

WITHYPOOL STONE CIRCLE

Dear Neighbour,

In the hope of preventing future conflict and clarifying the situation on Withypool Hill, we have decided to send out a letter to as many local people as possible to let you know what is going on in the area around the Stone Circle from Monday January 30th

Most of you will know of the Circle's whereabouts on the south western side of the hill. It is an amazing site and one of only two stone circles existing across the whole of Exmoor.

We were approached by Historic England who informed us that they were greatly concerned about the damage being caused to the Circle by quads and horses driving/riding straight up/down through the middle of it. It has consequently been put on their Heritage at Risk register. Many of you will have noticed this wide, ugly track that has formed over the last few years, the damage quite possibly done by people quite unaware of the Circle's existence. This has happened where once there was never more than an unobtrusive, unofficial footpath leading interested walkers to the Circle.

Amazingly, it turns out that there has never been any form of survey done on the Circle. Exmoor National Parks Authority and Historic England are keen to carry one out and this will happen over the next couple of weeks. All very exciting. In a few weeks you will also notice temporary signs going up on many entrances to the Common explaining what we are doing at the Circle and why we need to protect it.

We are incredibly lucky to have been given the funding by Historic England to carry out the survey and to have the help of the Exmoor National Park Authority to implement the works. This then leaves the hardest part remaining which is to try and prevent any future damage to the Circle, hopefully allowing the track to repair itself and return to its original peaceful state.

Sadly the Circle is not the only area of Withypool Common under threat, close examination of recent aerial photographs have particularly highlighted new tracks where there were never tracks before. I am sure that most of you will have noticed while walking on the Common that it is depressingly clear that off roading is still a regular activity.

With Lanacre having been my home for most of the last 40 years it breaks my heart to see the gradual degradation of Withypool Common, something needs to be done and let's hope we're not too late.

As you know Withypool Common is protected under its SSSI status (site of Special Scientific Interest) and its SAC status (Special Area of Conservation) and to drive a motorised vehicle off road on the Common without the landowner's consent is an offence which carries a substantial fine. There is a seasonal allowance made for registered graziers checking their stock on the moor.

We now have incredible support from the Exmoor National Park Authority, Natural England and the Police who are all keen to bring these activities to an end, so your support would be much appreciated.

A meeting will be held in the spring at Withypool Village Hall at which we can share the results of the survey and provide an opportunity to discuss a range of ideas to help protect and enhance the Common. I hope you will all come.

Yours sincerely,

Jo and Ashley Down
Lanacre