

# EXMOOR

## National Park

### Rivers & Streams

### Pocket Guide

Find out more about the waters that flow through this special place





# A Force of Nature



The power of Exmoor's rivers has long been harnessed by man. Initially, simple mills used the water flow to turn wheels which would grind corn, or drive machinery. In more recent times, small scale hydro-electric schemes converted the energy of river flows into electricity.

Early in the 20th century, the Dulverton Electric Lighting Company built a hydropower plant on the River Barle at Beasley Mill. This 100 kilowatt plant continued to generate electricity for lighting until 1938 when Dulverton was connected to the national grid. A similar plant operated at Lynmouth.

But the rivers can also be destructive. In August 1952 torrential rain over the Exmoor moors led to catastrophic flooding. The Lynmouth area was particularly hard hit with many buildings destroyed and the loss of 34 lives.

There is now an increased appreciation of the role that bogs and mires in the upper catchment of rivers can play in storing water and regulating river flows.



Exmoor Mires Project

Funded by South West Water, the Exmoor Mires Project has been restoring these areas and undertaking research on how healthy bogs can help to support healthy, clean and safer rivers.



Lynmouth after the 1952 flood

# Fishing and Canoeing

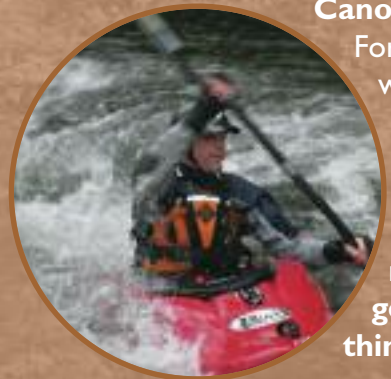
## Fishing

Exmoor's rivers provide fantastic opportunities for game fishermen, with reasonable day rates. Well managed fishing brings important income into the area and these days most of the salmon caught are released back into the river unharmed. For more information on fishing Exmoor's rivers see:



[www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/visiting/things-to-do/fishing](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/visiting/things-to-do/fishing)

## Canoeing



For information on where canoeing is currently permitted and conditions please see [www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/visiting/things-to-do/canoeing](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/visiting/things-to-do/canoeing)



Common frog



River Barle stepping stones

# Where to Enjoy Exmoor's Rivers

Following a path along one of Exmoor's Rivers, or looking down from a bridge to catch the glimpse of a brown trout in a dappled pool are among the not to be missed pleasures of a visit to Exmoor. Luckily there are lots of opportunities for people to enjoy our rivers in ways that respect their value as sensitive habitats which are largely privately owned and managed - here are some of the best places:

**1. Watersmeet** - The beautiful woodland walk that follows the East Lyn River from Lynmouth to the National Trust tearooms is one of the most popular on Exmoor. Look out for dippers and wagtails on boulders in the river and the shadows of brown trout in the deeper pools.



**5. Malmsmead** - Starting point for exploring the remote and atmospheric valley of Badgworthy Water, better known as the Doone Valley made famous in the novel Lorna Doone by RD Blackmore.



**2. Dulverton** - Pretty town where a bridge of five stone arches crosses the River Barle.



**6. Heddon's Mouth** - Good paths from the car park at Hunter's Inn, where there is a shop, toilets and pub, follow this steep sided valley down to where the River Heddon enters the sea in a dramatic cove.



**3. Tarr Steps** - Famous clapper bridge over the River Barle. Great place for picnics by the river or an easy circular walk through the beautiful and wildlife rich woodlands of the Barle Valley. There is even an inn.



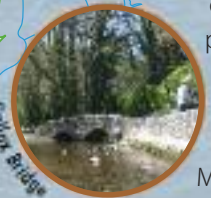
Withypool

**4. Withypool** - Pretty village on the River Barle, a good base for walking or just enjoying the views.

## What's in a name?

River names are often among the oldest place names in a landscape, having always been significant as boundaries, obstacles to be crossed and valuable resources to be used.

- Barle** - from the Anglo-Saxon "*beorgwella*" meaning "hill stream"
- Exe** - from the British word for water "*isca*"
- Lyn** - From Old English "*hlynn*", meaning "torrent"



Dunster Market



# Exmoor National Park is a land of rivers

Golden ringed dragonfly

Clear, oxygen-rich waters such as the Exe, Barle and Lyn are home to some of our most important wildlife and are one of the essential ingredients of Exmoor's unique and special landscape. The very name "Exmoor" is named as the moor of the Exe, our largest river.

**On Exmoor you are never far from the sound of water.**

The rivers and streams that flow from the high, rain soaked moorlands ever downward to the sea have, over thousands of years, cut the many deep valleys known locally as "combes".

Some rivers, like the Exe and its major tributary the Barle travel south, slowing as they move from the moors, across the flatter vales of mid Devon before finding their way to the English Channel.

Others like the Lyn, take the shorter, steeper route northwards to the tide scoured waters of the Bristol Channel.

These beautiful rivers are important and sensitive habitats that support a wide range of wildlife, most are privately-owned and managed.



River Exe at Winford

## A Sensitive Habitat

Exmoor's rivers are such a precious resource that many of them have been designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), but there are a number of threats that could have an impact on our rivers and the wildlife that depends on them.

**Alien Species** - As in many other habitats, invasive, non-native species are an increasing problem in Exmoor's rivers. Plants like Himalayan balsam quickly colonise river banks with their water-born seeds and American signal crayfish have all but condemned our local white-clawed species to extinction. River owners and organisations such as the Environment Agency and Exmoor National Park Authority are working together to try and reduce the impact of these species.

**Pollution** - Although the water quality of Exmoor's rivers is generally very good they are still vulnerable to pollution. Without careful management, the delicate chemistry of our rivers can be upset by water running off the land carrying nutrients, excess sediment and other potentially harmful substances.

**Climate Change** - As the climate changes it is likely to have an impact on our rivers, drier summers may reduce the flow of water, while an increase in storms and heavy rainfall may lead to more flooding and bank erosion.

**Disturbance** - Careless trampling of the gravelly areas on river beds where salmon lay their eggs (known as redds) during the spawning season in late autumn into winter can mean fewer young salmon hatching. Salmon numbers have greatly declined over recent years throughout Europe, and it is important to ensure that we give our Exmoor salmon the best chance of breeding successfully and ensuring healthy populations in the future.

### The Countryside Code:

- Respect other people**
  - Consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors
  - Leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths unless wider access is available
- Protect the natural environment**
  - Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home
  - Keep dogs under effective control
- Enjoy the outdoors**
  - Plan ahead and be prepared
  - Follow advice and local signs



## Get Involved

There are lots of ways that you can get involved in Exmoor's rivers and streams.

There are events and guided walks with local experts that will help you explore and understand these special habitats. Have a look at [www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/visiting/events](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/visiting/events)

If you would like to take a more active role, there are lots of opportunities to help local organisations in survey work and monitoring and often they will provide training.



Crayfish monitoring



Key training day

This work is vital to increase our understanding of the ecology and health of our rivers and streams and is a great way to really get to know them.

Find out more at [www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/get-involved](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/get-involved)

## Where to find out more

For more information about Exmoor's rivers and streams:

[www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/rivers](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/rivers)  
[www.environment-agency.gov.uk/](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/)  
 West Country Rivers Trust: [www.wrt.org.uk/](http://www.wrt.org.uk/)  
[www.exmoormires.org.uk/](http://www.exmoormires.org.uk/)  
[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/)

### Contact us:

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Dam building on Exmoor



Mires survey



[www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk)



# Exmoor's Rivers are Rich in Wildlife

Exmoor's rivers are clear and fast-running and support a wide range of species including the elusive otter, brown trout, dipper and kingfisher. The largely unpolluted waters provide excellent spawning grounds for Atlantic salmon, who may return to Exmoor after years feeding at sea as far away as the cool and food-rich waters off Greenland.

In the 1960s otters were on the verge of extinction in the UK and Exmoor's otter population was at an all time low. Today, thanks to conservation efforts and improvements in water quality, these shy and seldom seen creatures are known to live on all of Exmoor's rivers and streams right up to the headwaters.

## It's the small things that count:

As well as the larger, more obvious wildlife, our rivers are alive with invertebrates that provide a vital link in the food chain. Many insects such as mayflies, dragonflies and damselflies spend most of their lives living underwater as aquatic larvae, (also known as "nymphs") emerging as adults for just a brief time to mate before dying. Many of these insects need particularly clean, oxygen rich, pollution free rivers to thrive and their presence on Exmoor is a great indication of the health of our rivers.

## River flies

The clean, fast-flowing streams and rivers and Exmoor support a range of insects that themselves form the main food for salmon, trout and birds like the dipper. There are four main groups of river flies that you might see in their adult stages flying alongside rivers and streams in spring and early summer.

**Stonefly**  
As the name suggests, stonefly larvae are typically found in stony rivers and streams. The adults fold their wings flat over their bodies when at rest and you can often see two tails.

**Caddis flies**  
Closely related to moths and butterflies, the adults resemble small moths. The larvae of many of these species bind sand, gravel and other debris together with silk to make themselves a protective case to live in.

**Mayfly**  
Spending most of their lives as aquatic larvae, they emerge together in early summer to spend only a few days as adults. The adults of some species often float on the surface of the river with their wings erect like a flotilla of tiny yachts.

**Alderfly**  
These slow moving flies can be found on riverside vegetation in early summer. Their aggressive aquatic larvae have powerful jaws and prey on other invertebrates.



**This illustration by the noted wildlife artist Richard Allen shows many of the species that you might see in or around a typical Exmoor river.**

- 1. Sparrowhawk**  
This fast flying bird of prey will catch and eat a wide variety of birds and sometimes even bats!
- 2. Sand martin**  
You may well see these small relatives of swallows and house martins hunting for insects as they swoop along Exmoor's rivers in summer.
- 3. Golden ringed dragonfly**  
The females of this majestic species are the longest insect in the UK, the larvae spend up to 5 years living in small streams where they ambush passing prey.
- 4. Heron**  
This patient fisherman will stand in the shallows waiting for small fish or frogs to come within range of its stabbing beak.

- 5. Kingfisher**  
With their unmistakable bright blue and orange plumage these birds were once regarded as a fashionable adornment to Edwardian ladies hats.
- 6. Goosander**  
This handsome fish-eating duck was once an occasional visitor, but now breeds in small numbers on Exmoor's rivers.
- 7. Grey wagtail**  
More colourful than the name suggests, grey wagtails are energetic predators along fast-flowing rivers, eating a wide range of insects. They will even eat water snails and tadpoles in shallow water.
- 8. Otter**  
Although you would be very lucky to see one, otters now live and hunt on all Exmoor's rivers, despite once being close to extinction.
- 9. Dipper**  
The dipper is a common sight on Exmoor's rivers. It can walk underwater in search of the small water creatures it feeds on.

- 10. Beautiful damselfly**  
The male of this delicate dark winged damselfly will often patrol a patch of river bank vegetation, protecting it from other males and hoping to encourage a female to mate and lay eggs.
- 11. Brown trout**  
Most Exmoor brown trout spend their whole lives in our streams and rivers and can be found in even the smallest streams. Look out for their shadows as they wait, facing into the current for food to come their way.
- 12. Salmon**  
The amazing Atlantic salmon may travel as far away as the waters off Greenland to feed before returning to spawn in the same Exmoor river that it hatched in.
- 13. Brook lamprey**  
These primitive fish have no jaw, but instead develop a round sucker. They are usually secretive and nocturnal but may be seen during their spawning period in late spring.

- 14. White-clawed crayfish**  
These freshwater crustaceans are sadly in rapid decline, partly due to the rapid expansion of the introduced American signal crayfish which carries a devastating disease.
- 15. Bullhead**  
The bullhead is a small stout fish that spends the day hiding under stones, emerging at dusk. It is a favourite prey of the kingfisher.
- 16. Caddisfly larvae**  
Many aquatic insects like these case-building caddisflies, rely on rivers for their larval stage, and provide a vital food source for Exmoor's fish.
- 17. Jelly lichen**  
This strange and rare amphibious lichen only grows in clean, fast flowing, acidic rivers like the Barle on Exmoor.