

PRESS RELEASE:

Heading: **Does Exmoor's Heritage Matter?**

Date: 26th April 2011

Do we know enough about Exmoor's history and culture and how we can use these assets to help tourism and people's general enjoyment of the area?

These are the questions that will be debated at the Exmoor Society's Spring Conference to be held in partnership with the National Park Authority in Dulverton Town Hall next Friday 6th May 2011.

The Exmoor Society argues that Exmoor's historic environment has been relatively neglected until the last two decades. Since then, through more systematic research, fieldwork and a mapping programme undertaken by the Authority many new discoveries have been found. These findings challenge previous ideas about Exmoor's archaeology and there is a vital need to communicate their significance more widely, particularly to decision makers. At the same time, the landscape has inspired people to create great works of literature in particular, and has led to a rich local culture of legends, mysteries, events and a distinct way of life. Do we make enough of all these assets and encourage a tourism industry based on them?

Today's landscapes of Exmoor although being important for the natural assets they contain, are an historical and cultural asset of incalculable value. They have been shaped by people living off the land and interacting with natural forces over thousands of years. And yet, do we adequately recognise the historic and cultural dimension when making decisions about how Exmoor is managed?

Rachel Thomas, chairman of the Society, believes that "there is a misunderstanding at the heart of our approach to managing the rural landscape. Policy has now become too focussed on the component parts and the pressing needs of so many different interests ranging from nature conservation and farming to recreation and access. Particular priorities are now placed on the importance of the natural world to the relative neglect of the people element. There needs to be a better balance by looking at the bigger picture and recognising more strongly the historic and cultural dimension as well as people's interrelationship with nature. In a period of rapid change there are choices to be made on how the future landscapes of Exmoor will evolve and the Exmoor Society wants this to happen in a more holistic way so that it's traditional rural way of life can continue into the future".

The Society is delighted that Peter Beacham, Heritage Protection Director of English Heritage and author of many books, is to be the keynote speaker at the one-day conference and he will explore the value of Exmoor's cultural heritage. Other speakers including Martin Hesp, the well-known West Country journalist who will give his take on how Exmoor inspires him. Other speakers will develop the overall theme of understanding the past and inspiring the future.

Tickets for the conference to be held on Friday 6th May from 10am to 3.30pm cost £12 and can be obtained from Parish Rooms, Dulverton TA22 9DP or 01398 323335 or email info@exmoorsociety.com.

Programme for the day:

Exmoor's Heritage
"Inspiring the Future; Understanding the Past"

Programme

- 09.30 Arrival & Coffee
- 10:00 Introduction by Sir Antony Acland
- 10.10 **Setting the context**
Rachel Thomas, Chairman Exmoor Society
- 10:30 **Why do we need to understand the past?**
Peter Beacham
Questions
- 11.30 **How does Exmoor's landscape inspire people?**
Martin Hesp
Questions
- 12.00 **What is Exmoor's cultural heritage?**
Steven Pugsley
Questions
- 12.30 **Presentation of the Lucy Perry Literary Award to Young People**
- 12.45 **BUFFET LUNCH**
- 14.00 **What is the significance of Exmoor's past?**
Rob Wilson-North
Questions
- 14.45 **How important is Exmoor to the Romantic Poets?**
Elizabeth McLaughlin
- 15.00 **Summing Up:**
Nigel Stone, CE, ENPA
- 15.10 Close

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Note to Editors:

The Exmoor Society's 7th Annual Spring Conference in partnership with the National Park Authority aims to raise important issues of the day and influence the debate on how to manage this complex landscape. The Exmoor Society exists to promote and organise action for the conservation and enjoyment of the landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage of Exmoor national park. It was established in 1958 and successfully

fought proposals to afforest The Chains, the central moorland area of Exmoor. It has continued to campaign against adverse changes and encourage people's understanding of the park's special qualities. It acts as an independent watchdog and champion for Exmoor's status as a national park.