

PRESS RELEASE: The Exmoor Society celebrates its Foundation

The Exmoor Society, celebrating its 60th Anniversary recently returned to its roots at Simonsbath House Hotel, as it was here that the Society was formally founded, on 28 November 1958. Simonsbath Lodge, as it was then called, was the home of John Coleman Cooke, the first Chairman of the Society. Trustees and members were entertained by a dramatic dialogue, written by Trustee Roger Watts, that brought alive the reasons for the formation of the charity. The President, Sir Antony Acland, proposed a toast to the Society, followed by a convivial and delicious buffet lunch.

In 1958, proposals to afforest The Chains, the central moorland area, were made public. The National Park had only just been designated, mainly because of its wild and remote moorland. Local people from the Barnstaple area and the Dunkery side of Exmoor and coastal communities were horrified at this idea. They decided to start a petition, backed by the North Devon Journal, which collected over 3,000 signatures and was successful in persuading the Forestry Commission to withdraw their plans. Dated 28 November 1958, The Sunday Times ran an article headlined 'No Conifers for Exmoor' and reported that an Exmoor Preservation Society was formed on 28 November 1958. A Society that could present alternative views to public bodies and encourage activities beneficial to Exmoor was the core purpose of the founding fathers.

Steve Pugsley, local District Councillor and member of the ENPA, outlined what he considered to be The Exmoor Society's achievements today. He mentioned the series of studies which the Society has commissioned in relation to moorland, landscape, upland farming and natural capital all providing evidence to influence National Park policy. He emphasised the development of the new and prestigious Exmoor Resource Centre and the *Exmoor Review*, now in its 60th edition. He also referred to the Society's Pinnacle Award for young entrepreneurs, encouraging new generations of young people to live and work on Exmoor, keeping it vibrant and alive. He described The Exmoor Society in 2018 as supportive, active, professional, visible and enjoyable, adding: 'Today it is widely respected and in vigorous health'.

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Images: President, Vice President & Trustees.jpg
Entertainment2.jpg – l-r: Heather Hodgson, Roger Watts, Rachel Thomas
Both ©The Exmoor Society

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Note to Editors:

The Exmoor Society exists to promote and organise action for the conservation and enjoyment of the landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage of Exmoor national park. It was established in 1958 and successfully fought proposals to afforest The Chains, the central moorland area of Exmoor. It has continued to campaign against adverse changes and encourage people's understanding of the park's special qualities. It acts as an independent watchdog and champion for Exmoor's status as a national park.

