

## **PRESS RELEASE:**

### Heading: **Delivery by (shanks) pony**

As part of their new archive project, staff and volunteers at the Exmoor Society are investigating the old postal routes across Exmoor. Never the easiest place to navigate, up until 1970 post was routinely delivered on foot, by motorbike and from horseback, with walking routes of 15 miles and more. The posties were Exmoor's main method of communication in more ways than one – as well as the post, they took with them village news, and (unofficial) deliveries of newspapers, bread, tobacco, even medicines. For farms with no road access, the postie was sometimes the only visitor in days.

The Society is particularly interested in the old postal routes and ways of delivering mail between around 1930 and 1970. This was a time of great change, as the telephone superseded the need to communicate by mail or telegram. No longer was the post the main method of communication as roads improved and the motor car became more common. As less post was delivered and it became quicker to get from farm to farm by car or van, walking rounds were limited to towns, and ponies and motor bikes were no longer needed.

It is claimed that the last route to be ridden on Exmoor was undertaken by John Blackmore around Withypool, including farms such as Ferny Ball, Landacre and Blackland. Interviewed for the Exmoor Oral History Archive in 2001, Blackmore spoke about Eisenhower's visit to Withypool and how the great general took tea with his sister. Unable to serve in World War II because of his health, John continued to deliver the mail on Exmoor using his horse Shamrock. The pair were photographed for The Picture Post in 1941, wading through the River Barle.

Exmoor Society archivist Dr Helen Blackman said "the old postal routes and stories from the posties make an intriguing history. They tell us much about the moor and the difficulties of communicating in the days before tarmacked roads and telephones. The posties and the village shops were vital to remote villages and even more remote farms." The Society, with the help of a grant from the Malcolm MacEwen Fund, was able to employ an Exeter University student during the summer to investigate the routes and to walk some of them. Re-walking them helped give a sense of what the posties were coping with and, since many of the routes were ridden, plans are afoot for Helen to ride one of the routes on an Exmoor pony.

Rachel Thomas, the Society's chairman, said "If you have any stories about the old postal routes we would love to hear from you. Dr Blackman and the Society's volunteers are preparing a publication which includes details of the paths taken so if you would like to get involved, please get in touch using the information given below".

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Image 1: Bridleway from Warren Bridge to Clovenrocks Bridge, by Lawrence Baines, 2017

Image 2: Withypool Post Office, by Tom Troake, 1970

