

## Press Release: Annual General Meeting

The Exmoor Society praises the Glover Review's recommendations on the future of National Parks

On the same day as the major Glover Review into the future of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) was published, the Exmoor Society held its Annual General Meeting. In a quick change to her speech and recognising that there was much more to digest, Rachel Thomas, Chairman said "This is a very exciting report with big ambitious recommendations for our protected landscapes. Many of the points that the Society had submitted to the Review were fully developed. For example: a National Landscaper Service to be set up to promote National Parks and AONBs as a family at the national level; changes in governance with Glover calling for smaller boards and a separate sub-committee to decide planning applications; more space for nature; greater access for all; a new agri-environmental scheme with greater local flexibility and enabling farmers to remain on the moor continuing traditional practices. Interestingly the Review recognises our work in relation to Natural Capital. It stated "In 2017 Professor Dieter Helm, Chairman of the Natural Capital Committee, challenged the Exmoor Society to explore how they could use the Natural Capital concept. The Exmoor Society rose quickly to the challenge starting with a project to trial a practical tool-kit that would help identify eco-system services provided by Exmoor. They have tested it in three pilot areas which between them cover all the landscape types in the Park. .... This work has moved forward the natural capital approach". We praise work undertaken by the consultancy, Rural Focus and its report, Towards a Register of Exmoor's Natural Capital, can be found on our website."

The Chairman concluded the AGM by saying that Exmoor was privileged to be chosen as the place for the official national celebrations of 70 years of the National Park and Access to the Countryside Act. Called the Big Picnic, all the UK's National Parks were represented and it was honoured by the presence of their Royal Highnesses, The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall. The event demonstrated Exmoor's outstanding assets. It was set in the stunning Barle valley, with moorland and woodland sweeping down to the loveliest of rivers, at the picturesque landscape at Simonsbath. It showed a local community still linked to the land with livestock, local produce and crafts, school children studying the river, country sport displays and cultural activities such as pop-up poetry, music and a resident artist all entertaining picnickers, some in splendid dress with fine hampers and rugs. The Chairman said "Although fully aware of the enormous challenges ahead, this year the Society wants to leave the memory of how National Parks at their best are inspiring places where landscape and nature are intertwined with people and their livelihoods and values shaped through the centuries, adding so much to the nation's well-being. Now the Glover Report shows how they can increase their contribution to the nation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."

To follow the formal part of the AGM, two speakers, Richard McLaughlin, Founder Member of the Exmoor Rivers and Streams Group, and Thomas Thurlow, ENPA Historic Buildings Officer, demonstrated different aspects of conservation work within the Park, echoing important themes in the Glover Report. The first outlined the importance of healthy rivers rich in nature, particularly in the well-being of salmon. The second speaker illustrated the variety of listed buildings in the Park, ranging from ancient farmsteads, churches and designed landscapes to modern post-boxes and a strategically placed lump of stone.

Several annual Awards were presented, including the Founder's Award to Hugh Thomas, the Conservation Award to Adam Lockyer, and the Pinnacle Award for young entrepreneurs to William Bolton.

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Images:

AGM Group: (l-r) Rod Coyne, Keith Howe, Rachel Thomas, Thomas Thurlow, Adam Lockyer, Richard McLaughlin, Mark Haworth-Booth (*The Exmoor Society*)

Porlock Bay (*Madeline Taylor*)



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