

en treasures

Ancient forest yields its secrets



The ancient forest that once stood where Porlock Beach now is has captured people's imagination for over 100 years.

Amongst the sand and shingle are decaying tree-stumps and fallen branches - the remains of woodland that thrived here over 5000 years ago when the climate was warmer and the coastline further out than it is now. The forest is revealed twice a day with the fall and rise of each tide.

In recent years the erosive processes that have caused the breaching of the shingle ridge and the inundation of Porlock Marsh have also increased the rate at which the submerged forest is disappearing.

In March this year, Paula Gardiner of Bristol University and staff and volunteers from

Exmoor National Park Authority collected a number of samples from these ancient trees. Working against the tide, the timbers were carefully cleared of sand and clay before a slice was removed and sealed.

Rob Wilson-North, National Park Archaeologist, described the timbers as "wonderfully well preserved".

They will be dated by radiocarbon analysis, and it is also hoped that they will contain sufficient information to allow species identification.

In the longer term the information contained in the rings will be subjected to dendrochronological analysis which may date them more precisely as well as providing a picture of the environment in which these trees grew.