



EXMOOR LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

ANNUAL REPORT 2010



The Exmoor Local Access Forum is an independent statutory advisory body set up by Exmoor National Park Authority in 2002, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. It held its first meeting in February 2003.

The Forum's purpose is to advise the National Park Authority, Natural England, the two local highway authorities covering the area and other statutory bodies about improvement of public access to land for open-air recreation and enjoyment. In providing advice, the Forum must have regard to the needs of land management and conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape.

This is the seventh Annual Report from the Forum, which held three meetings in 2010, in February, June and December.

Improving and developing maps and advice

- Forum Members are supporting the achievement of a website mapping system currently being developed, which will provide details of definitive routes and permitted paths in the National Park, together with descriptions of routes and additional advice on structures, suitability for mobility trampers, etc.
- Following the success of a map of mountain bike routes, Forum Members are also interested in the development of maps specific to other user groups (for example, canoeists or fishermen).
- In partnership with the Authority and the West Somerset and Exmoor Bridleways Association, the Forum is looking at the potential to assess bridleway routes so that website maps could include a general indication of their suitability for different standards of rider.

Improvements to existing paths: aspiring to easier access

The Forum has suggested several locations on the existing path network where strategic improvement work, such as removal or replacement of a structure, could make a whole route more easily accessible. The Forum will be seeking further suggestions from local communities and passing this to the Authority to inform future improvement works.

Canoeing and Public Access to Exmoor's Rivers

This continues to be a regular topic of debate and as part of its 2011 work-programme the Forum hopes to hear the canoeists' perspective from a representative of the sport's governing body. A wider debate on public access to inland waters also continues and in relation to local situations, the Forum's recommendation is that the National Park Authority continues to maintain engagement with all interested parties.

Sharing Information

The Forum recognises that partnership working will become increasingly important. To avoid duplication of resources in the regular inspection of rights of way, at its most recent meeting the Forum suggested that the potential be explored for organisations to adopt a standard inspection approach and to share information, and for greater use of volunteers.

Other meetings and events

The acting Chairman of the Forum attended a meeting of the South West Local Access Forums Chairs and Representatives, also attended by the Regional Director for Natural England who reported on changes in Natural England following the outcome of the public spending review.

Two Forum Members attended the annual South West Region Local Access Forums Conference, with speakers covering a variety of topics including health, young people, and green infrastructure.

Meeting the communities of Exmoor

The Forum has continued to hold its meetings at venues across the National Park to gain a feel for local issues and concerns about access and outdoor recreation. Molland, Dunster and Dulverton hosted the Forum's meetings in 2010.

Consultations:

During the year, the Forum has submitted responses to the following consultations:

- Proposed amendments to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 for coastal access: Defra
- The Coast Access: Natural England's Scheme: Natural England
- Progress Summary for the Exmoor National Park Authority's Rights of Way Improvement Plan Actions and Suggested Revisions 2010: ENPA
- Consultation on procedures for making representations and objections to coast access proposals made in report by Natural England: Defra

Briefings 2010

Exmoor Mire Restoration Project

At the request of Forum Members, representatives of the **Exmoor Mire Restoration Project** attended a Forum meeting to set out the work planned and what it would mean for users of the moorland. The aim of mire restoration is to block drainage systems and peat cutting sites to create better water retention, improve water flow and quality, and benefit biodiversity. The Forum was keen to clarify the potential impact of these works on access and rights of way in the National Park and received assurance that existing rights of way would remain open, and that restoration works would not directly affect any public right of way. Forum Members were also advised that the project could improve the condition of pathways on open access land by diverting water to more tussocky areas, which walkers and horse riders tended to avoid. The majority of works would be completed within the next 5 years, during which time there would be ongoing consultation both with the Authority's Access & Recreation Officers and the Local Access Forum.

Mosaic Project

The Forum received a presentation from a representative of the **Mosaic Project** and learned more about its aim to build sustainable links between black and minority ethnic communities and the National Parks in England and the Youth Hostels Association. National Parks were created for the benefit of the public, and the role of Mosaic is to make sure that all people had an equal opportunity to enjoy the many benefits that National Parks offer by training influential leaders from ethnic minority communities to become "Community Champions" and to promote the National Parks and the YHA in their communities.

The Forum learned how Mosaic is also working with other community groups facing barriers to accessing National Parks, by transferring the Mosaic model to 16-25 year olds living in deprived wards in and around Exmoor and Dartmoor, and training 'young champions' who were willing to find out more about their National Park and to share their experiences with other young people.

Dunster becomes a Walkers are Welcome Town

The Forum was delighted to hear that Dunster had achieved accreditation as a **Walkers are Welcome Town**, one of over 50 towns and villages across Britain that have joined this community-led scheme, to demonstrate a commitment to strengthening their town's reputation as a place for visitors to come to enjoy the outdoors.

Volunteer Working

The significant value of the work of the many volunteers who support access across the National Park is likely to become increasingly important as part of the Coalition Government's 'Big Society' approach. During the year, the Forum heard from Exmoor National Park Authority's Volunteer and Outreach Co-ordinator about the **Exmoor Conservation Volunteer Partnership** (the National Trust, Crown Estate, South West Lakes Trust, Somerset Wildlife and Exmoor National Park Authority) and its work to provide a range of physical and monitoring tasks suitable for volunteers, including low-level maintenance of footpaths and bridleways, scrub clearance, and wildlife and hedgerow surveys. The Forum was also interested to hear about the 'help a Ranger' days when volunteers were able to assist the Authority's Rangers, ecologists and archaeologists to carry out vital habitat management, path repairs and surveys for conservation organisations across the National Park, as well as the Exmoor National Park Authority Path Watcher scheme and their support of Parish Path Liaison Officers.

Exmoor National Park Authority Public Rights of Way Annual Report 2009-10

Exmoor National Park Authority's **Public Rights of Way Annual Report** was presented to the Forum at its June meeting and set out details of the work completed during 2009-10, including: ♦ path maintenance ♦ installation and maintenance of drains to keep rights of way surfaces in a condition suitable for intended use ♦ removal of obstructions ♦ supply and installation of rights of way furniture ♦ legal work to address off definitive line issues ♦ completion of 10 major works projects ♦ the Rights of Way Improvement Plan ♦ project Management and support for wider access management.

The Public Spending Review

In common with many other public sector organisations, Exmoor National Park Authority will be subject to a significant reduction in government funding during the public spending review period to 2015 and this will impact on all its future activities, including in relation to access and rights of way. During this time of financial constraint, the Forum believes its focus should be to advise on practical and achievable objectives. Forum Members will also be considering opportunities to stimulate community access projects, and will be on the look out for funding opportunities for which Local Access Forums and community groups might be eligible.

What next?

Exmoor Local Access Forum has six new Members, increasing the range of interests represented. In 2011, the Forum looks forward to receiving briefings on different sports/activities including any access related issues, and to continuing to advise and support the Authority's Rights of Way team in what will be challenging times ahead.

December 2010

If you wish to learn more about the work of the Exmoor Local Access Forum please contact Abbie Keeper on 01398 323665, email: ajkeeper@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk.

Further details of the Forum's agendas, minutes and reports can be viewed and downloaded from the National Park Authority's website – www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk. Agendas and papers are also widely circulated to a number of individuals and organisations, and can be seen in local libraries and council information points.

The Members of Exmoor Local Access Forum

Chris Binnie: Chris owns and runs a small farm, with a wish to diversify into equine tourism. He has a particular interest in bridleways and he organises rides and walks across Exmoor. Chris is also interested in walking, shooting, archaeology, wildlife and conservation, and holds commoners rights on Dunkery. Chris is a member of British Horse Society and Exmoor Trust and member of the Executive Committee of the Exmoor Society. Represents owners and occupiers of access land and users of local rights of way.

Antony Brunt: Antony is an hotelier in Dunster who regularly organises holiday breaks which include walking on Exmoor and whose hotel is accredited under the "Walking for Health" initiative. He is a guide for the North Devon and Exmoor Walking Festival and leader for their South West Coast Path linear walks, and holds a South West Moor and Mountain Leader Certificate. Antony is Chairman of the Exmoor Tourist Association. Represents tourism, users of local rights of way and those with an interest in the enjoyment of Exmoor.

Jeff Cox: Jeff is involved in the preparation of pamphlets and booklets on walks, conservation work, waymarking and surveying rights of way to identify erosion and maintenance requirements. He is a member of the Exmoor Conservation Partnership Volunteers, Exmoor Youth Hostels Association and Chairman of the Exmoor Youth Association. He is heavily involved with the organisation, promotion and running of the Exmoor Perambulation. Represents conservation, users of local rights of way and those with an interest in the enjoyment of Exmoor.

Maria Floyd: Maria has a general interest in access issues and is a member of the National Farmers Union and the Brendon Commoners Association. Represents owners and occupiers of access land.

Julian Gurney: Julian is the Head Ranger for the National Trust's West Exmoor properties and a Lynton and Lynmouth Town Councillor. He has lived and worked on Exmoor for most of his life, is committed to ensuring that such a unique and beautiful place should be open and accessible to a wide range of user groups and individuals, and believes that conservation and access need to exist symbiotically. Julian is a keen walker and as part of his work, he is responsible for access provision checklists for up to 60 miles of public rights of way. Represents managers of access land, users of rights of way and those with an interest in the enjoyment of Exmoor.

Suzette Hibbert: Suzette started working life in the New Forest where she trained and worked in the tourism industry for nearly 20 years. She moved to Lynton and Lynmouth with her husband and daughter in 1983, buying a shop in Lynmouth from where they traded for 22 years, until retirement in 2005. Suzette is a member of the Lynton & Lynmouth Town Council, chair of Lynton and Lynmouth in Bloom, which achieved a National Gold Award in 2006, and chair of the Lyn Community Development Trust. She became a District Councillor for Lynton, Lynmouth, Countisbury and Brendon in 2007. Member of Exmoor National Park Authority.

Alison Kent: Alison spent 15 years employed as a Ranger for the Exmoor National Park Authority and therefore has first-hand experience of many of the issues surrounding access. Now retired, Alison is Vice Chair of the West Somerset & Exmoor Bridleways Association and Chair of the Taunton Deane Bridleways Association, and a member of the British Horse Society, Exmoor Society, National Trust, Ramblers Association and South West Coast Path Association. Alison is a keen walker and horse rider and for the past 27 years, together with her husband, has run a small farm of sheep and beef cattle. Alison joined the Forum in 2009 and represents users of local rights of way and those with an interest in the enjoyment of Exmoor.

Joan Long: Joan is the chair of the North Devon Group of the Ramblers Association and a regular walk leader with particular interests in conservation, and the historic and natural environment. Joan is also a member of the 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. Represents conservation, users of local rights of way and those with an interest in the enjoyment of Exmoor.

Robin Milton: Robin is a farmer with a farm holiday business. He is a member of Withypool Commoners Association, Chairman of Chulmleigh and South Molton NFU Branch, West Anstey Parish Meeting and former Devon Young Farmers' Association Leader. Exmoor National Park Authority Member.

Richard Partington: Richard is an environmentalist with enthusiasm and passion for promoting care for and enjoyment of the natural world. He is a member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature's World Commission on Protected Areas, its global protected landscapes Task Force and its UK Assignment Group. He is also a Member of the Countryside Management Association, former Chair of Active Exmoor and Chair Designate to EUROPARC Consulting. Richard is a specialist in using conservation and recreation to support rural economies and local values. Represents conservation, tourism, users of rights of way and access land, and those with an interest in the enjoyment of Exmoor.

Richard Peek: Richard is a farmer and landowner. He is a member of Devon Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, and Chairman of the Exmoor Foxhounds through which he encourages people to come to Exmoor to enjoy horse riding. Represents owners and occupiers of access land.

Andrew Player: Andrew is a regular walker and runner and in his spare time is an instructor for the army cadets. He is employed at the Crown Estate, Dunster and is interested in tourism, active recreation, nature and landscape recreation and outdoor education. Andrew is keen to share knowledge and to understand the opinions of those who use Exmoor's public rights of way. Represents managers of access land, users of rights of way and access land.

Nick Simpson: Nick moved to the region fairly recently and is enjoying getting to know the Exmoor area. He is a keen walker and cyclist and also has an off road bike and is a member of the Trail Riders Fellowship. Represents users of rights of way and those with an interest in the enjoyment of Exmoor.

Peter Thorn: Peter has a background in teaching and has worked for the Outward Bound Trust and for Local Authority Youth Services, and brings to the Forum a perspective on how access to the National Park can be more relevant to young people as a source of personal development as well as for recreation. Peter is a keen walker and canoeist (he is Canoe England River Advisor for the East Lyn) and also enjoys mountain biking. He is passionate about conservation and appreciates the delicate balance which needs to be achieved with public access. Represents users of rights of way and access land and those with an interest in the enjoyment of Exmoor.

Christina Williams: Christina is a keen walker and horse rider and is committed to and interested in the future of the community of Exmoor both economically and socially. She is dedicated to the landscape character of the National Park and the benefits it can provide in terms of visitors and economic opportunities. Christina believes that education is the key to removing distrust between landowners and users, particularly in respect of access land. She is a member of the Exmoor Society (the Executive), CLA (Devon Committee member), Devon and Somerset Pony Club, West Buckland School Governor, Moorland Board and Director of the Badgworthy Land Company. Represents owners and occupiers of access land.

Ueli Zellweger: Ueli is the owner of various riverbeats and several plots of land with some rights of ways on Exmoor. Represents landowners, occupiers of access land and users of rights of way.