

THE SOCIETY'S YEAR IN RETROSPECT 2015/16

Highlights of the Year: Achievements and Performance

- Commissioning and launching an update of the 2004 Moorland Report called *Exmoor's Moorland – Where next?*
- Bringing to a virtual close a very successful two-year Archive Project and establishing a new website for its online catalogue.
- Undertaking preparatory work for a new project concentrating on using the archive to understand Exmoor's special qualities.
- Holding a stimulating, lively and fully-booked Spring conference on the theme 'Exmoor's Future Landscapes'.
- Working with ENPA to analyse Exmoor farm business.
- Establishing a fully functioning Resource Centre which is now used by members of the public and interested groups.
- Operating a high quality walks programme which is now one of the largest on Exmoor.
- continuing to influence others in protecting Exmoor through the planning system, lobbying and highlighting areas of concern, often working in partnership with other Nation Park Societies.
- Making awards from our restricted funds, including the Pinnacle Award which supports business opportunities for young people.
- Encouraging Trustees to take on defined roles.
- Discussing possible ways of working with the Malcolm MacEwen Trust.

The Year in Retrospect highlights the significant contributions and activities the Society has undertaken in order to achieve its object of protecting and conserving Exmoor National Park for the benefit of the public.

Influencing Others

As a charity, the Society's main objective is to protect and conserve Exmoor National Park for the benefit of the public. It influences policies affecting the Park in a variety of ways: through conferences, issuing statements, responding to consultations. It has continued to make its views known to the public through press releases, media interviews, and its new website. In the last year, the activities have included:

Landscape Advisory Group (LAG) – This is now chaired by The Society. It has influenced the ENPA to undertake an update of the Landscape Character Assessment 2007 and to appoint a Landscape Officer. Landscape matters now have a greater weight in Planning decisions.

Planning – The public enquiry for the Local Plan was held in the middle of July and the Society submitted a written response to it. Although there were fewer applications earlier on in the year, the number has increased due to the installation of the broadband infrastructure by Airband. There has been a site visit attended by the Society has been held in relation to the planning application for the Barnstaple and Lynton Railway. Permission was granted for the 30-metre high mobile phone mast on Haddon Hill in the ENPA car park.

Farming – Trustees discussed the State of Farming 2015 report and agreed that further work needed to be done in conducting a survey of a representative sample of Exmoor farm businesses in context with other upland farms and all-England Less Favoured Area farms. Salient points are now being drawn up from the survey for a short discussion paper. At the same time the Society is involved with a CNP Working Party on Upland Farming.

Moorland – Over ten years ago, The Exmoor Society published a report called *Moorlands at a Crossroads*. The Society decided to revisit the report and publish a follow-up. The Society commissioned Robert Deane, the author of the 2004 report, to do the work. The Report was published at the Spring Conference in April. It recommended five themes for action over the next ten years: planning for environmental change; deepening public involvement; building on what has been achieved; improving the effectiveness of moorland management; strengthening new values and benefits provided by moorland and other landscapes. The Society achieved considerable publicity over the findings of the report including making a general statement on the views expressed about rewilding Exmoor by George Monbiot.

Exmoor Free-living Pony – The Society was made aware of the polarised debate on the origins of the Exmoor Pony. It decided not to enter the debate at this stage and was pleased that two Resolutions, sent to the Exmoor Pony Society, had been withdrawn and a joint working group set up with representatives from both sides of the argument.

Archive Project

The two-year Archive Project came to a successful conclusion on 30 June. It has met all its targets and more including total re-organisation of all the material which is now catalogued and can be accessed on THE Exmoor Society website. Researchers can use all the facilities including an outstanding collection of maps whose value is only now being realised. Digitisation of several collections of slides and negatives, some dating back to the 1890s, has made them available for use. A full programme of walks, talks and events has been undertaken. As a result of the success of this project, fundraising for a new project has been set up which began on 1 July. Work will continue on finalising the cataloguing and conserving material but the emphasis now is on using the archives to help the understanding of Exmoor's special qualities.

Events

- a) **The Spring Conference.** The 2016 conference, one of the most successful in its 12-year history, was on the theme of 'Exmoor's Future Landscapes'. It attracted national speakers who came to the conclusion that Exmoor's landscape future was bigger, better and brighter for all! Natural England emphasised that the role of farming was vital to future landscapes, the RSPB the importance of collaboration with key groups and the NFU on the role of farming in providing a range of benefits as well as food production.
- b) **Mini Displays.** With the acquisition of a specialised cabinet several special displays have taken place at 34 High Street on a variety of themes including Hope Bourne, wildlife, industrial Exmoor, woodlands, moorlands and Lorna Doone. The last created a great deal of public interest and a visit to the Society of a descendant of Sampson Low who published the works of R D Blackmore. George Low said that the visit had been 'a voyage back in time to his ancestors'.
- c) **Walks Programme.** Guided walks were offered through eight months of the year, such as old favourites like Lorna Doone Country, and new ones including Avill Valley Vistas, and continue to attract greater numbers.
- d) **Exmoor Language Garden.** Held in November 2015, the Society and a linguistic researcher hosted a new event '*The Language Garden – a celebration of language on the moor*'. It investigated the relationship between landscape, culture and language currently used as well as

older forms of Exmoor dialect. Two schools, Minehead First School and Dulverton Middle and Community School, displayed the work they had undertaken to investigate how the language and landscape of Exmoor is intertwined.

Outreach and Awards

- 1. The 2016 Exmoor Review** – the annual flagship publication of The Exmoor Society, was well-received under new editorship. It remains an important record of issues, events, people's memories and passions, with a comment from the Editor: *"Exmoor is a very beautiful, living landscape made – and still being made – by the land itself and the people who have lived and worked on it throughout the ages."*
- 2. The Founders Award 2016** is presented to Dave Knight in recognition of his work with various farming groups and chairing the Exmoor Hill Farming Network, as well as farming himself on Exmoor. He is making a significant contribution to furthering the essential work of the Society in having sympathy for, and showing, the inter-relationship between farming and landscape conservation.
- 3. The Conservation Award** is presented to Rob Wilson-North, the ENPA Conservation Manager for his passion and outstanding work and publication in relation to Exmoor's archaeology and history of farming changes. He is continuing to break ground in his research by interpreting the changes to Simonsbath through the Knights' associations.
- 4. Lucy Perry Literary Competition.** The Senior first prize was won by Eleanor Voce and the Junior first prize was Hugh Kilvington, both of West Buckland School. Other schools were represented.
- 5. Alfred Vowles Photographic Competition.** The overall winner was Keith Hann, with his photograph of an Exmoor pony scratching its head on a finger post.

Website and Resource Centre

A new website for the Society is now live and, although still in its early stages, is more easily accessible and the main way the Society communicates with its members and the public.

The Resource Centre is now functional and open to all between Monday and Friday (apart from Bank Holidays and occasional times when posted on the website). It contains a shop that sells small items and second-hand books mainly related to Exmoor, has workspace with free WiFi for researchers and people wanting to find out more details on a range of Exmoor topics. The library has the best

collection of Exmoor books and the Archives, now catalogued, contain reports, slides, maps, and letters accessible to all.

Governance

The Exmoor Society has three new Trustees and increased its ability to campaign on issues such as the value of moorland and the role of practices in relation to landscape quality. It continues to review policies, this year including Investments, Complaints and the Risk Register.

The Malcolm MacEwen Trust approached the Society for closer working and, as a result of discussions over the year, it has decided to close the MMT and transfer its funds to the Exmoor Society to be held as a Restricted Malcolm MacEwen Conservation Research Fund.