge of human activity on Exmoor from the Bronze Age to the Victorian era.

Dr Martin Gillard

Exmoor Mires Partnership Historic Environment Officer



Havananda Ombashi coring peat samples at The Chains with Dr. T. Daley and Dr. A. MacLeod

Prehistoric grazing patterns and understanding past changes in vegetation patterns on Exmoor's moorlands can help us manage them in the future.

Climatic changes as well as changes in human land use have influenced the development of the Exmoor mires into how they are today. Previous research has shown that a key time period of vegetation transitions on Exmoor happened between the late Neolithic and the late Iron Age (2500 BC to 43 AD). In order to reconstruct the past vegetation and understand what drivers were involved, a PhD project match-funded by Exmoor Mires Project and The University of Plymouth began in January 2016.

The project uses palaeoecological research on peat samples from mires. Amongst different types of material that are preserved in peat are pollen and fungal spores (also known as non-pollen palynomorphs), and when the peat remains are dated (e.g. with radiocarbon dating methods), precise reconstructions of past environmental change can be made. Fungal spores from dated peat sequences can be particularly useful for reconstructing past land management practices, most notably through spores of fungi that are associated with animal dung. Peat samples from several sites (Spooners, Great

Buscombe and The Chains) on Exmoor were collected and are currently being studied for this project.

The data collected so far points towards clear phases of more intense land management (particularly grazing from the fungal spores) during the later stage of the Neolithic period at Spooners (around 2500 BC). Areas around both Spooners and Great Buscombe also seem to have been in use for pastoral activities at several phases throughout the Bronze Age and Iron Age. Phases of increased grazing indicated by the fungal spores are strongly associated with increases in grassland cover in the pollen data from the sites.

During previously funded research in 2015 carried out by Prof. R. Fyfe and Dr. K. Head at The University of Plymouth, both arable cultivation and burning had also been identified at Great Buscombe. These phases are now being compared with the newly analysed fungal spore data during this project, and placed alongside the known field archaeology in areas surrounding Spooners and Great Buscombe.

At present, samples are being analysed within the prehistoric field systems at Codsand Moors, and it is hoped that these will shed light on more precisely when, and which, activities took place within them.

Havananda Ombashi, University of Plymouth

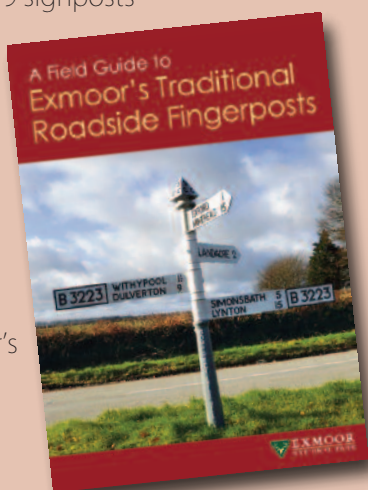
Signposts past and future



Villages and remote crossroads have been enhanced by a two year project to refurbish Exmoor's distinctive, traditional roadside fingerposts. Once dilapidated signs now stand proudly as an asset to the area and a blessing to visitors navigating rural lanes. Local communities and 100 volunteers took part in the project, with contractors employed for more difficult situations or when new parts were required. A total of 219 signposts

were refurbished, with 163 of these cleaned and painted by volunteers. A new booklet (right) produced as part of the project celebrates the signposts' story and includes old photographs showing how valued the posts are as part of Exmoor's heritage. Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Exmoor National Park and Somerset County Council, the project came to an end in February 2019. However, the work of the volunteers continues into a new phase supported by a local Steering Group and a fund set up in CareMoor for Exmoor.

More details are on our website.



Above: A typical mid-20th century signpost made by the Sheldon Foundry in Wells at Blue Gate, near Simonsbath, with a 1999 name collar.



Above right: Two large late 19th century or early 20th century arms on the post at Wheddon Cross

Right: Project officer Charlotte Thomas with volunteers Stuart Lawrence and Mike Neville of the Minehead Team.

Photo: John Kemp



Recording Dunster's Early Buildings

The Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society Building Recording Group has been awarded funding by Historic England to look at "Early Urban Fabric" in Dunster. The two year project, named the 'Early Dunster Project', was launched with presentations and an exhibition in June 2018.



A house with smoke blackened roof timbers in West Street. Seen here is a jointed cruck frame with rod and daub infill.

Volunteers are working with other groups, including the Dunster Museum Archaeology Group to make as detailed a record of Dunster's early historic buildings as possible within the timeframe. This includes preparing a report on each building with drawn plans and photographs. The support from Historic England includes training and a further programme of dendrochronology (tree-ring dating), which should complement that already carried out by Time Team (see YouTube and Historic Environment Review 2016) and earlier work. This has shown early (pre 1600) roof evidence in 25 buildings with dendro-dating providing significant evidence from the 14th and 15th centuries. In addition, the two wing roofs of the Priory have been dendro-dated to 1270-1302 and 1439-1471 respectively.



Left: Part of jointed cruck frame with part of an early door frame to a solar. Right: True cruck frame in same house.

A report and public event is planned for the end of the project in 2020. Results will include reports of all the buildings recorded with historical records where available and general research into the settlement. So far the owners of 31 buildings have come forward and work has begun on 13 buildings, with 7 completed. Anyone interested in being involved is invited to contact us through ENPA.

Mary Ewing, Early Dunster Project



Further Investigations in Dunster

The Dunster Museum Archaeology Group have continued their investigations at the Roman site on Dunster Beach, monitoring cliff erosion for finds and undertaking extensive geophysical surveys. In the village further work and geophysical survey is being undertaken to investigate burgage plots and a lost garden in the grounds of Dunster Castle with the support of Historic England and the National Trust.

The Time Team Digital Dig Village project has completed a monumental 50 test pits in Dunster and have produced an interim report on their research whilst continuing to process work on the excavations, finds and building recording.



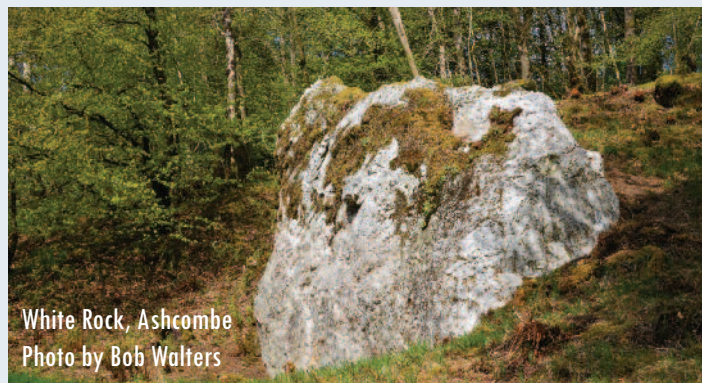
A piece of Samian from cliff erosion at Dunster Beach

Ashcombe Gardens, Simonsbath

In 1820 John Knight, a businessman from Worcestershire paid £50,000 for a wild, uninhabited area of moorland, the former Royal Forest of Exmoor. He moved there with his wife and six young children and began a project to colonise and reclaim the 16,000 acre wilderness to transform it into a great estate with a mansion at its heart in Simonsbath.

Nearby Ashcombe gardens, now owned by ENPA, were begun as part of this vision, but were never completed. Traces of garden terraces, bridges and paths remain, but little is documented about what the gardens were intended to be like. A group of volunteers have begun revealing the framework of the garden. Work is focussed on clearing and re-establishing the paths and recording and adding to the existing planting scheme. Invasive species are being

removed and the natural woodland planting enhanced. The dramatic white rocks forming a portal to the wild valley garden invite visitors to explore the site.



White Rock, Ashcombe
Photo by Bob Walters

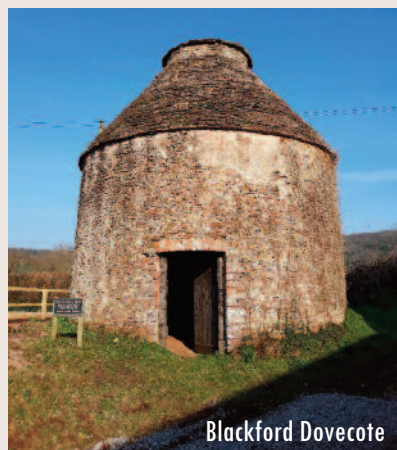
Exmoor's Historic Buildings in 2018

2018 was my first full year as the Historic Buildings Officer for the National Park and I continue to be amazed at the diverse range of buildings, from milestone markers to medieval Packhorse bridges.

A large part of my work has been to undertake external, visual condition surveys of the listed buildings within the National Park. This is undertaken every 5 years and gives an idea of what the condition trend is and the issues that are a cause of concern for owners. The survey also looks at whether the building is occupied or in use. This may sound like a straightforward question but there are occasions where it isn't

so clear, for example is a chest tomb occupied or in use!!!?

With just under 750 structures to inspect this is no small task. Although not yet complete, it is likely to show that listed buildings on Exmoor are generally well looked after but that certain buildings are more vulnerable. Exmoor has 34 listed bridges, the



Blackford Dovecote

majority of which have to withstand fast flowing and high rivers and repairs are scheduled to take place to at least five listed bridges in the coming months.

Unfortunately at the time of writing we have one less listed building than we did in 2017... the grade II listed red telephone box in Dulverton is temporarily removed by BT after being damaged in an accident.

Much of my time in 2018 was focused on Simonsbath. This 19th century estate village formed the hub of John Knight's reclamation of the Royal Forest. White Rock Cottage is one of the earliest and best preserved of all the buildings he erected.



Lyncombe Packhorse Bridge

Dating from 1820, the building has been added to and adapted. First occupied by the gardener and estate surveyor, it was later extended to form a school before becoming an



White Rock Cottage in Ashcombe Gardens

outdoor education centre but it has sat derelict for the best part of 20 years. In 2018 the National Park was awarded LEADER funding that will go some way to conserving the building and removing later additions to show

the building as it was originally intended to appear from the surrounding designed garden landscape in Ashcombe.

Thomas Thurlow, Historic Buildings Officer



Longstone Landscape Group Award

In 2017 the Parracombe Archaeology and History Society received a Partnership Award from the National Park for the important contribution they have made to the study of Exmoor's past. The group recorded the prehistoric landscape on Challacombe Common and the deserted settlement of Radworthy as part of the Longstone Landscape Project (see previous HE Reviews).

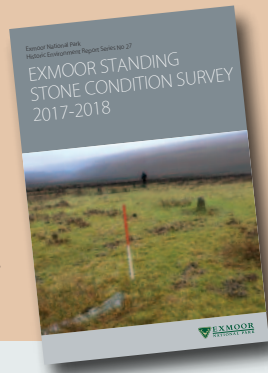
2017 also saw them begin mapping and researching the individuals and families buried in the graveyard at St Petrock's Church, now in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust. Abandoned in the 1870s, the church retains its fine Georgian interior.

Publications:

See the publications section on our website for more detailed reports. Recent publications include our Rapid Coastal Zone

Assessment Survey, an outline biography of John Knight and the Standing Stone Condition Survey. You can also download a PDF version of this review at:

www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/Whats-Special/history/publications.



Coming up:

The events listed below are a selection. For booking and more information, details of further events on Exmoor and open days at Simonsbath Sawmill see www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/visiting/events

May 22 Barlynch Priory Open Day 2pm - 4pm

May 26 North Hill Guided Walk 10.30am

June 5 Walk to Timberscombe Iron Age enclosure 5pm

June 15 Exmoor Mires walk to Horsen Hill and Ferny Ball 10am - 2pm

July 12 Raleigh's Cross Mineral Line Long Walk 9.45am - 2.45pm

July 24 Archaeological walk on The Chains 12noon - 4pm

Aug 21 A 2 hour walk around historic Exford 10am - 12pm

Sept 16-22

Exmoor's Historic Buildings Festival

check the website for events throughout the week.



Sept 16 Barlynch Priory Open Day 11am - 2pm

Sept 21 North Hill on the Radar 10am - 3.30pm family event with military vehicles, displays and walks. Radar Station open.

Oct 12 Exmoor's 19th Archaeology Forum, Dunster Tithe Barn, focus on Exmoor's historic buildings.

Contact us:

The Historic Environment Team is based in Exmoor National Park Authority's offices:

Exmoor National Park Authority
Exmoor House Dulverton TA22 9HL.
Main switchboard: 01398 323665.

Shirley Blaylock

Conservation Officer (Historic Environment)

Direct Line: 01398 322289

sjblaylock@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk

Catherine Dove

Conservation Advisor (Historic Environment)

Direct Line: 01398 322273

cgdove@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk

Martin Gillard

Historic Environment Officer

(Exmoor Mires Partnership)

Direct Line: 01398 315011

mgillard@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk

Thomas Thurlow

Historic Buildings Officer

Direct Line: 01398 322285

tthurlow@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk



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Historic Environment Record enquiries can be made by emailing her@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk

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



@archaeologyenpa

Historic Environment Review 2019:

Compiled and edited by Shirley Blaylock

Front cover: Long Stone, Challacombe Common by Leo Davey



helps conserve Exmoor's fantastic heritage by supporting general conservation of the historic

environment, as well as special projects such as CareMoor for Ashcombe Gardens, restoration work at Simonsbath and our CareMoor for Historic Signposts appeal.

www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/caremoor