



EXMOOR LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

ANNUAL REPORT

2007

Introduction

The Exmoor Local Access Forum is an independent statutory advisory body set up by the Exmoor National Park Authority in 2002, under sections 94 and 95 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (the CROW Act). The first meeting of the Forum was held in February 2003.

The Forum's main purpose is to advise the National Park Authority, Natural England, the two local highway authorities covering the area and some other statutory bodies on the improvement of public access to land in the National Park for the purposes of open-air recreation and enjoyment of the area. This also comprises public access to land for 'any lawful purpose' (including access for 'functional or 'utility reasons').

This is the fourth Annual Report from the Forum which includes the main issues and how they have been taken forward over four meetings. The meetings were held on 8 November 2006, 28 March, 25 July and 28 November 2007.

For further details on the issues covered below, the agendas, minutes and papers for the Forum's meetings can be viewed and downloaded from the National Park Authority's website – www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk. The agenda papers are also widely circulated to a number of individuals and organisations, and can be seen in local libraries and council information points.

This report will be presented to the National Park Authority (the appointing authority) at its meeting on 5 February 2008.

Main Issues considered by the Local Access Forum

West Anstey Common

At the 8 November 2006 meeting, the Forum was informed of local access and management issues on West Anstey Common on the southern edge of the National Park. The Common is an important area for access (although not as widely used as some other commons within the National Park), where the pressure from certain activities has resulted in damage, particularly arising from the illegal use of 4x4 off road vehicles venturing into heather moorland areas (important for wildlife) and from visitor vehicles being parked in environmentally sensitive locations and close to an *important historic memorial stone (the Froude Hancock Stone)*. Both the National Park Authority and Natural England have been engaged in looking at ways to solve the problems through a Moorland Management Plan for the area and sought the Forum's advice.

The Forum recommended and supported suggestions for tackling the problems. In particular, various physical barriers were proposed, such as boulders and the provision of earth banks, to prevent vehicular incursion, together with a significant reduction in access points, the provision of markers

and interpretation to guide people, and new car parking areas (although there was also a desire for the area not to be urbanised). A number of routes across the Common used by pony trekkers and walkers have suffered from water logging and the Forum suggested encouraging minimisation of the use of those routes and drainage works to divert water away.

During the Autumn of 2007 there was a local consultation on proposals from the National Park Authority/Natural England to improve the management of vehicles on the Common and these were considered at the Forum's meeting on 28 November 2007. A particular problem highlighted through the responses is the vehicles parked in the vicinity of the memorial stone. Within the Forum's meeting, however, there were differences of opinion over the vehicle users causing the problems there and the effects this has in terms of erosion. It was, therefore, felt that further consideration needed to be given through a site visit to the Common and the next meeting, both to be held on 12 March 2008. Nonetheless, the Forum supports limited parking near the stone.

Restricted Byways

In the last two Annual Reports, the Forum outlined the effects of the reclassification of the former Roads Used as Public Paths (RUPPs) to Restricted Byways on the Somerset side of the National Park, particularly the prevention of their use by mechanically propelled vehicles. This led to the Forum seeking a speeding up of the processing of applications, made before a cut off date of 20 January 2005, for a number of Restricted Byways within the National Park to become Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs) (see the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2006). However, there has also been confusion over the law and conflicting guidance given to both the Forum and the National Park Authority over the legality of vehicles using the routes pending the outcome of the applications. This matter was further considered at the Forum's meeting on 25 July 2007 when a definitive response was provided by a representative from Defra that the routes could be used where applications to upgrade them to BOATs had been legally made and those proposing to use them had sufficient evidence to prove motorised vehicular rights.

Meeting the Communities

Over the last year, the Forum has continued to reach out to the communities of the Exmoor National Park to ascertain local issues and concerns in relation to access and outdoor recreational pursuits and has provided feedback to the National Park Authority on the matters raised for appropriate action to be taken. This has now become the mainstay of the Forum's work and is recommended to other Forums.

The Forum's meeting on 28 November 2007 was held at the Calvert Trust Centre Exmoor, Wistlandpound, which is just outside the western boundary of the National Park. It is one of three Calvert Trust Centres around the country which provide a range of recreational and other activity facilities, particularly

catering for people with disabilities to assist their learning, physical development, mental health issues and sensory needs. The Centre recently underwent an upgrading of its facilities, to include new Challenge and Discovery trails, a Discovery Centre, outdoor riding area, climbing wall and children's play area. The Forum was impressed with the facilities on offer and the benefits it can provide for both visitors and residents to the National Park. The Forum is also keen for the National Park Authority to investigate the potential for an existing footpath leading from the Centre to the moor to become a bridleway which would enable direct access for the Centre's horses and ponies, without the need for transport.

Exmoor's Moorland Initiative

The last Annual Report set out the details of this Initiative by the National Park Authority and others which is aimed at improving the state of Exmoor's moorlands through a wide range of projects and actions. The Forum was invited at its meeting on 8 November 2006 to comment on the proposed access plan for the moorland areas. Whilst it was acknowledged that existing access was good, the Forum felt there was the need to attract new people, particularly the young, to inform and educate them about the moorlands, and the need for a survey of moorland visitors and analysis of existing visitor data. Transport and the costs of getting to people to the moorland areas is also seen as a problem, particularly for younger people, and the Forum wished to see encouragement of a wider range of activities taking place (e.g. horse riding across moorland is more attractive to younger people than walking).

Active Exmoor

The Forum's meeting on 8 November 2006 was informed of the work of this organisation in providing recreational activities and training opportunities, particularly for young people, across Exmoor, which was welcomed and supported. Subsequent Forum meetings (28 March, 25 July and 28 November 2007) were informed of the success of Active Exmoor and partners in attracting part of the Somerset Stage of the Tour of Britain Cycle Race to Exmoor in September 2007, which drew significant attention to Exmoor and all it has to offer, also bringing *potential* benefits to the economy and the encouragement of other cycling activity. *The Forum has sought the National Park Authority's support for securing part of the race on Exmoor over the next 4 years that it is held in Somerset.*

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP)

At the 28 March 2007 meeting the Forum was updated by the National Park Authority on 33 proposed priority actions and policies in the RoWIP which the Forum had an integral role in advising upon. The actions/policies have the aim of helping the National Park Authority to improve the management of rights of way and enable the development of new access opportunities. The achievements so far were highlighted and the Forum noted the progress made.

Access to Water

The Forum's last report set out its preference for negotiated voluntary access agreements on rivers to enable canoeing to take place, which is seen as the best way of meeting everyone's requirements and protecting river environments. At the Forum's meeting on 28 November 2007 concern was expressed about increasing trespass by canoeists on local rivers in the North Devon part of the National Park and the damage this may be causing. The local riparian owners from that area are looking at a range of measures to overcome the problems and, through the National Park Authority's officers, the Forum will ask for input into the Environment Agency's proposed draft plan for the South West on Water Sports and Recreation.

Consultations

The Forum has responded to three significant consultations over the last year - the Defra Consultation on Proposals to improve access to the English Coast, the Defra public rights of way consultation on the Implementation of the right to apply for orders to extinguish and divert rights of way and associated rights of appeal, and the Natural England consultation on Discovering Lost Ways.

The first two consultations were considered at the Forum's meeting on 25 July 2007. However, as both consultations were lengthy, the Forum felt it was impractical to reach conclusions in the time available during the meeting and so the Secretary was asked to formulate responses through consulting members individually.

On the 'right to apply' consultation, the Forum was on balance supportive of the proposals but felt that a standardised form was necessary, third parties needed to be aware of applications at an earlier stage and the costs involved needed to be realistic but also affordable.

In respect of the coastal access consultation, the Forum was fully supportive of the existing access arrangements along the South West Coast Path (a presentation on the South West Coast Path was provided at the 25 July 2007 meeting from the South West Coast Path Co-ordinator), but was evenly balanced as to whether more should be made of the coastline through expanding the access corridor.

Regarding the Discovering Lost Ways consultation, it was necessary for individual Forum members to submit comments to the Secretary as there was not a Forum meeting within the consultation time frame. The Forum's response focused upon:-

- The important role Local Access Forum's could play in raising the awareness of Lost Ways, co-ordinating information about them and the practicality of pursuing them.

- The need for a standardised approach for recording Lost Ways and other rights of way on the Definitive Maps, ensuring the correct classification which everyone can understand.
- A clear means of identifying the ease or difficulties of using routes, particularly in respect of those people with disabilities.

Organisational Matters

Jeremy Holtom has now been Chairman of the Forum for four years and Stephen Crossman is in his second year as Vice-Chairman.

There have been further changes in the Forum's membership following a recruitment process in February/March 2007. Details of the current membership can be seen on the following pages.

November 2007

Telephone – 01398 322218 (direct line)

Email – cacarder@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk

Post – Carol Carder, Secretary to the Exmoor Local Access Forum, c/o Exmoor National Park Authority, Exmoor House, Dulverton, Somerset TA22 9HL

EXMOOR LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

SUMMARY OF THE BACKGROUNDS AND INTERESTS OF FORUM MEMBERS

NAME	RELEVANT INTERESTS	MEMBERSHIP OF ORGANISATIONS	AREAS
Barry Bassnett	Rights of way/Access; uses a mobility scooter (Tramper) to access Exmoor as he is disabled. He is active in encouraging the use of gates rather than styles, wider footbridges for people with disabilities and the removal of barriers which inhibit the use of routes by disabled people.	Disabled Ramblers	Across Exmoor, particularly the North Devon part
Chris Binnie	Rights of way (particularly bridleways), horse riding (including organising rides across Exmoor and hunting), walking, shooting, owns and runs a small farm (wishes to diversify into equine tourism), wildlife and conservation, holds commoners rights on	West Somerset and Exmoor Bridleways Association (currently Chairman), British Horse Society, Exmoor Society, Exmoor Trust, West Somerset Riding Club, Bickham Shoot (Timberscombe)	Activity across Exmoor National Park and West Somerset

Dunkery

Simon Colley	Retired teacher who has led children in outdoor activities, e.g. pony trekking, rock climbing and mountain biking	Devon County Council registered moorland walking leader	North Devon area
Jeff Cox	Walking, involved in the preparation of pamphlets and booklets on walks, conservation work, waymarking and surveying rights of way to identify erosion and maintenance required	Exmoor Conservation Partnership Volunteer, Exmoor Youth Hostels Association (currently Chairman), heavily involved with the organisation, promotion and running of the Exmoor Perambulation	Activity across Exmoor National Park
Stephen Crossman	Sport and recreation (including walking and cycling), tourism and local business	Minehead Cycling Club, Team Zoyland Cycling Club chair, Somerset Crown Estates Tenants Association chair and Minehead Running Club.	Minehead/North Exmoor area (involved in activities across Exmoor)
Maria Floyd	Farming, accountancy (business) and access in general	NFU and Brendon Commoners Association	Brendon and Countisbury/North Devon area of Exmoor (contacts across Exmoor)
Jeremy Holtom	Walking, horse riding, land management, commons and disabilities	Badgworthy Land Company Secretary, Trustee at Calvert Trust Exmoor, member, and Chair of the Project Group, Woodland Trust member, Exmoor	North Devon part of Exmoor/Central Exmoor

		Society member, Exmoor Woodland Conservation Fund member, British Horse Society, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, CLA and Countryside Alliance	
Jason Hooper	Trail riding, walking, wildlife, archaeological remains and follows stag and fox hunting	Trail Riders Fellowship	South Molton area/southern Exmoor
Joan Long	Walking (walk leader), conservation, historic and natural environment and business	North Devon Ramblers Association chair, Exmoor Society, Devon Wildlife Trust, National Trust, Woodland Trust, Campaign to Protect Rural England, South West Coast Path Association, Youth Hostels Association and Dartmoor Preservation Association	North Devon area of Exmoor (involved in activities across the National Park)
Rob Manicom	Walking, Mountain Biking, involved through his work in rights of way management and maintenance	Works for the National Trust Holnicote Estate as Access and Recreation Warden	West Somerset/Exmoor
Robin Milton	Farming/ landowner, farm holiday business, fishponds, walking, shooting and disabilities	Withypool Commoners Association, Chairman of Chumleigh and South Molton NFU Branch, West Anstey Parish	Southern/Central Exmoor

		Meeting and Ex Devon Young Farmers' Association Leader	
Richard Peek	Farmer (also involved in farm tourism)/ landowner. Rides across the moor whilst involved in legal hunting activities	Member of Devon Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, Chairman of the Exmoor Foxhounds through which he encourages people to come to Exmoor to enjoy horse riding and takes part in other fund raising activities which can help the local economy	Across Exmoor, but particularly in the North Devon part
Jim Pile	Farmer. Interested in rights of way/access, the future development of Exmoor. Shows sheep at the local and Devon County levels.	Exmoor National Park Authority Member (appointed to the Forum by the Authority). Chairman of Kentisbury and Trentishoe Parish Council Trustee of Kentisbury Village Hall and of the Kentisbury Old School Educational Foundation Membership of the Conservative Party, the National Farmers' Union and the National Sheep Association	Across the National Park area
Jean Ridge	Walker, particularly involved in the Walking for Health Initiative, and designs walks for visitors to the area (particularly for the Yarn Market	Trained walk leader for the Walking for Health Initiative (organised by the British Heart Foundation and the Countryside Agency), Member of the Exmoor Society and member of the	Across Exmoor

	<p>Hotel, Dunster) The work for the Yarn Market Hotel, Dunster involves tourism and includes the promotion of other businesses, organisations or events. This work being associated with all types of sport and recreation Keen conservationist</p>	<p>Campaign to Protect Rural England</p>	
Tim Ryan	<p>Co-ordinator of Outdoor Education, Group Leader of young people making expeditions on foot, outdoor sport and recreation generally (i.e. running, orienteering, canoeing, climbing, walking and cycling), conservation work (including footpath maintenance and management)</p>	<p>Works for East Devon College, Tiverton (Outdoor Education), Sustrans member (cycling), British Canoe Union member, Tourism Concern member, Quantock Orienteers member (BOF coach), Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme</p>	<p>Mid Devon/across Greater Exmoor</p>
Duncan Waller	<p>Partner in Barle Valley Safaris, which operates tours across the National Park (particularly used by those with disabilities) and tourism (emphasis on</p>	<p>Exmoor Tourist Association, Exmoor Outdoor Activities Group, Living Exmoor and Countryside Alliance</p>	<p>Across Exmoor</p>

	sustainable activities)		
Roger Webber	Farmer, countryside in general (including rights of way/access and studying the red deer) being a voice for the community and representing the local interests and village life in general	Exmoor National Park Authority Member (appointed to the Forum by the Authority). Membership of various groups on behalf of the NPA. Member of West Somerset Council. Chairman of Cutcombe Parish Council. Membership of Exmoor Trust, Joyces Charity, Conservative Party, National Farmers' Union, Countryside Alliance and National Trust	Across the National Park area
Christina Williams	Rights of way/access and is a keen walker and horse rider. Committed to and interested in the future of the community of Exmoor both economically and socially. Dedicated to the landscape character of the National Park and the benefits it can provide in terms of visitors and economic opportunities. Feels that the balance between access and conservation is difficult, but	Exmoor Society (the Executive), CLA (Devon Committee member), member of the Devon and Somerset Pony Club, West Buckland School Governor, member of the Moorland Board and Director of the Badgworthy Land Company	Across the National Park, particularly the southern and western areas

essential for
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Believes that
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access land.