

D. Open Moorland



Heather-covered hills and ridges provide a dramatic landscape scene.



Deeply carved moorland valleys offer surprise views.



Smooth horizons, large skies and simple land cover define the grass moorland areas.



Striking landscape contrast between the muted hues of heather moor and bright green of adjacent improved pastures.



A simple fence line can be a prominent feature on the open moor.

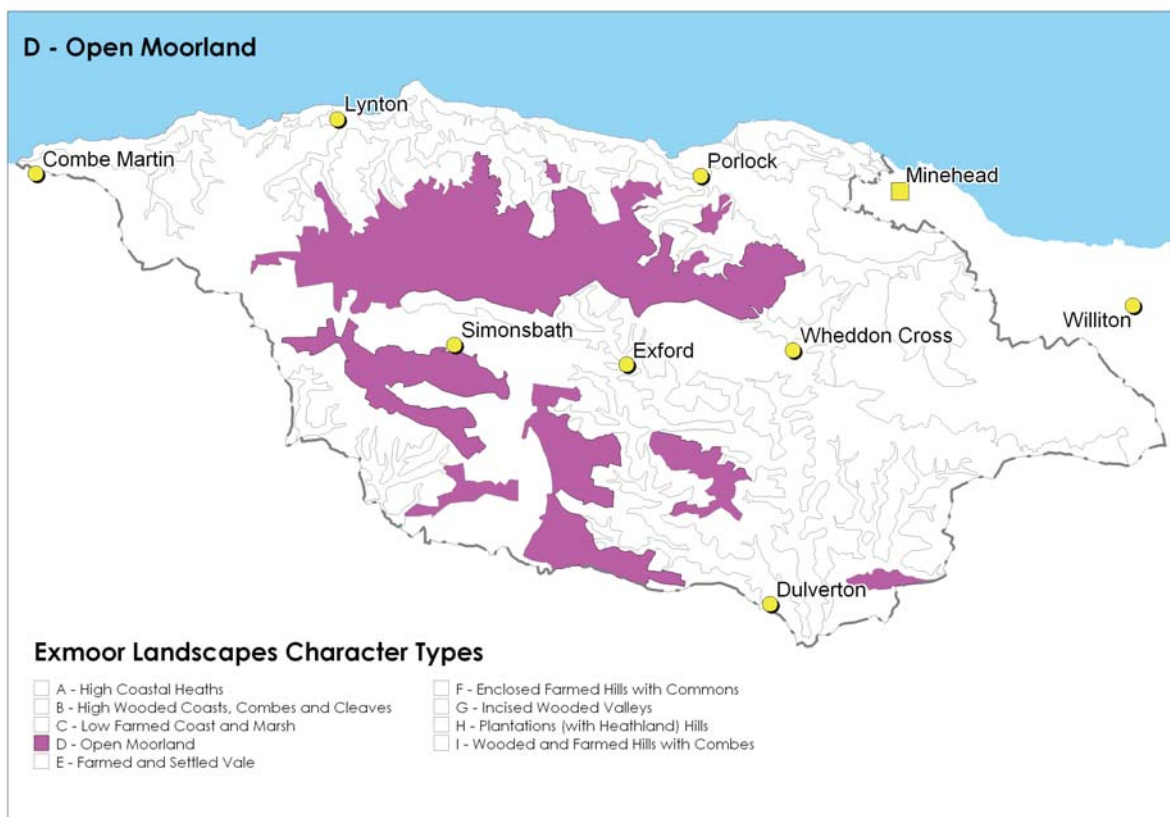


Loss of heather moorland due to encroachment of bracken and gorse.

6. D: Open Moorland

Location and Boundaries

- 6.1 The windswept, exposed and open landscape of Exmoor's *Open Moorland* occurs within four areas – two significant in size and two much smaller. Although fragmented, the main sweep of *Open Moorland* stretches, east to west, from the foothills of Dunkery Beacon to Butter Hill. From here, it wraps around to the southeast as far as East Anstey Common. There are also two smaller outlying *Open Moorland* areas: Winsford Hill and Haddon Hill. The *Open Moorland* is bordered by a number of different landscapes but is for the most part met by the vast sweep of the *Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons*.



Key Characteristics

- Open, upland landscape defined by vast areas of **heather and grass moorland with significant areas of bracken and gorse.**
- A **large-scale landform** of broad, gently undulating plateaux and rounded hills that loom over the adjacent, lower lying landscapes.

- Cut by distinctive, **deeply carved moorland valleys** (both wet and dry) – the streams issuing from a large number of **moorland springs**.
- Elevation ranging from 245m to 520m AOD. Highest areas offer long **views across the varied landscapes of the National Park** as well as out to sea.
- Underlain by geology of **sandstone, slates and siltstones** with some higher areas capped with **peat**.
- **A rich ecological resource** – much of the moorland designated as SSSI.
- **Land use characterised by open, rough grazing** – predominantly sheep, Exmoor ponies and cattle.
- **Generally absence of settlement** with the exception of individual farms.
- Minimal built development, limited vehicle access or other visible human artefacts make for a **tranquil landscape with some areas evoking a wild and remote character**.

Landscape Character TYPE Description

- 6.2 Although just one of the many landscapes that make up the National Park, the *Open Moorland* is perhaps the landscape most recognised (by visitors and residents alike) as quintessential to Exmoor's character. It is a powerful, inspiring landscape – of large scale expanse, elevation, and exposure.
- 6.3 A relatively simple land cover - purple heather and grass moor - defines the *Open Moorland*. Although bringing variations in colour, texture and movement, the heather and grass nonetheless form part of the same *Open Moorland* landscape type – knitted together by the smooth horizons, large skies, panoramic views and vast landform scale.
- 6.4 Although sheep, Exmoor ponies and cattle continue to graze the moor, there are many areas where gorse, scrub and bracken have taken hold. As with the

Coastal Heaths, taller vegetation on the *Open Moorland* is enclosing and limiting views - reducing the sense of scale. This is particularly true where young trees have established.



Cattle grazing the open moor.

- 6.5 The continuity of *Open Moorland* is cut by a series of valleys that make for dramatic scenery – steeply sided, often-narrow channels marking the course of the gently meandering streams (issuing from moorland springs) that are flanked by boggy ground and valley mires.
- 6.6 The *Open Moorland* has an almost seamless character – with few obvious interruptions. There are some old hedge banks in places - now lined with post and wire fencing – but these are subtle and often only apparent at close proximity. Some overgrown beech hedge banks are visible on the skyline.
- 6.7 Perceptions or experiences of the *Open Moorland* vary considerably with the weather conditions – in wind, rain and fog the landscape can appear physically challenging, hostile and even threatening. Conversely, on a clear, sunny day the *Open Moorland* has a safer, hospitable character. The moors are popular with walkers, horse riders and cyclists alike. Well-used, informal car parks align the few roads cutting across the *Open Moorland*.
- 6.8 There is very limited built development, infrastructure or modern human artefacts on the *Open Moorland* and a strong sense of tranquillity has generally been retained. Typically, the *Open Moorland* provides outward views to a

range of landscape types – lending varied character to the moor. There are however some (limited) areas where the only view is one of *Moorland expanse*; stretching out as far as the eye can see. These areas are the most remote - some of the few remaining places on Exmoor where a sense of wildness and solitude can truly be experienced.

Landscape Character AREA Descriptions

D1. Northern Moorland

- 6.9 Forming the largest area of moorland on Exmoor, this Character Area extends from the foothills of Dunkery Hill in the east to Butter Hill in the West and is a continuous band of moorland – uninterrupted by landscapes of different character.



Continuous band of open moorland.

- 6.10 Fundamental to this Character Area are the number of deeply incised moorland valleys – cut where the spring line streams run off hills to meet with the rivers of the *High Wooded Coast, Combes and Cleaves*. Hoar oak Water and Badgworthy Water, for example, meander through the Moorland en route to the East Lyn River – finding their way to the Bristol Channel at Lynmouth.
- 6.11 Defining the east of the Character Area, the heather-covered Dunkery Beacon forms the highest point on Exmoor – the summit of the National Park – and acts as a prominent landmark and point of reference. With a secondary road running over Dunkery Hill, Dunkery Beacon is a much-visited viewpoint; offering

extensive (and varied) coastal and inland views e.g. across Dunkery and Horner Wood to Porlock Bay and across the *Plantation Hills* to Dunster.

- 6.12 Although open access land, this area of Moorland is also well served by recreational routes. The Macmillan Way West cuts across Dunkery Hill and Beacon and along the spine of the moorland ridge, veering northwards into Doone Country – the culturally significant landscape expressed in R.D. Blackmore’s famous novel – *Lorna Doone*. The Tarka Trail and Two Moors Way also cross the area of grass moorland known as The Chains.



View across Pinkery Pond to the grass moorland of The Chains.

- 6.13 The high plateau of The Chains and the middle moor (from Badgworthy to Alderman’s Barrow) are two of the few areas from which extensive stretches of uninterrupted moorland can be viewed.

D2. Southern Moorland

- 6.14 The *Southern Open Moorland* is the second largest character area of the *Open Moorland* landscape type. Occurring within the southern half of the National Park, this character area has a greater sense of fragmentation than the *Northern Open Moorland*. This is due to improvement of moorland to form an enclosed farmed landscape (the *Farmed and Settled Hills* landscape type). An example is a farmed area that sits as an island between Long Holcombe and Burcombe (to the west of the Barle Valley) breaking up the continuity of the moor.

- 6.15 The *Southern Open Moorland* is defined by two distinct areas of open moor – separated from one another by a strip of land characterised by *Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons* and by areas of moorland fringe. The landscape comprises a series of rounded summits or hills (e.g. Withypool and Brightworthy Barrows), ridges (e.g. Molland to East and West Anstey) and combes (e.g. Squallacombe, Long Holcombe). The combes are significant in number – branching off the river valleys that cut through the moorland, the largest of which is the River Barle, defining much of the area's northern boundary.
- 6.16 The *Southern Open Moorland* is unsettled but the village of Withypool (within the adjacent *Incised Wooded Valley* landscape type) has a marked influence on the character of the moorland with housing development extending onto the foothills of Withypool Hill.



Housing at the foot of Withypool Hill.

- 6.17 There are a number of secondary roads that provide access to the Southern Moorland. The Ridge Road, for example, that cuts across Molland, West Anstey and East Anstey Commons provides clear views into the contrasting, enclosed pattern of farmland to the south (beyond the National Park boundary). There are sections of the road that are lined with gorse and where views are restricted.

D3. Winsford Hill

- 6.18 Winsford Hill is one of the smaller areas of heather *Open Moorland* and comprises a series of hills along a ridge – Winsford Hill, Draydon Knapp, South Hill

and Varle Hill. Although lying relatively close to the much larger Southern Moorland block, this landscape sits as a detached moorland area, immediately surrounded by *Incised Wooded Valleys* (of the River Barle and River Exe) and *Enclosed Farmed Hills with Commons*.

- 6.19 The B3223 cuts northwest to southeast through the landscape; forming a clear line across the moor's ridge with the land falling away either side. Cattle grids at either end of the B3223 - Comer's Gate and Mounsey Hill Gate define entrances to the moorland and a clear sense of arrival. The location and elevation of the road provides views into the contrasting farmed and wooded valley landscapes. Views are also possible of other areas of *Open Moorland* (views to Withypool Hill in the west and to Dunkery in the northeast for example). So, although this moorland is physically detached, there is nonetheless a visual connection with a wider *Open Moorland* landscape.



Winsford Hill – clear views to surrounding farmland and beyond.

- 6.20 Views offered along the road make it a popular stopping point for cars. Close to the highest point on the moor (Winsford Hill) a large car parking area is provided.
- 6.21 Although views from the road are a key feature, they have been inhibited by scrub encroachment on the roadside – forming channelled views in places. The moorland is grazed (by Exmoor ponies, cattle and sheep) but scrub encroachment is notable with bracken, gorse and young trees covering a

considerable area.



Scrub and bracken encroachment

- 6.22 Although the moorland is open and for the most part uninterrupted, there are some overgrown beech hedgerows. A recent introduction to the landscape which contrasts with the open, smooth lines of the moorland are the game crops located on Ashway Side/Varle Hill.

D4. Haddon Hill



Views across heather moorland at Haddon Hill.

- 6.23 Haddon Hill is by far the smallest area of *Open Moorland*. Located a few miles east of Dulverton, Haddon Hill sits towards the southernmost point of the National Park. This small heather moorland pocket occurs immediately south of both the River Haddeo and Wimbleball Lake and offers elevated views (particularly from Hadborough – the highest point on the hill) over the *Haddeo Incised Wooded Valley* and to the open waters of Wimbleball Lake.



Clear views over Wimbleball Lake to the farmland beyond.

6.24 Haddon is a popular area of moorland, especially with dog walkers. The adjacent car park (with toilets and interpretation board) is often in use and, perhaps because of the smaller size and ease of access from Dulverton, Haddon seems noticeably busier than the other areas of moor. As well as the popularity of the moor, the views across to settlements, to Wimbleball Lake (popular for sailing, fishing, windsurfing etc) and to a number of farms and houses increases the awareness of people-presence and human activity in and around the landscape. As a consequence, this moorland area does not share the same sense of remoteness found in some areas of the larger moorland tracts.



Haddon Hill is a popular area with walkers.

6.25 The Hadborough Plantation, part of which has recently been cleared for heathland restoration, borders Haddon Hill. This area of coniferous plantation forms a solid boundary to the south and adds a sense of containment and shelter.

- 6.26 Although a distinct moorland landscape, Haddon Hill borrows much of its character from the surrounding farmland landscapes – the strong patterns of enclosure and bright green hues of the improved pasture contrasting with the muted colours and openness of the moor.



Improved enclosed pastures and dark woodland contrast with the open character and muted hues of the moorland.

- 6.27 Exmoor ponies graze freely on the hill and are well recognised as an intrinsic feature of this area of moorland.

Landscape TYPE Evaluation

Strength of Landscape Character

- 6.28 This is a landscape of **strong** character – the *Open Moorland* being a very recognisable, perhaps unmistakable landscape – synonymous with Exmoor. The large scale landform, the smooth skylines, the vastness of view, the sense of tranquillity and (in places) remoteness, and the simplicity of landcover (from heather to grass moor) combine to create an inspiring and challenging landscape. Grazing cattle, sheep (including Exmoor Horn) and Exmoor ponies play a key role in defining the *Open Moorland* and are, in many ways, as intrinsic to the landscape as its physical characteristics.

6.29 Bracken and gorse encroachment and young tree establishment are undoubtedly affecting the intactness of the moorland and as such are threatening the strength of landscape character.

Landscape Condition

6.30 The condition of the *Open Moorland* is varied from **moderate** to **good**. As with the Coastal Heaths landscape type, there are number of factors (recreation, agriculture, and infrastructure for example) that are affecting the state of repair, or degree of intactness, of the *Open Moorland*. Those judged to be endemic to the landscape as a whole are noted below, recognised as key issues or 'visible forces for change'. There are of course other issues that are affecting parts or particular areas of this landscape but which are not common across the entire type. These are noted separately as part of the Character Area Evaluation.

Landscape Strategy

The overall strategy for the *Open Moorland* is to **Conserve and Enhance** landscape character. It is essential to conserve the open and simple visual character of the *Open Moorland* and to enhance that same character within those areas where views have been impinged and where the enclosing nature of scrub encroachment has reduced the overall sense of scale. As with the High Coastal Heaths landscape, there is a danger that further incremental inclusion of human elements in the landscape (e.g. interpretation boards, parking provision) will threaten to reduce the remote and wild character still enjoyed on some parts of the moor.

*The following table highlights the range of **Issues** recognised through field survey as having (or likely to have in the future) a negative impact on the landscape. The associated **Objectives** are those that would benefit landscape character (and visual amenity) and condition thereby improving overall landscape quality. It is recognised that some of these may be in conflict with other objectives e.g. ecological, agricultural or recreational. The objectives are intended to act as a guide for future consultation work and to inform, for example, the development of actions or implementation strategies.*

*Those issues considered to be long-term landscape threats appear first in the table (under the heading '**Key Issues**' and highlighted in grey). Landscape issues considered, at present, to be less threatening (of secondary significance)*

appear after the Key Issues under the heading '**Secondary Issues**'. These secondary issues are nonetheless important considerations.

Landscape Issues	Objectives	Priority Areas
Key Issues:		
Decline in landscape condition/agricultural improvement, leading to the conversion of Open Moorland to areas of 'moorland fringe' character.	<i>Conserve and enhance existing moorland areas and restore (where feasible) moorland fringe areas back to Open Moorland.</i>	D1. Northern Moorland D2. Southern Moorland
Loss of the simple, open purple hills (often visible from considerable distance) due to the encroachment of bracken and gorse and some broadleaved woodland species.	<i>Conserve, enhance and restore continuous tracts of open heather moor without significant areas of bracken or gorse.</i>	D3. Winsford Hill D4. Haddon Hill
Loss of sense of openness/ expanse as well as opportunities for viewing the landscape due to encroachment of gorse along the roadsides – changing the sense of scale by enclosing and channelling views.	<i>Create more open views from roads through removal of roadside gorse (paying particular attention to areas offering finest views) in order to improve visibility across the heath land and improve visual connection with the other heather moorland areas of the High Coastal Heaths.</i>	D2. Southern Moorland <i>(particularly West Anstey ridge road and Withypool Common).</i> D3. Winsford Hill
Secondary Issues:		
Threats to tranquillity and remoteness and the simple, open, essentially wild and rugged character of the moorland due to the provision of facilities such as car parking and toilets and small scale, incremental inclusion of human elements in the	Conserve overall sense of tranquillity and the few surviving areas of truly remote landscape within the National Park – those that retain a feeling of being removed from modern day human activity.	D3. Winsford Hill D4. Haddon Hill D1. Northern Moorland <i>(although there are very few human elements within this landscape, parts of the landscape are</i>

landscape such as signs and interpretation boards.		<i>some of the most remote within the National Park. As such, it is much more sensitive to any further introduction of features).</i>
Poor quality views into some areas of adjacent farmland due to management of boundary features, intensive management of grassland, inappropriate positioning of large silage bag stacks and farm litter/waste.	<i>Work with landowners to improve/enhance views into the adjacent farmed areas.</i>	D1. Northern Moorland D2. Southern Moorland (looking south and north respectively into the areas of farmland between Challacombe and Simonsbath).
Erosion of verges and informal enlargement of car parking areas threatening the heath land cover.	<i>Prevent further expansion of car parking areas through careful design and restore areas that have been damaged by vehicle erosion.</i>	D1. Northern Moorland D2. Southern Moorland D3. Winsford Hill
Footpath erosion – forming strong linear (often wide) tracks through the heather moorland.	<i>Reduce the visual impact of footpath scarring in the landscape.</i>	All areas.

Landscape Character AREA Evaluations

D1. Exmoor Forest - Dunkery

- 6.31 There is evidence of scrub and bracken encroachment of heather moorland within this landscape – even in ‘key’ areas such as the foothills of Dunkery. In terms of obvious human intervention in the landscape, there seem to be few visual indicators for change. As such the rate of change within this moorland area appears relatively static. This is true when compared with other Moorland landscapes as well as different landscape types within the National Park.

- 6.32 This area of moorland is the most extensive, uninterrupted tract within Exmoor and contains some of the few surviving areas where a true sense of remoteness can still be felt. As such, even the smallest changes or additions can make a significant difference to the character of the landscape as well as to our experiences of it. This is well illustrated where a minor wooden finger post sign, offering directions to the B3358 road, has been situated within an area of The Chains. Although not overtly intrusive, the sign nonetheless heightens the awareness of proximity to modern infrastructure, thus diluting the rare quality of landscape remoteness. Further additions such as these within the remotest areas of the moor will have a detrimental impact on key attributes of wildness and solitude for example.
- 6.33 A small, but locally significant, feature in the landscape is that of the wind turbine at the Pinkery Outdoor Education Centre. Any further addition of similar vertical (moving) elements such as the turbine is likely to result in cluttering – interrupting the smooth and simple nature of the skyline.

D2. Southern Moorland

- 6.34 Similar threats to moorland character are found within the *Southern Open Moorland* – in terms of bracken, gorse and young tree encroachment. This is very noticeable within the moorland valleys, particularly that of the River Barle.
- 6.35 Another force for landscape change within the *Southern Open Moorland*, which is not readily seen on other areas belonging to this landscape type, is that of development encroachment. This is a particular issue where settlement extension to the south of the village of Withypool has stretched up and onto the foothill of Withypool Hill. Post war housing (some very recent) has acted to detract from the setting of this area of moorland by impinging on the views of open moorland from the village. The cumulative effect of posts carrying overhead wires in and around the Withypool area also detracts from the smooth lines and simplicity of the moorland landscape.

6.36 The other noticeable threat to moorland character here is that of degradation and semi-improvement of moorland edge areas. There is a sense that these moorland fringes are eating into the moorland and fragmenting it further. This is true for example of the area around Squallacombe.

D3. Winsford Hill

6.37 At Winsford Hill, the greatest threat to landscape resource and character comes from scrub encroachment. There are significant areas of land that are covered with gorse and bracken as well as deciduous trees such as hawthorn. This is very evident on the lower slopes and along the B3223 that crosses the moorland – restricting views and the sense of openness. On entering the moorland at South Hill, the sense of arrival onto moorland is stifled by the encroaching vegetation.

6.38 The cumulative impact of road signage within this area of moorland should be monitored – although small-scale features, the signs nonetheless act as visual detractors in the landscape. Erosion of moorland at the roadside is evident in places where cars are being parked for people to enjoy the views across the Barle Valley and beyond to Withypool Hill for example.

D4. Haddon Hill

6.39 There are a number of features at Haddon Hill, which when viewed collectively, are judged to be a force for change in the landscape. As with some areas of the *Coastal Heaths* landscape type, Haddon Hill has seen the typically wild character of moorland become tamed or restrained e.g. through the introduction of a car park area (surrounding a central area of improved grassland), an interpretation board and a toilet block. A property adjacent to the car park has a small-scale wind turbine. It is this collection of items within this small moorland area that has had the effect of creating a more comfortable (tamed) landscape – one that is distinctly less wild and challenging. The addition of further features or enhancement and improvement of the car-parking areas needs to be monitored to ensure the

essence of the landscape – the moor – remains the main focus on both arrival at and departure from the landscape.

- 6.40 Haddon Hill is very popular with walkers (especially dog walkers) and this is evident through significant footpath erosion (and widening) resulting in the loss of some heather moorland. As with other character areas, bracken and gorse are scrubbing up the landscape – limiting and/or interrupting viewing opportunities. Rhododendron encroachment is also a visible force for change.

