



EXMOOR
NATIONAL PARK

May 2012

Historic Environment Review



Enhancing
the qualities that make
Exmoor
special

Round Up of 2011

West Somerset Mineral Railway book wins Peter Neaverson Award

The 2011 Peter Neaverson Award for Outstanding Scholarship in Industrial Archaeology has been given to Mike Jones (right) for research into the history and physical remains of the West Somerset Mineral Railway. His book, written with the late John Hamilton: *Neither Here Nor There? The mining and transport of iron ore from the Brendon Hills to South Wales*, (published by Exmoor National Park Authority) is a two-volume work and the result of many years of painstaking research. Its publication was made possible by the West Somerset Mineral Railway Project and has been supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.



Exmoor National Park Historic Environment Report Series



This report series includes interim reports, policy documents and other information relating to the historic environment of Exmoor National Park. So far there are reports on the Historic Environment Research Framework for Exmoor 2010-15; Exmoor's Moorlands Research Priorities 2011-15; Archaeological Excavations at Larkbarrow in 2008; A Burnt Mound on Brendon Common; Blackpits Barn. The reports can be downloaded from the Exmoor National Park Authority website (Historic Environment Publications page), or hard copies can be obtained from the Exmoor National Park Historic Environment Service.

Placements

During 2011 several students and placements have been working with us. Sarah Rimes has been digitising images for

the ENPHER and linking them to individual monument records. This placement has been carried out under a Student Business Partnership Scheme with the University of Exeter and West Somerset Council. The scheme has given Sarah valuable experience in the workplace, whilst dealing with the large chunk of technical work required in order to make documents and images available digitally through the ENPHER. Nick Dawson who is studying at the University of Cardiff carried out a measured and photographic survey of a WWI building at Blackpits; Nick was joined by Peter Bonvoisin (University of Bristol) to research and produce Archaeology Walk Cards for the Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnerships Scheme. We hope to progress this work with further placements during 2012.

Exmoor National Park Historic Environment Record Development and Website

The Exmoor National Park Historic Environment Record (ENPHER) is developing its new website, which will go live during 2012. During 2011 we have been busy improving the data within the HER as well as producing interesting and useful articles related to the historic environment of Exmoor, from general period summaries, to favourite walks, to myths and legends. Each of the articles has been written by a range of specialists and enthusiasts. You will also be able to download an extensive range of images and documents.

Oral Histories

The Big Adventure Day was held at North Hill, Minehead on Saturday 27 August 2011, and members of the public were asked to contribute their Second World War memories relating to the use of the tank grounds.



We had an incredible turn out on the day and visitors were drawn to the old Radar Station by the velvety sound of wartime songs and Vera Lyn. Visitors were able to see wartime memorabilia on display and enjoy samples of war time cake and biscuits. An area was set aside to record people's wartime memories, and it was humbling to hear the accounts of the survivors who had played such

important roles during the Second World War; others remembered being small children at the time and their memories included the excitement of seeing tanks rumbling from Minehead railway station up onto North Hill.

From these recordings we have been able to gather much more information about the site, and how it was used. As well as the interviews, we have also received some wonderful letters and hand-drawings sent to a small daughter by her father who was based at the camp. Together these form a unique archive of North Hill in wartime.



Hawkcombe Head Undergrounding

In August 2011 a group of schoolchildren from Exford and Porlock schools had the chance to help in an archaeological excavation at Hawkcombe Head near Porlock. The excavations were being carried out to mitigate the archaeological impacts of undergrounding electricity cables and the work was funded by The Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnership Scheme. In recent years excavations by the University of Bristol and Exmoor National Park



Authority have investigated hunter gatherer occupation of this site and have obtained large quantities of flint as well as several hearths and some postholes. Radiocarbon dates have established that the area was used around 8,000 years ago. The work carried out during 2011 identified a clay surface on which were a number of flint tools. Analysis of the clay identified a single piece of hazelnut shell which itself has been dated to the late 6th century BC, nearly 1000 years later than other hunter gatherer activity at the site.



Archaeology Forum

Exmoor National Park Authority and Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society joined forces to hold the 11th Archaeology Forum and Joint Annual Archaeological Symposium on Saturday 12 March 2011 in Dulverton.

Dr. Mark Gillings gave the keynote lecture on The Miniliths of Exmoor. Other speakers included Chris Webster on the excavations at Taunton Castle, Steve Minnitt, who gave an invigorating talk on the spectacular Frome Hoard, Hazel Riley on the historic landscape at Codsand Moors, Rob Wilson-North spoke about the changing perceptions of Exmoor's past and highlighted its fragility and this was followed up by Jessica Turner

outlining recent monitoring work on the condition of Exmoor's Scheduled Monuments.

Commenting on the day David Dawson from the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society said: "Archaeology is as popular as ever and this event brings to a public audience the exciting work that has happened in the previous year. It also provides an opportunity for people to ask questions and discuss with the archaeologists concerned. The range of work undertaken is always difficult to compress into a day, but is typical of the archaeology routinely carried out in our area."



Moorland Priorities

In February 2011 a group of individuals with expertise in the moorland historic environment gathered in Dulverton to identify shared priorities for research into Exmoor's moorlands over the next few years. The results of this deliberation have now been published as No 2 in the Historic Environment Report Series.

Miniliths at Risk

During Easter 2011 Dr Mark Gillings and Dr Jeremy Taylor from the University of Leicester continued with their investigations into the 'miniliths' or stone settings of Exmoor by carrying out conservation work on several sites that had been identified as 'at Risk' in the recent Scheduled Monuments Survey. The sites investigated were Warcombe Water (SM25215), Trout Hill 1 (SM25221), Tom's Hill (SO374) and Porlock Stone Circle (SO201).

At Porlock Stone Circle geophysical survey was carried out in order to establish the extent of excavations in 1928, the extent of the site and whether there was any below surface archaeology. As with Lanacombe and Warcombe Water the geophysics revealed a number of features in close proximity



to the circle, the features which hint at a substantial yet previously unknown phase of activity around the circle. In light of this and the excavation in 1928 it is felt that there would be some benefit in a large scale excavation, survey and consolidation programme sometime in the near future.

Sustainable Management of the Palaeoenvironmental resource in Upland Peat: The Exmoor Valley Mires Project

Dr Heather Davies (University of Liverpool) summarises some of the results of her recent PhD work on Exmoor between 2008 and 2011. The project has defined the extent, condition, and archaeological potential or value of valley, spring and hillside mires on Exmoor.

Walkover survey was carried out across areas of access land on the moors and from this work detailed distribution maps of mires were produced which indicated that mires were distributed across the more central areas of the moor away from the coast, and that larger mires tended to form at higher altitudes. The small size of these mires, wide geographical spread across Exmoor's moorland area, and variation in topographic locations, make the information they contain about past environments particularly valuable when trying to reconstruct local-scale landscapes. This means that they have the potential to allow the mosaic of landscapes and vegetation change across Exmoor to be reconstructed, and provide detailed landscape context to archaeological sites. The distribution map and accompanying database has high potential to be used to guide palaeoenvironmental sampling strategies for archaeological projects across Exmoor, particularly by those investigating vegetation dynamics through time (e.g. woodland character and loss, or heathland development), or to shed light on the landscape context and past perception of the more enigmatic standing monuments on Exmoor.

The walkover survey also studied the condition of mires and has developed a useful methodology which can be applied to other uplands in the UK. Of particular concern is the damage recorded to peat close to old drainage ditches. Over 90% of mires showed signs of active erosion and it is likely that

mire condition may deteriorate at these locations, and peat deposits in the vicinity of eroding drains may deteriorate. This will lead to the decay of organic material and damage to palaeoenvironmental remains in the sections of the peat which are continuously above the water-table. It is also likely that peat will cease to accumulate in areas near to drainage features where the surface layers of the peat are no longer waterlogged for any part of the year. The implications of these findings for the wider resource on Exmoor (and other uplands) are that, although the palaeoenvironmental remains are still likely to be well preserved away from drainage ditches, near to more extensive, deeper, or more longstanding drainage features, the condition of these remains is likely to be poorer and deteriorate further over time.

The Exmoor Mires Project - Historic Environment Programme

The Exmoor Mires Project (2010-2015) is working, with funding from South West Water, to recondition Exmoor's peatland in order to ensure water quality as well as bringing a number of other environmental benefits. In 2011 we received the go-ahead to begin a programme of work, through the Exmoor Mires Project, designed to both enhance our knowledge of the moorland historic environment and to safeguard it. An archaeologist, Lee Bray, has been appointed for 2 years to work within the Exmoor Mires Project Team. Lee's role is to commission and co-ordinate historic and archaeological surveys, fieldwork and palaeo-environmental sampling. Lee can be contacted at the Exmoor Mires Project Office in Dulverton (01398 324491, Direct Line: 05601181601; email: LSBray@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk).

Royal Forest Boundary

A fallen boundary stone formerly marking the eastern extent of the Royal Forest was identified by Mr Chris Binnie and brought to the attention of the Historic Environment Team. Following some detailed archaeological recording at the site by South-West Archaeology, the stone was consolidated by ENPA's Field Services Team. We are grateful to Mr Binnie who paid for the archaeological recording.





The archaeology of Exmoor's settlements is often overlooked, and so throughout 2011, a big effort was made to look beneath the Dulverton that is familiar to us all. The Dig Dulverton project was designed to look at why

settlements are where they are, how they evolved and to explore what makes them distinctive. Local people, the school community, a range of experts and staff at Exmoor National Park Authority used historic building expertise, archaeology and documentary research to try and understand 'the sense of place'. The name Dulverton – 'Dieglaford' - (meaning hidden ford) is an accurate description of the settlement as it nestles by the river crossing surrounded on three sides by steep wooded hillsides. Dulverton has always been the gateway to Exmoor with several ridgeways converging there. For this reason alone it seems safe to assume the settlement has a very early origin, when coupled with the prehistoric hillfort of Oldbery situated above Burr ridge Woods it is clear that there has been a settlement here for at least 2000 years but there is very little actual evidence of this. Other evidence of the origins of Dulverton is Roman iron smelting near Marsh Bridge. The church stands at the top of the settlement and between it and the ford the village clusters on a very small site between the hillslopes above and the wet valley floor below.

The project was kicked off by a 'road show' in Dulverton Town Hall where records and material from

the Exmoor National Park Historic Environment Record were displayed.

Mary Siraut, the County Editor of the Somerset Victoria County History and Laura Bennett the Somerset Finds Liaison Officer for the Portable Antiquities Scheme were also on hand to help identify objects and illuminate Dulverton's past. At this event individuals signed up for the 'the Big Dig' weekend in May and threw open their homes and their gardens to local archaeologists.

A total of eighteen trenches were opened across Dulverton and twelve houses investigated. The excavations ranged from the grounds of Barlynch Priory to the exercise yard of the 19th century workhouse. Finds included Civil War artefacts, medieval pottery, a 17th century domino and the Lord Treloar's Cripples' Medal.

The historic building analysis has proved very interesting and a broad conclusion is that very early buildings still survive in Dulverton, particularly around the Town Hall area of the town. Dulverton Middle School got involved too with excavation trenches in the school grounds looking for evidence of a structure shown in 1890.

The project, whilst only scratching the surface, has given a fascinating insight into Dulverton and its evolution and has shown the value of looking together at below ground archaeology, historic buildings, the plan of a settlement, its written history and its local traditions and memories.

We hope to work on other Exmoor settlements in years to come.





Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings

Exmoor has 16 Conservation Areas reflecting the character and historic value of the built environment. Late in 2011, Nigel Pratt, the Conservation Officer, began an assessment of the condition of some of these areas, and this work will continue during 2012. At the same time, we have begun a condition survey of all Listed Buildings within the National Park.

Favourite Walks: Living on the edge - Mansley Combe

One of my favourite aspects of Exmoor is the marginality of its landscape. 'Strand lines' of abandoned occupation evoke the struggle between people and environment over thousands of years and they graphically show us just how dynamic the landscape has been in the past. One of the best places to experience this is on the edge of Dunkery. From the carpark at Dunkery Gate the path drops gently eastwards into Mansley Combe. Almost immediately you pass from moorland into rough, enclosed land, and the track crosses over the broad, slight, stony banks of abandoned prehistoric fields and a probable prehistoric settlement. As the path takes you further into the combe, the abandoned buildings of a medieval village lie close by tucked into a narrow natural gully and overwhelmed by bracken in high summer. The settlement and its terraced medieval fields, or lynchets, overlie the remains of the prehistoric fields. The lynchets tell us that arable crops were grown here by medieval farmers but their names, along with the name of the hamlet in which they lived, have been lost. The path leads on down into the combe, and the fields of Langham Farm, medieval themselves, are visible laid out over the spur to the south.



Mansley Combe. (©English Heritage NMR15856 20)

Deep in the combe you cross the river Avill and a ruined farm building or linhay stands in the dark shade beside the path. From there the path climbs towards Dunkery Errish and you pass once more onto the expansive moorland slopes of Dunkery. Wind your way westwards back around the top of Bin Combe and so back to Dunkery Gate.
Rob Wilson-North

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www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk

Front cover:
looking west along the Brendon Hills. Photograph by
Damian Grady (©English Heritage, NMR 27410 019).

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