



The
Dartmoor
Society

Newsletter

Issue No. 70 • March 2022



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Introduction

Dear friends,
by Alan Endacott | Acting Chair

Sadly, this will be the last introduction to the Newsletter I shall be writing as vice-chair and acting chair, as I have decided to stand down at the next AGM in order to concentrate on my archaeology PhD studies and work commitments.

During the time I've had the privilege of being in these roles, I have tried to bring people with opposing views together for constructive dialogue. I've been particularly keen that the voices of those with long-term, first-hand experience of Dartmoor are heard, especially those of the commoners. They are an essential part of any conservation initiatives and their contribution needs to be properly recognised, remunerated and encouraged.

Our recent conference, 'Hallowed Turf: perspectives on the conservation of Dartmoor's blanket bogs', tackled one of the most controversial conservation initiatives the moor has ever seen. It brought people with diverse views together to hear a range of excellent presentations on the wider context, the science underpinning the work, its delivery and mitigation of the potential impact on the historic environment, as well as some innovative approaches used elsewhere.

There were some searching questions from the floor and I witnessed numerous conversations taking place during the intervals, between people with very different views. This can only be healthy. Pressure from the Society on key details of the work is making a real difference to the approach, including a more balanced allocation of resources, improved communication and a greater emphasis on the archaeology of the project areas.

It is essential that we work together to find the very best approach for Dartmoor: one that properly understands and, if at all possible, protects its unique heritage and achieves results with the minimum intervention required. I believe our remote uplands are special for all sorts of reasons and deserve handling with the utmost sensitivity.

Another concern frequently raised during my term has been the rising dominance of Molinia, or purple moor grass, to the detriment of biodiversity. There are complex reasons for this change, including climate change itself; but there can be no doubt that an overall reduction in livestock grazing since the introduction of agri-environment schemes in the late twentieth century has been a big factor in the failure to keep it in check. Once again, we have tried to bring key individuals and agencies together to identify the issues and try to find workable solutions.

The concept of 're-wilding' has become a popular cause and if we are to successfully re-introduce more species diversity, society has to re-connect with our hill farming community and to listen to their received wisdom. At a recent meeting, I was heartened to hear an official acknowledgement that long-term anecdotal evidence has a valid part to play in understanding the changing environment and should be recorded and studied.

Looking to the future, I hope that we continue to play a key role in tackling these kinds of issues by fostering research, gathering evidence and organising meetings and conferences to bring the many different perspectives together. Ideally this should involve those with most at stake, the next generation. Keeping young families within the National Park is essential for vibrant communities to thrive, while safeguarding the essential qualities of Dartmoor, its unique culture and traditions.

Before signing off, I would like to pay tribute to members of your hard-working executive committee whose names and roles are detailed on the back cover of this newsletter. This includes four retiring members, Wilf Hodges, Liz Miall, Chris Chapman and Gideon Shalom, to whom we owe much gratitude.

Liz and Chris are kindly continuing to provide advice and practical support.

Finally, thank you all for your support over the past three years. It has been heartening to see how our membership has held up and even grown through a difficult period. We look forward to welcoming new faces to the executive committee, bringing different perspectives and fresh ideas. I hope that whoever leads us in the future will continue to enjoy your support and encouragement. We all share a common love for Dartmoor and long may our companionship continue.

With all good wishes

Alan Endacott MA | Acting Chair



Sticklepath and Okehampton Conservation Group

by Mike Watson

The Sticklepath and Okehampton Conservation Group (StOC), winner of the 2022 Dartmoor Society Award, celebrated its 30th anniversary in September last year. The group was formed following the enthusiasm generated by a community project at Finch Foundry, Sticklepath, initiated mainly by Norman Dunn from the Leaze Centre for adults with learning difficulties in Okehampton, and Ian Brooker, northern sector ranger for Dartmoor National Park.

A steering group from the Sticklepath/Okehampton area was convened and, helped by the experience and encouragement of John Turner from West Devon Borough Council, the conservation group was formed. Over the years we have benefitted from the continuing support of WDBC and still enjoy a valuable relationship with groups of adults with learning difficulties, although

this has been difficult during Covid. One or two of the original steering group are also still going strong(ish)!

It has always been one of StOC's aims to carry out conservation tasks in and around the north Dartmoor area that probably would not otherwise happen. Due to the challenging financial circumstances in recent years and resulting loss of staff

in many organisations, there has been an increasing reliance on voluntary groups like ours.

In addition to our excellent working relationship with DNPA, we also work with Dartmoor commoners' groups, Butterfly Conservation, the National Trust, the Woodland Trust, Devon Wildlife Trust, parish councils, schools and others. We aim to have a programme of tasks arranged for every Friday. We haven't missed many in 30 years (prior to Covid) and five to 20 people have probably given about 50,000 person hours of work over that time.

Much of our efforts involve gorse and bracken control and the maintenance and improvement of rights of way in the north Dartmoor area. Specific projects include the building of bridges over the River Taw; initial clearing of the Granite Way to enable access for the surveyors; rebuilding the stone wall along the footpath into Skaigh Wood; building a boardwalk across Pixie's Moor to deal with erosion problems; clearing gorse and bracken where it was over-running archaeological sites at East Hill, Shilstone, Cranbrook Castle and several hut circles and pillow mounds; and maintaining and improving important wetland sites for threatened species

such as the marsh fritillary and southern damselfly.

The success of the group is due in no small way to its camaraderie. We share an enthusiasm and belief in what we are doing and enjoy working together in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Regular after-work debriefing sessions in the Devonshire Inn help! For some folks, coming out each Friday has been a lifeline for all sorts of reasons and the social side of what we do should not be underestimated.

Over the years StOC has won several awards from different organisations, but receiving the 2022 award from the Dartmoor Society is particularly gratifying. We all enjoy Dartmoor and the benefits it gives us, and it is a good feeling to be able to give something back by helping to take care of it.

New members are always welcome. For more information, look online at www.stocgroup.org or www.facebook.com/stocgroup, or contact Mike Watson on watsonmendipmike@gmail.com or Ged Fitzgibbon on ged.fitzgibbon@gmail.com. Alternatively, call Mike on 01837 840183 or Ged on 01837 849177; or meet us in the car park at Finch Foundry on any Friday at 10am. Bring a packed lunch, stout footwear and a smile. We'll provide the rest.



Naomi Oakley at Challacombe

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A Visit to Challacombe Farm

by Annabel Crowley

On 26 June 2021 we visited Challacombe Farm for a guided tour from Duchy tenants Naomi Oakley and Mark Owen. Challacombe is a long valley running north-south with Hamel Down to the east and Soussons Down to the west, where evidence of human occupation spans thousands of years, from hut circles to tin-mining, strip lynchets to the ancient settlement of Grimspound.

Today, Naomi and Mark manage the land in an organic and regenerative way with the aim of conserving and enhancing the landscape and its biodiversity. The animals they keep are vital to the management of the land: cattle, ponies and sheep all graze differently and have different effects in each area of the farm. The cattle are docile, hardy Welsh Blacks who thrive in the marshy areas and open the ground up for wildlife; the sheep

are similarly tough, many being a cross between Shetland and Icelandic that Naomi and Mark called ‘Shetlandics’. Their close-cropping habits help to maintain the visibility of archaeological remains, while the Dartmoor ponies on the farm are used in autumn to keep down the rough grass in an area of heather.

Our walk started just below the farmyard where we passed a new pond that Naomi told us began to attract wildlife as soon as it

was created. We then crossed a lane and began the ascent through a steep field now filled with wildflowers, among them many orchids, including butterfly orchids. Naomi remembers her father cutting gorse and spraying here in attempts to ‘improve’ the hillside. Now it is a traditional hay meadow once more. Bracken still pokes through and is pulled out by hand, and invasive gorse still tries to grow and is cut back as necessary.

Across the top of the hill, we walked through two fields in different stages of conversion back to hay meadows. Naomi explained that she and Mark let sheep on to these fields after haymaking only briefly but otherwise keep them

elsewhere, since they like to eat the flowering plants. Cattle graze the meadows through the autumn and the fields are vacated by late February to allow the wildflowers to start growing again.

The hay and haylage made on the farm support the cattle through the winter when they are kept in a large field with access to a barn. The fact that Challacombe’s animals are entirely grass-fed and slow to mature means that their meat is highly valued by customers. Naomi and Mark sell it direct from the farm, as well as sheepskins and wool, some of which is used by Yuli Somme at Bellacouche, a local felt and natural shroud maker.



Award-winning habitat at Challacombe Farm

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Having left the hayfields, we joined a lane briefly before turning back into another field where the Environment Agency has funded the construction of a long silt-trap pond at the foot of a gradual slope. This collects water from a ditch that runs down from Hamel Down, slowing the flow and preventing silt being carried straight down to the river where it can interfere with salmon spawning beds. The water now fills the pond and then gradually disperses down through the rushes and soft ground of rhos pasture to the valley bottom. This rhos pasture is the home of the rare marsh fritillary butterfly. The EA wanted to build the silt trap of concrete but was persuaded instead to create a much more natural feature that was quickly colonised by wildlife such as dragonflies, diving beetles and snipe. Naomi and Mark are part of a local network of farmers who voluntarily monitor the health of the marsh fritillary population.

Walking back to the farmhouse via the yard of outbuildings opposite the drive end, we looked at the remains of the medieval longhouse and other buildings. Naomi described how there were once several households and pubs on this site. Nowadays, while there are only two dwellings at Challacombe, a steady trickle of walkers, cyclists

and riders cross the farm on paths that Mark and Naomi enjoy seeing used, believing in the benefits to all of sharing this beautiful place.

Having lingered long in the fields, we were now behind schedule so we stopped only briefly for our picnic teas before heading up on to Challacombe Down with Mark. The hill is carpeted in deep heather interspersed with whortleberries and alive with the activity of bees and other insects. We could easily imagine the summers of long ago when animals were brought here for upland pasturing. In the thirteenth or fourteenth century, Challacombe became a permanent settlement and the farm was later split into five tenements which continued in use till at least 1880. Strip lynchets on the valley slopes, from the time when cereal crops were grown there on narrow terraces, are the most extensive in the whole of the south west.

From the hill we descended via a deep gully known as Scudley Beam, one of many sites on the farm that bear witness to centuries of mining activity at Challacombe. Evidence of streamworkings by the earliest tinnners in the twelfth century remains in the form of distinctive spoil mounds along the West Webburn

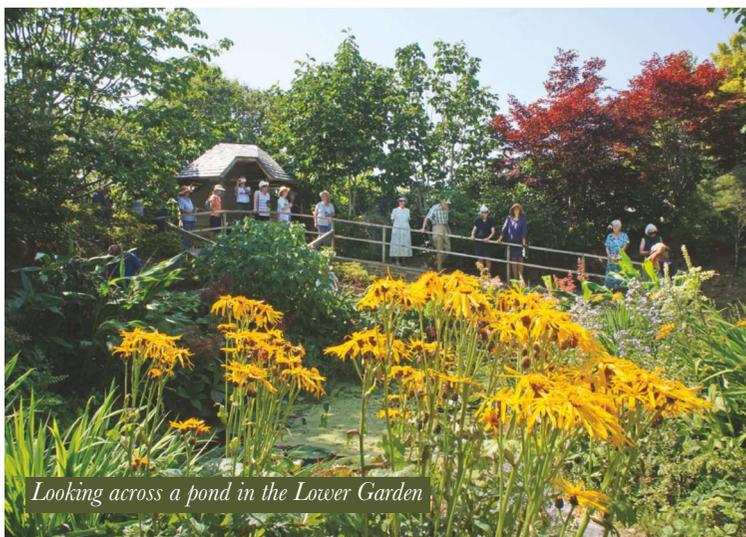
and Redwater. Later, many prospecting pits were dug and in the nineteenth century the Golden Dagger and Vitifer mines developed nearby; indeed, the current farmhouse at Challacombe was built as a mine captain's house in the 1800s.

Taking in a bog where sundews and bog asphodels grow, we ended our visit back at the farmyard. Challacombe

has such variety, and is such an outstanding example of farming in harmony with the environment, that it repays repeat visits. Fortunately there are several public rights of way through the property and Naomi and Mark regularly host group visits by prior arrangement. You can read more about the farm, sign up to a monthly e-newsletter and buy meat by visiting their website, www.dartmoorfarm.com.



Challacombe's medieval ruins



Looking across a pond in the Lower Garden

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A Visit to Wildside

by Annabel Crowley

Members of the Dartmoor Society visited Wildside, near Buckland Monachorum, Yelverton, on the hot afternoon of 20 July 2021 to be guided round this remarkable garden by its creator, Keith Wiley

Head gardener at the nearby Garden House from 1978 till 2003, Keith began work on Wildside in 2004 with his late wife Ros, with the aim of allowing plants to thrive as they would in the wild. In order to maximise planting opportunities on the site – a 1.6-hectare (four-acre) pasture field, sloping to the south above the Tavy valley – he spent many hours in a digger, excavating and moving an estimated 110,000 tonnes of earth around to create a variety of habitats. The alterations mean there is no longer

anywhere in the garden with the same level as the original field, and the difference between the lowest and highest points is now about 6 meters (20 feet).

The site is divided into three: the Canyons at the top, the Courtyard in the middle and the Lower Garden. Keith explained that he started by stripping nearly 18cm (7in) of topsoil off the field to reveal the shillett beneath. The topsoil was replaced at a variety of depths ranging from 180cm (6ft) to as little as 5cm (2in). He banked up earth in some places

to create shelter and made valleys to channel any surface water down to ponds. Paths wind round the garden, at points cut into the hillside and at others rising high above the hedge line.

The variety of environments available means that plants sometimes decide to grow in unexpected places: Keith pointed out a *Rodgersia* that had seeded into bare shillett, a spot no one would think to plant a moisture-loving plant. He favours multi-stemmed rather than single-stemmed trees and happily plants trees generally at much closer spacings than experts might advise, on the basis that this is how they often grow in natural conditions.

We walked down into the Lower Garden past the house that Keith and Ros built for themselves five years ago, and were greeted with an intense landscape of colour, form and texture, studded with trees and packed with plants. It was hard to imagine that this had been an unremarkable patch of pasture only 17 years earlier. Keith explained that he had been inspired by ‘the dreamy mix’ of flowering plants he found in the walled garden of the Garden House in 1978, and wanted to create a similar effect with the addition of water. There are bulbs in old turf in an orchard area, wisteria trained up posts to grow as small trees, 20 different varieties of *Magnolia* (in all 80



In the Canyons

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trees) and conifers that started life in a bonsai collection but were 'released' into the garden to grow as they like. The Wileys brought thousands of plants with them from the nursery they ran at the Garden House, including one conifer that is now 70 years old and an example of the interesting shapes Keith values particularly in winter.

Because of the way the site has been manipulated, habitats as varied as alpine, aquatic and woodland lie alongside each other, held together by the trees that populate the place. One particularly lovely area is a

grove of Acers, where the trees were planted into 20cm (8in) of topsoil on 1.2m-high (4ft) mounds on either side of the path, so that their canopies soon reached 3 meters (10ft) into the air. Keith takes pleasure in the fact that goldfinches soon began to nest among their branches, despite the trees themselves being too small to be considered suitable by the birds under more normal circumstances.

Wildside was established in the teeth of prevailing winds whistling across the Tavy valley but now has many sheltered areas and is usually unaffected

by frost which rolls away down the hill. In the middle section of the garden, the Courtyard, it was certainly easy on the day of our visit to imagine ourselves in a Mediterranean or southern African setting. Keith described this area as a melting pot of the places that have impressed him, including Bryce Canyon in the US state of Utah which inspired the rendered walls. This is the only area of Wildside containing straight lines, in the form of raised beds and a 100-metre pergola. Keith describes it as his version of a cloister, with views from shady areas into sunshine.

At the top of Wildside are the Canyons, where Keith's colossal earth-moving efforts are most obvious. He described the area as having looked like a moonscape for years, while he waited to accumulate the funds to create a natural swimming-pool complete with sandy beach among the shillett mounds. Then he saw a photograph of South African flowers beside water and abandoned his vision, deciding instead to recreate the South African garden at the Garden House but with the addition of water.

Now there are 100 different types of Agapanthus here, thousands of day lilies, Crocosmia, Dierama and ornamental grasses, as well as an enormous bank of Cistus that

began with six unnamed plants. Keith seems relaxed about cultivar names and entirely comfortable with the fact that many Agapanthus and Dierama have now hybridised. The plants grow mostly in sand covered with a shillett mulch where they seed freely and where the stone sets off their colours to sensational effect. When we visited, the pools had been made watertight with seven layers of lining - a job that took four people three weeks to complete - and were nearly ready to receive water that will be circulated around the area by pumps. A wooden building is planned overlooking this garden, for use as a cancer respite centre. Funding for this part of the project has been raised in memory of Ros, who died in 2019.

We walked back to our starting point past yet more evidence of inspired planting: a thicket of *Eleagnus angustifolia* on a dry bank whose narrow silver leaves suggest an olive grove, despite growing in a part of Devon that receives 152cm (60 in) of rain per annum. Keith was still enthusing about the recreation of specific environments right up to the moment we said goodbye and left us all looking forward to returning to see the spectacle again next year. The afternoon ended with a cream tea at the Drake Manor Inn in nearby Buckland Monachorum.



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Members listen to Keith Wiley in the Lower Garden



Steve Alford shearing a greyface Dartmoor

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A Visit to Elvan Farm, Throwleigh: probably Dartmoor's Best-Known Farm

by Caya Edwards

In a quiet corner of Dartmoor between Throwleigh Common and the slopes of Cosdon Beacon lies Elvan Farm. This is a new farm that has become nationally known through Channel 4's Devon and Cornwall TV series. The images of Steve and Crispin Alford riding up on to the moor, managing the vegetation on the commons and ensuring that traditional farming practices such as learing sheep are maintained, have brought Dartmoor into living-rooms all over the country.

Owners Steve Alford, who is on our committee, and Hayley Jansz invited the Dartmoor Society to see the farm on Monday 20 September and hear more about their way of life. We saw first-hand how they have found ways to combine tradition

with innovation and to carve out a living by adapting to changing ideas about farming and finding new markets for their products.

There are long-standing connections between this farm and members of our own

Dartmoor Society committee; people who were with us on the day and who have helped shape the land and our ideas of past and present farming culture.

This crossing where two old roads meet is close to where Alan Endacott, our vice-chair, grew up and where his family have lived since 1858. He was able to talk about farmers from the earliest times, drawing on his research and archaeological discoveries, as well as his knowledge of characters from the recent past and how they lived and worked the land.

For the past 43 years Chris Chapman has chronicled the lives in this landscape. He has

photographed the Alford family on many occasions right up to the present day when he was at this event to capture on camera the latest generation of farmers on Dartmoor.

Bill Murray, who is Steve's uncle, is a living repository of traditional words, songs and sayings. His rendition of 'Down 'pon Ole Dartmoor' is known far and wide, as are his collaborations with other folk musicians, playing and reviving old songs to entertain modern audiences.

The Alfords have been farming hereabouts for many years and have always maintained close connections with their



Steve Alford talking about the cattle on Elvan Farm

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neighbours the Endacotts. Our first port of call on the tour was the barn, originally built by Alan's father Tom Endacott. Steve acknowledged that because the original barn was placed on that spot by Tom, his family had been able to extend it over the years and develop that piece of land for farming, resulting in getting consent for the building of their new farmhouse. This stands beside an old blue elvan quarry that was worked by Alan's grandfather in partnership with Captain Oscar Greig, a former WW11 flying ace and avid collector of prehistoric flints.

Before starting his own farm, Steve spent 20 years contract sheep shearing, and since 2015 has organised the Dartmoor charity speed shear that he and Hayley now hold at Elvan Farm. This is an event that has exceeded every expectation from the start, attracting crowds from far and wide. It will be held again on Sunday 28 August 2022.

As we gathered in the barn, Steve talked about the farm's commercial flock of mule Suffolks and its growing flock of greyface Dartmoors which they are crossing with Swiss blacknose – yes, Swiss blacknose on Dartmoor! Before we knew it, Steve was mustering sheep through pens and had

manoeuvred a hefty greyface Dartmoor into position ready to shear. The impression was surprisingly relaxed and light in both sheep and shearer, with the weight of the animal transferred in seemingly effortless movements while the blades floated over the sheep and the wool peeled off and down to the floor. Wool, this wonderful and natural resource, is hardly valued these days; the Wool Marketing Board has huge amounts of unsold surplus. Here at Elvan Farm they have found a local market for their wool and it is now sold to a local company, The Enchanted Bed Company, and used in mattresses made in Sampford Courtenay.

We made our way up towards higher ground to view a herd of multi-coloured cattle. A shorthorn bull, in benign mood, was in company with south Devon heifers. Elvan Farm also crosses these south Devons with hardy Galloways to produce the beautiful and productive blue grey that is so well suited to Dartmoor.

Experimenting with stock and grazing regimes, overwintering some of the cattle on the moor as part of a Countryside Stewardship Scheme, adapting to Natural England's requirements and anticipating new directives are all part of life for Dartmoor farmers. Yet

the Alford's, while proud of their farming traditions, seem very open to new ideas and opportunities. Working within their existing stocking levels and resources they find ways to respond to ever-changing ideas about how Dartmoor should be managed.

Walking up to the commons past Shilley Pool, with views extending as far as Dunkery Beacon on Exmoor, Steve explained how he has changed the way he grazes his cattle on these commons. He is careful that no area is overgrazed and takes different routes with

supplementary feed to ensure even grazing and distribution of the herd. After a period where very little grazing was permitted, he is currently taking part in a trial where 30 of these hardy cattle stay on the commons all year.

On the way back to the farmhouse we stopped at the Bronze-Age settlement that lies near the road, on the slopes bordering the present-day settlement of Throwleigh and reflected on the contrast between the tranquility of the old prehistoric settlement and the complexity of farming life today.



Steve Alford leading the walk on Throwleigh Common



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Digging up peat to dam a gully on Whitehorse Hill

The Dartmoor Society Conference 2021

‘Hallowed Turf: Perspectives on the Conservation of Dartmoor’s Blanket Peat’

by Annabel Crowley with thanks to Mike Rego

The 2021 Dartmoor Society Conference was held on Friday 12 November at the Charter Hall, Okehampton. An audience of more than 90 members and guests packed the hall to hear six expert speakers give their separate and wide-ranging perspectives on the conservation of peat on the high moor.

With funding from DEFRA, the South West Peatland Partnership is part-way through a project to restore about 300 ha of peatland on Dartmoor, with the aim of improving the absorption

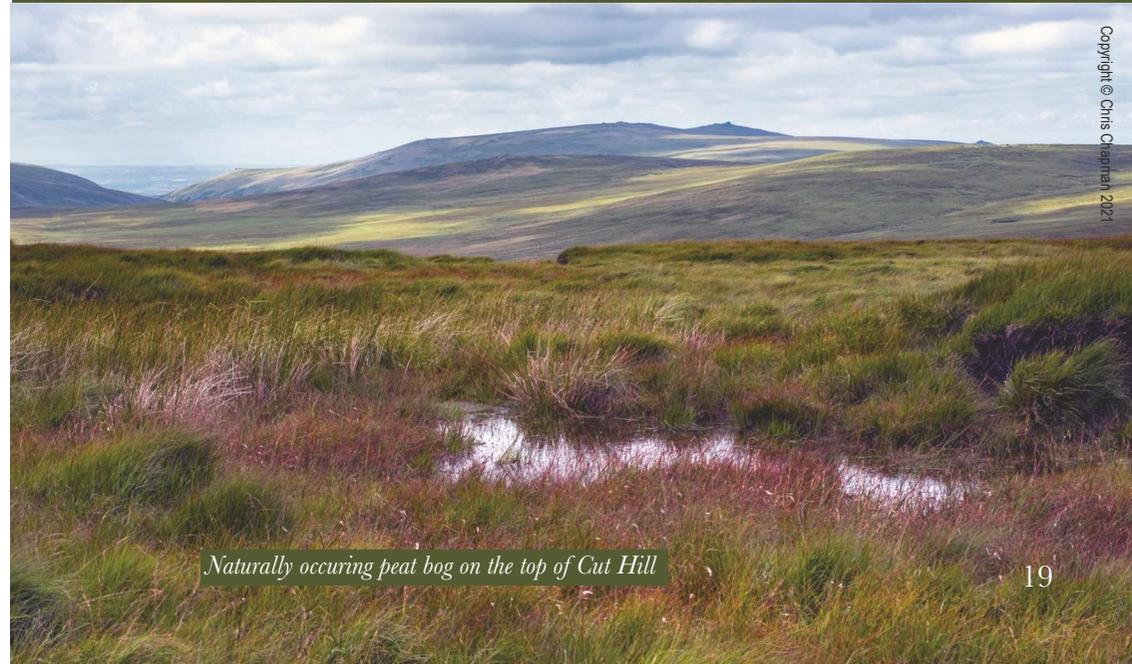
of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, encouraging an increase in wildlife diversity and improving storage and release of clean water into the river systems that originate on the high moor. According to research by the University of Exeter, much of that peatland is emitting greenhouse gases as a result of historic drainage, cutting and erosion.

Our acting vice-chair, Alan Endacott, warmly welcomed everyone to the conference, commenting on the full house and the good proportion of

younger faces in the audience. He showed an aerial photograph of the blanket bog on Hangingstone Hill he had taken in May 2012, little knowing then that it and others like it were going to become such an emotive subject. He highlighted the diversity of interest in our upland blanket bogs: to some they are still a place of work, in the tradition of countless generations; to others they are rare places of peace and tranquillity or the sacred realms of the ancestors. Some, like Alan himself, find fascination in studying the little understood hidden archaeology, while there are those who find the continuance of a pastoral economy and the scars left by previous industry abhorrent and who would rather see the uplands left to nature and natural processes.

Alan observed that, regardless of perspective, there is no doubting the role of peat as an efficient carbon store and the enormous value of blanket peat and valley mires as a rare habitat and the source of most of Devon’s rivers, not to mention our drinking water. In the year of COP26 in Glasgow, such matters have been brought into sharp focus. Millions of pounds are currently being spent by the South West Peatland Partnership on efforts to restore large areas of peat on the high moor.

However, the situation is complex. For example, there are environmental costs resulting from this project such as the release of methane – which has been shown to account for 50% of greenhouse gases – as well as the carbon footprint of



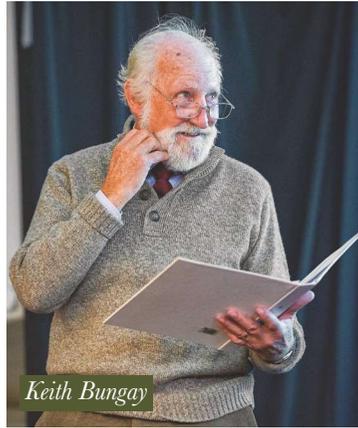
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Naturally occurring peat bog on the top of Cut Hill

the project itself, to be weighed against the benefits. It is no secret that the Society, as members of the Partnership and signed up to the principle of restoration, if not the detail, raised concerns earlier in the year about this and other specific aspects of the invasive work involved, especially the level of resources then allocated for researching, recording and safeguarding the cultural heritage. The Dartmoor Society was pleased to see that at least some of these concerns were addressed in the latest funding bid.

Alan explained that the Society felt that communication should be improved and that more could be done to engage with Dartmoor communities and to encourage public debate; hence the decision to hold this conference. He concluded: 'It's so important that we get this right for future generations and only right that we should take all perspectives into account to arrive at the best possible balance; and this means talking and listening. I hope that we will hear a lot of positive and enlightening things during the course of the day, including what has been done in other upland areas and any lessons learned in the process. So let's all keep open minds as we listen to the individual speakers who have so kindly given up their time to prepare presentations and speak

to us today and look forward to some good-humoured debate during the question and answer sessions.'



Keith Bungay

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The event was chaired by Keith Bungay, formerly head planner for Dartmoor National Park, then deputy to the late Ian Mercer and eventually chief officer for Exmoor National Park Authority for 11 years. As chair of Europarc UK he developed links and exchanged experiences with European Protected Areas. He has been trustee and chair of the South West Lakes Trust for over ten years and, now living in Exmouth, maintains an active interest in planning, conservation and recreational issues in East Devon.

The first speaker was Dr Adrian Colston from the University of Exeter's Centre for Rural Policy Research. Adrian is a former National Trust manager for Dartmoor and previously for Wicken Fen in Cambridgeshire.



Adrian Colston

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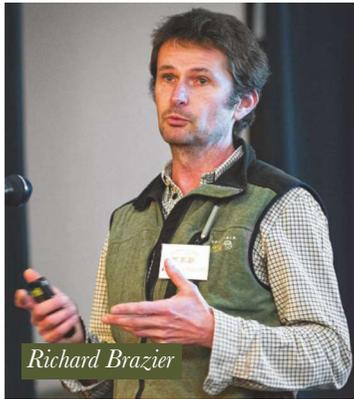
His PhD thesis was entitled 'Stakeholder Attitudes to the Narratives of the Dartmoor Commons' and he began by outlining some of the conflicts that arise from the many different claims made on the moor by different 'stakeholders' and the varied 'stories' that are told according to the focus of the teller: hill farming, wildlife, peatlands, historic landscapes and rewilding. Stories of over-grazing and under-grazing have been joined by others about re-wetting, re-grazing and now rewilding, and what Adrian described as the latest emerging narrative of 'meat, health and carbon' – and with it a possible threat to traditional pastoralism.

The re-wetting of peat attracts controversy, despite almost everyone recognising the value of peatland as a 'carbon sink'. Adrian's research includes interviews dating back to the 1990s and anecdotal evidence

confirms records showing that the moor is drier now than it was in the past. He quoted a hydrologist who noted that while many seek to restore Dartmoor to a specific historical period, a hydrologist will aim to restore a degraded area to a functioning landscape and wait to see what communities of plants and fauna emerge.

Regardless of developments in the relatively small areas of peatland restoration, questions remain as to how the rest of the moor should be managed. Issues include the dominance of *Molinia caerulea* or purple moor grass, stocking levels and declining biodiversity. Adrian said his perception was that 'none of the stakeholders are really happy, hill-farm economics are not profitable without tax-payer input, wildlife is in decline, archaeology is becoming enveloped and access to parts of the moor is now difficult and hazardous. One ray of hope, at least to some of the stakeholders, is the blanket bog restoration projects which are returning rare wildlife to the moors and creating an exciting new landscape'.

The second speaker was Richard Brazier, Professor of Earth Surface Processes at the University of Exeter and director of the Centre for Resilience in Environment, Water and Waste. He explained the importance of peat and described the science that has



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informed the peatland restoration project and the findings from mapping of the high moor. This has demonstrated the extent to which the peat has been affected by the digging of gullies, ditches and cuttings in the past, as well as the location of bare or sparsely vegetated areas. The work predicts that 2,900ha of peatland is 'significantly and directly ecohydrologically degraded' and only 360ha is 'functionally intact' though fragmented.

Since restoration, monitoring at Flat Tor Pan reveals that average water table depths have increased, as has permanent deep-water storage in the peat soil, and that total runoff from the monitored gully reduced by about 66%. While dissolved organic carbon concentrations remained the same post-restoration, the fact that runoff has decreased means that the total carbon load finding its way into water treatment works, where it has to be removed,

has also decreased. Moreover, the carbon in the runoff water seemed to have come from fresh plant litter rather than from deeper and older peat.

Five years on from restoration, findings show there has been no significant increase in CO2 being released, a noticeable increase in cotton grass and a decrease in Molinia. However, the higher water table promotes methane production by microbes in the soil; Richard said these emissions would typically level off and stabilise as the vegetation changes.

He concluded his presentation with slides showing the remarkable mapping tools that are now available, allowing researchers to map not only existing habitat but also changes to that habitat, down to details such as the automatic detection of commercial woodland and hedgerow management.

The third speaker was Morag Angus, South West Water's manager for the South West Peatland Partnership which operates across four sites: West Penwith, Bodmin Moor, Dartmoor and Exmoor. She began by describing the organisations – private, non-governmental and government, plus those representing farmers and landowners – that make up the partnership and the

funding available for the period 1998–2025: £9 million for capital works and £3.5 million for research and monitoring.



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Morag outlined the threats to the healthy functioning of peat, ranging from past drainage and peat-cutting works to burning, over-grazing, military activities, nitrogen deposition and climate change. She enumerated the resulting effects: increasing carbon emissions, poor water

quality, decreasing biodiversity, a proliferation of Molinia and obscuring of historic features. Stressing that this is not just a capital works project but a holistic approach based on hydrological restoration, Morag said that so far on Dartmoor, the project has restored 451ha, or 2.85% of the moor's peatland and that the aim of the next phase, ending in March 2025, is to restore a further 900ha.

Describing the planning of each phase of the work, she illustrated her talk with photographs of the wide-tracked vehicles used to get materials to sites. These include diggers whose tracks distribute their weight so efficiently that the pressure they exert is less than that of a human. There were also photographs of the use of blocks, bunds and dams made of either peat or timber sourced from Woodland Trust sites around Dartmoor; of eroded peat sides that had been reprofiled and before-and-after



Swaling on Dartmoor

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photographs showing water being held in previously dry ditches and gullies.

Results of monitoring on the project so far suggest there is an increase of breeding snipe and dunlin and a significant increase in the mean percentage cover of blanket bog species. At the same time, no signs of the snail that causes liver fluke have been detected.

Morag looked forward to more community engagement and communication, more use of local contractors and more wide-ranging research. She said the partnership was honest and open about how well the project was working, and interested to change, improve and adapt as the situation required.

At the end of the morning session, speakers took questions from the audience.

Q: Methane emissions are 80 times more dangerous in global warming than carbon. How might the Peatland Project be contributing to global warming through methane release and through carbon emission each time a digger moves peat to create bunds or reprofile eroded areas. Can you quantify your total carbon emissions?

A (Richard Brazier): This is not an easy question to answer. Wetland restoration is a matter

of short-term loss for long-term gain. We're looking ahead hundreds or thousands of years.

A (Morag Angus): We don't know our overall carbon footprint. A project in the north has done a carbon account and found that the main factor was staff and contractors travelling to the site. We will certainly do our own account.

Q: Are you doing any other hydrological projects on Dartmoor? For example, the level of the West Dart has dropped dramatically in recent years.

A (Richard Brazier): We are not assuming nothing else has changed. The work on Flat Tor Pan has very local effects and we don't say they affect river flow downstream. The Environment Agency is looking into this and seeing much more variability in rivers, rain and when it falls. We are monitoring in the Dart Valley with the EA where there are other natural interventions to slow and steady flows, to take the peaks off. Work is needed all the way down the course of rivers so that, in the future, adding many case studies together will give more information.

Q: What happens to the important edges of bogs?

A (Morag Angus): We are aiming at whole landscape recovery and increasingly looking at edges and nature

recovery in larger areas, valley mires and wet woodland up to peatland edges. Peat woodland may be useful at edges where peat is shallow and degraded. **A (Richard Brazier):** Small blanket bogs need protection and gentle transition zones rather than hard edges are important for increased biodiversity.

Q: Is there any bespoke modelling for Dartmoor?

A (Richard Brazier): In 2010 some modelling showed that by 2080 there will be no peat forming on Dartmoor without intervention and with continued climate warming. I don't know of any modelling that applies that to woodland and valleys but bringing back biomass increases resilience.

Q: Is there any monitoring of areas where Dartmoor is healing itself? In 1983 I photographed the last peat cutting and it's now difficult to find. I photographed a pristine site recently on Cut Hill.

A (Richard Brazier): Remote sensing work can show this over the three to four years it's been in use. But vegetation change doesn't show hydrological change. What may seem pristine may have had a metre of peat removed by cutters, so it may not be functioning in the same way as an untouched bog. It will be losing less carbon if it's covered, but that covering may

be Molinia, which takes longer to form peat than Sphagnum.

Q: The slant seems to be on the environment. Is there enough consultation so that the right long-term decisions are made? **A (Adrian Colston):** There is still not enough clarity regarding the future and it's least clear in respect of farming on the commons. We need to see a joined-up approach from the project that includes farming; hill farmers can deliver public goods.

In the afternoon session, the fourth speaker of the day was Kevin Cox, chair of the RSPB council in the UK. Kevin showed some dramatic images of the effects of climate change and drew our attention to the fact that the UK's three million hectares of peatland constitutes not only 10% of UK land but also 9–15% of the entire



Kevin Cox

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extant peatland in Europe. Peat stores far more carbon than do trees; but much of our peatland is degraded: while 23% is in a near-natural state, 40% is eroded, heather or grass dominated, 18% is afforested, 14% is used for crops and grass and 5% is extracted.

Kevin showed a photograph of Black Tor pan alive with irises, bog cotton, bog asphodel, cross-leaved heath and sundew. He described how the poor condition of much peat has led to the loss of fauna, particularly birds, wondered whether Cranmere Pool, ‘the pool of the cranes’, might one day see cranes again and expressed concern over lapwing, curlew and golden plover numbers. Conversely, where peat was rewetted at Flat Tor pan between 2010 and 2018, dunlin breeding pairs increased from 16 to 24. All uses of peat, he said, should keep it wet and in the ground.

Kevin then described two projects where the RSPB is involved in other parts of the UK. At Dove Stone in Derbyshire, the charity has been restoring peatland in partnership with United Utilities since 2010, helping to create 15,000 dams of peat, stone and heather bales to hold and slow water, and to spread 750,000 handfuls/plugs of sphagnum moss across 750ha of peatland.

In the Flow Country of northern Scotland, the RSPB has been involved in massive efforts to reclaim peat bogs from commercial forestry since 1998. Kevin showed charts of restored water tables and improved carbon sequestration, interspersed, as was his entire presentation, by beautiful images of birds.

He concluded by aiming to debunk what he called major myths associated with restoration projects on Dartmoor. He argued that the moor needed only a limited number of suitable species of tree; that heather moorland is not as important as some people believe; that burning on peat is ‘part of the problem, not the solution’; and that rewetting, far from killing vegetation as some believe, only kills *Molinia*, bracken and gorse while encouraging the establishment of peat-forming plants. ‘Wetter is better’ was his message.

The fifth speaker was Martin Gillard, historic environment officer for the South West Peatland Partnership. He described his work as the assessment of areas scheduled for re-wetting, using old records and on-site surveys, in order to protect historic features. He pointed out that ‘historic’ is a complicated term, encompassing some relatively recent remains

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Martin Gillard

of industries such as mining and quarrying. Even Phillpott’s peat passes on Whitehorse Hill were cut only in the early 1900s and were then modified in the 1960s by the military.

Conversely, peat erosion has resulted in the uncovering of previously hidden archaeological remains such as the Cut Hill stone row and the Whitehorse Hill cist. But Martin said that the ‘tens of thousands of tons of peat lost’ that resulted in the exposure of the stone row is a process that is still going on. Interest in the discovery of archaeological remains has to be balanced with the need to re-wet the peat.

Martin showed photographs from the Amicombe restoration area on the west side of the moor, where various archaeological features have been identified and therefore excluded from the work area. Drivers have GPS on their mobile devices and flags are also put out so that vehicles can be kept away. Elsewhere, sacrifices

are made, such as the edge of a tramway that was reprofiled in order to protect the rest of the area from erosion.

Additional funding for the Peatland Project means that a specific historic environment post will be created for Dartmoor. There will also be funds for monitoring and research.

The sixth and final speaker of the day was Geoff Eyre, a farmer, engineer and agri-businessman from the Peak District who illustrated his talk with photographs from 40 years of his own work on the uplands. Addressing the problem of rampant *Molinia*, he recalled the various methods he has used over the years to control it, including cutting, dessicating and burning. Evidently a natural inventor, he described a machine he designed to harvest heather seed, a bracken sprayer he modified to distribute the seed and the use of helicopters and soft-track vehicles in his quest to restore large areas of moorland.

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Geoff Eyre

Geoff expressed some reservations about efforts to re-wet areas. He said that, in his experience, water courses blocked with stone washed out in heavy rain that eroded gullies; and that wooden dams, where they held firm, had created water depths of up to five feet that then iced over in freezing weather. In hot dry summers, the gulleys dried out and cracked, so they didn't hold water the following winter.

In support of carefully controlled 'cool burning' of moorland, Geoff said only the flowers of heather are consumed while the stems survive, and that fire stimulates germination of the seed. Burning into gullies encourages the growth of heather that then stabilises the sides. Moreover, the peat is not damaged. In order to prove this, he had once hidden six £50 notes under moss during such a fire and retrieved them later, intact.

Geoff described how he had bought some land with over 400 acres of bracken and devised a 20-litre spray to treat the area with the systemic herbicide glyphosate. With this he could spray 100 acres a day from a soft-track vehicle, after which he burnt the bracken and found that its toxicity had left the soil which he could then stabilise by seeding it with sheep sorrel,

tormentil and bedstraw and then grow heather.

The presentation ended with a film that Geoff had made of the many different birds and other wildlife that thrive on his moorland.

At the end of the afternoon there was a short discussion with contributions from the audience on the question of whether enough effort and resources had been focussed on the features of Dartmoor's human environment, given that it is a sacred site. The Peatland Partnership say there have been numerous watching briefs for archaeologists to observe the diggers at work but that the cost of £200 per day, and the fact that no artefacts have so far been found, make it sometimes hard to justify and that it is therefore regarded as a mitigated risk.

The Dartmoor Society's acting chair, Alan Endacott, concluded the day, expressing satisfaction that the conference had successfully brought together the interests and views of many different interested parties – archaeologists, farmers and environmentalists – and said that it was vital that the conversations continued urgently, in order to ensure the best outcomes for Dartmoor and climate change, in a spirit of cooperation and communication.

The Dartmoor Society Annual General Meeting 2021

The Dartmoor Society's 2021 AGM was held on Saturday 14 August in Chagford's Jubilee Hall. Despite continuing concerns caused by the Covid19 pandemic, the meeting was well attended and the committee was delighted to welcome about 50 members to the event.

The business of the afternoon was preceded by a talk, entitled 'Dartmoor from a Public Body Perspective', given by Eamon Crowe, team leader for South Devon and Dartmoor at Natural England.

Eamon gave a whistle-stop tour through changes in the agri-environmental support system of the last 25 years and reflected on how much has changed in that time. Having worked in south Wales and the Peak District, he arrived in Devon to run Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs), thinking, he wryly recalled, that 'it would be easy to give money away'. In the course of his work here he has 'visited almost every farm on Dartmoor, walked almost every hectare, eaten humble pie and learned a great deal'.

Since 2011 there have been significant cuts in public service funds and Eamon contrasted the size of his 11-strong team in that year with 2018, when his staff was reduced to a single person. Notwithstanding such cuts, he observed that the work remains the same.

Looking at future prospects for Dartmoor, Eamon spoke of Natural

England's involvement in the Peatland Restoration Project; of the new Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs) currently being gradually introduced that will prioritise environmental and animal welfare outcomes; and of the development of a Nature Recovery Network (NRN), 'a national network of wildlife-rich places' that is part of the government's 25-year Environment Plan.

There were several questions from the floor, focusing on the difficulty for small farmers in dealing with the Rural Payments Agency, the future for young Dartmoor farmers and the knotty issues around stocking levels on the commons, management of Molinia, heather, gorse and water – especially the newly rewetted areas which Eamon acknowledged looked 'raw' initially but which he said would look normal after 'a little bit of settling down'. Eamon acknowledged the problems and the importance of supporting farmers and landowners in their roles as managers of the landscape; it was also clear that he had, as Alan Endacott summarised, 'an unenviable task' as a public servant trying to implement policies made elsewhere.



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Acting Chair's Report 2020-21

by Alan Endacott

The last time we met in person for an AGM was at Scorrington in April 2019, when our dear friend Tom Greeves stepped down as chair and his giant shoes have yet to be filled. When Tom gave his final chair's report, who could have predicted what was to happen subsequently but here we are, over two years later, finally able to meet friends old and new, in person here in Chagford.

We were due to meet here in April last year but had to postpone due to the first lockdown. The core business of the AGM had to be conducted remotely and this was a poor substitute for meeting face-to-face, so I warmly welcome you all here.

I would like to start off by thanking you, our members, for your continuing support, even through the lockdown

when we were unable to stage events. And I particularly want to thank my fellow executive committee members for all of their hard work and dedication in another challenging year, especially Annabel and Chris for bringing out two beautifully produced Newsletters, covering a range of topics to keep members interested and informed. Chris has also been a great help with his practical and technical support, not to mention his wonderful photographic skills and local knowledge. Along with committee members Liz Miall, Bill Murray and Caya Edwards, a great deal of time and effort went into inspecting and documenting peatland restoration and South West Water's 'Upstream Thinking' activities across the moor and liaising with the Peatland Partnership over detailed concerns.

Our hon treasurer Tom Orchard and membership secretary Wilf Hodges have continued to keep the Society ticking along with their usual efficiency and enthusiasm. Our membership seems to be going from strength to strength, thanks to Wilf's diligence and efforts especially by Chris Chapman to promote the Society and recruit new members.

We welcomed some new faces and a range of skills and experience to the executive committee during the year with the co-option of Bill Murray, Steve Alford and Gideon Shalom and we are very grateful for their input. We also welcomed back the ever-enthusiastic Caya Edwards to the executive after a short sabbatical and she very kindly took on the role of acting hon secretary, which has been a huge help. During the year, we have reorganised the way we do things by creating a set of sub-committees for specific activities and areas of interest. Currently these are events, merchandising, newsletter, planning issues, Peatland Partnership and Upstream Thinking, and hill farming, the latter drawing on the knowledge and experience of Layland Branfield and Steve Alford.

Recently we enjoyed our first two events in 15 months, both inspirational in their

way. The first was a visit to Challacombe to see the work of

Naomi Oakley and Mark Owen; and the second, a visit to the wonderful gardens of Wildside created by the visionary gardener Keith Wiley and his late wife, Ros. Other, postponed events are being brought forward and new ideas are in the pipeline thanks to an energetic and enthusiastic events sub-committee, consisting of Annabel Crowley, Bill Murray, Caya Edwards and Liz Miall, with assistance from the rest of the executive committee and volunteers, to whom I am very grateful.

Meanwhile, our work goes on behind the scenes. We are currently producing a position statement on climate change as it specifically relates to Dartmoor communities: suggesting local policies and action that can help to tackle some of the serious challenges we face but also highlighting areas where Dartmoor may be threatened by the unintended consequences of national policies. This will be published on our website shortly.

Like many people, I found the cessation of routine activities provided an opportunity to reflect on such issues but, of course, the core work of the Society continued as we read, discussed and commented on

a number of documents and plans relating to Dartmoor and watched as projects unfolded. In particular, we witnessed the expansion of peatland restoration works on our precious uplands with some dismay, when the scale, scope and what we considered to be overly intrusive methodology of the most recent project became apparent during the course of a number of visits to Hangingstone and Whitehorse Hills earlier this year. I'm not going to go into the details today but, suffice to say, we subsequently raised a number of specific concerns, several of which, I am pleased to say, were taken into account in the latest funding bid.

In an attempt to stimulate broader public engagement and debate on the subject of peatland restoration, we are staging a conference on 12 November in the Charter Hall, Okehampton, entitled 'Hallowed Turf: Perspectives on the Conservation of Dartmoor's Blanket Peat'. This will be an opportunity to hear more about the science behind it, the current methodology, the impacts on farming and wildlife and to hear about alternative approaches used elsewhere.

As always, good communication along with robust, constructive debate has been the key, and

the input and support of the executive committee has been crucial to our ability to speak with one voice. That's not to say that there hasn't been debate and I fully appreciate that we can't claim to speak for all of our members – we are a very broad church after all – but I firmly believe that we are right to study the detail of such plans and to ask pertinent questions.

As members of the Peatland Partnership, it would be too easy to simply rubber-stamp every proposal put forward.

So why do we stick our heads above the parapet? I admit that I have had to wrestle with my conscience when it comes to Dartmoor's part in efforts to tackle climate change and other issues that affect society as a whole. It sometimes feels like we are out of step with the times but, equally, should we not ask whether the pressures and demands of modern life are out of step with Dartmoor? We should certainly be prepared to listen and to respect the views of those who may have different visions for Dartmoor. One of our great strengths as an organisation is our willingness to stage events that encourage free and open debate and activities that enable our members and others to learn more about a wide range of Dartmoor-related topics. But there are occasions when we are called on to

comment on issues that affect the very fabric of our beloved moor.

Simple opposition on principle is all very fine and laudable but I see our role as an independent body, not just to call things out when we feel it is wrong for Dartmoor or its communities, but, wherever possible, to try and bring parties together to find workable ways forward. This is, of course, all the more difficult where national agendas are involved and then it is our duty to stand up for Dartmoor and to try to ensure that decision-making is based on sound, evidence-based reasoning. This not only applies to the moor's living, working communities today but also to its rich and unique cultural heritage, which is increasingly overshadowed by what has become known as its natural capital and carbon off-setting potential.

There are risks of remote, upland areas like Dartmoor

becoming commodities in an age of global trading in carbon credits, when many millions of pounds of public and private money are being thrown, often indiscriminately, at quick-fix projects to tackle climate change. We should all look at our individual lifestyle choices and the impact they may have on climate change. What we cannot and should not do is treat unique and special areas like Dartmoor as scapegoats to assuage our individual or corporate consciences. It is only right that, as an independent organisation, we shine a light on the work of agencies and companies to ensure that detailed proposals are appropriate to Dartmoor, whether or not we support the general principles behind them.

There is a growing tendency to remotely measure, categorise and computer-model the landscape and ecology. The science is pretty amazing but pays little regard to the

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Prehistoric reaves viewed from Combestone Tor

intangible qualities of Dartmoor; the aspects that make it so special and unique and the people who, over countless centuries, shaped the very landscape that we know and love. Many of our hill-farming families, my own included, can trace their ancestry back as far as their parish records go and recent ancient DNA research has suggested that they probably have their origins in the Bronze Age.

In other words, our forebears built the reaves, lived in the hut circles, worshipped in the stone circles and were buried under the cairns. It was our ancestors who built the longhouses, the thatched cottages and mile upon mile of sturdy hedge- bank and drystone wall and who filled the coffers to build our parish churches. It was they who created and nurtured the wildflower meadows, planted the trees, managed the coppices and

watercourses, bred the distinctive Dartmoor livestock breeds and provided the very conditions that encouraged the diverse ecology of wild flora and fauna that existed when Dartmoor became a National Park in recognition of all those special qualities 70 years ago.

What many still perceive as the wilderness of Dartmoor's uplands is, in fact, the result of thousands of years of cultural activity, especially the ancient practice of commoning, which resulted in a balanced ecology of upland pasturage until the middle of the twentieth century. I don't think that anyone would dispute that this balance has been upset since the creation of the National Park but there is less consensus on the causes. In simple terms, the finger could be pointed at the productivity subsidies of the Common Agricultural Policy which

encouraged over-grazing in some quarters, or the subsequent agri-environmental schemes which have seen stocking numbers drastically reduced and an over-dominance of Molinia, gorse and bracken, arguably having a devastating effect on biodiversity. There are, of course, complex issues involved and there are no quick fixes but we have to work together to try to restore that balance and provide a mosaic of different habitats to allow more wildlife into the equation without apportioning blame.

I have heard it suggested by armchair commentators that commoning as a way of life is obsolete and damaging to the environment, ecology, even our climate and that, by analogy, our hill-farming community should be treated like the coal-mining communities in the 1980s. Worryingly it was recently mooted in the House of

Lords that when commoners stand in the way of certain proposals, their ancient rights should be seized by compulsory purchase. Thankfully this was rejected by DEFRA. While there may be no immediate danger of this happening on Dartmoor, the adoption of that principle would be the thin end of a totally unacceptable wedge. I think it's fair to ask, if we were talking about the territories or way of life of Native Americans

or Indigenous Australians, would the narrative have been different?

In any case, I don't accept that our hill farmers are a barrier to tackling climate change or restoring ecological balance. Most farmers I know are enthusiastic conservationists as well as being proud of producing quality, locally-sourced food for our tables rather than imported food where we have little or no control over welfare or environmental standards. Overall, farmers are not the problem here but they are a big part of the solution, a point that I know is recognised by our speaker today. Potentially, there are great opportunities for farmers and society as a whole by embracing new schemes but not if they involve further reductions in stocking levels across the board. That should be obvious to anyone who has witnessed the vegetational changes on many commons since the foot and mouth epidemic of 2001.

My approach has always been to encourage open and constructive dialogue on all the practical as well as conservation and economic issues. Nobody understands the moor better than the hill farmers who are inextricably invested in the landscape over many generations. Not only have



Highland cattle on Shapley Common

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they spent their whole working lives out there in all weathers, observing the changing moods and faces of the moor but most will have received the collected wisdom of their forebears and can tell you more about long-term vegetation and climatic changes or erosion events in their patch than any computer model, if you are only prepared to listen to them.

As we face the prospect of our precious National Park being run by a single, national landscape service, as recommended by Julian Glover's Landscapes Review of 2019, I fear that the individualism and particular character of Dartmoor and its people will be watered down still further by centralisation

and that Dartmoor will be seen mainly as a carbon sink, a wilding experiment or an adventure playground for an increasingly urbanised population, rather than the unique working and living environment it has always been.

All of these different interests may be perfectly valid in their own ways but must be handled with care and a sound perspective; and that is where our combined experience of Dartmoor comes into its own. It's not that we refuse to accept change, or fail to recognise scientific research or the potential benefits other approaches to managing parts of the Dartmoor landscapes and our peat bogs can bring. However, it's all too easy to go along with fashionable



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The Mortimore family bringing their cattle up to spring pasture near Chagford

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Frank Phillpotts peat pass on Whitehorse Hill, flooded by the Mires Project, photographed 5 February 2021

dogma and to ignore tradition or genuine innovation. As individual members of the executive committee, we give countless hours of our time keeping abreast of the latest science and scrutinising proposed projects on an area-by-area basis. Sometimes we feel the need to stick our necks out to challenge these approaches, or to defend traditional practices when it would be far easier to say or do nothing. So, when we raise our heads above the parapet, it's not because we don't care about the environment or future generations, it is because we do – deeply.

Accurate historical perspective is important; but there is no point in acrimonious debate

about what has gone wrong or who is to blame. The most important thing is what we do about it, together. Whether we like it or not, we have to find compromises and solutions based on broad consensus and that means listening to and respecting other, well-informed points of view. We have all been through a tough period one way and another and society as a whole is at a critical crossroads. We are so very fortunate to live where we do but we are not immune to all the problems facing our world. So let us remain open-minded and constructive but most of all, be thankful that we share a love for the wonderful gift of Dartmoor and ensure we pass it on to the next generation in a better state than we find it now.

Minutes of the 23rd Dartmoor Society AGM 2021

Committee Members Present: Peter Beacham, Alan Endacott, Tom Orchard, Wilf Hodges, Chris Chapman, Bill Murray, Gideon Shalom, Annabel Crowley

Apologies: Liz Miall, Caya Edwards, Layland Branfield, Steve Alford, Sue Andrews, Pat Read, Alison Watt, Tim Sandles.

Minutes of 22nd (2020) Virtual AGM: (previously posted on the DS website)

Chair's Report: See previous pages

Treasurers's Report: (circulated) Q: Why was £1,361.01 transferred from the Research Fund current account into the current account? **A (Tom Orchard):** In order to have fewer 'pots' and make the money easier to manage.

(Alan Endacott): We intend to encourage research and are actively looking for ways to get the Research Fund used. We hoped that Colin Wakeham would apply for support with his research at Burrator but he has withdrawn.

Membership Report: (circulated) Wilf Hodges added thanks to DS members, and observed that 'we grow older while technology grows younger', hence the need to keep in touch with members by email.

He explained the situation with data protection legislation and his efforts to use the most secure mailing system.

Election of Officers and other Executive Committee Members: Caya Edwards, Annabel Crowley, Layland Branfield, Bill Murray, Gideon Shalom, Steve Alford, all unanimously elected.

Election of Independent Examiner of Accounts: Simon Murray & Co proposed by Tom Orchard, seconded by Tom Greeves

Proposal: Chris Chapman described a proposal to replace the thrice-yearly Newsletter with a combination of emailed news sheets (or posted where email not available) and a printed annual review. This would address the need to contact members immediately about events, bookings, cancellations etc. The vote in the room was inconclusive, so the decision was postponed and members will be consulted again on the matter at a later date. All Newsletters have been scanned and archived.

AOB: The cancellation of Jim Causley's evening and the date of the forthcoming conference were noted.

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Presentation of the 2020 Dartmoor Society Award to Tom Greeves

Our special guests at the 2021 AGM were Tom and Lis Greeves. Tom was the recipient of last year's Dartmoor Society award and Peter Beacham, our president, was at last able to present a beautiful platter, made by Moretonhampstead potter Penny Simpson and decorated with the three hares motif.

We were to have presented two Dartmoor Society awards, as Tim Sandles is the recipient of the 2021 award for his pioneering website 'Legendary Dartmoor'. Unfortunately, Tim was not well on the day and we look forward to presenting him with his award on another occasion.

The presentation speech by our acting chair, Alan Endacott, is reproduced below: 'Most of you will know the recipient of the 2020 Dartmoor Society award personally and everyone will know of his massive contribution to Dartmoor over the past half-century. Tom founded the Dartmoor Society with his wife, Lis in 1998 and was chair from then until stepping down in 2019. Had he not instigated the Dartmoor Society Award himself, he would undoubtedly have been awarded it many years ago!

'Plymouth born, Tom studied archaeology at Edinburgh in the early 1970s and went on to attain his PhD on the Devon Tin

Industry 1450–1750 at Exeter in 1981. He became the foremost authority on the subject from then on, chairing the Dartmoor Tinworking Research Group from 1991–2001.

‘His Devon-wide knowledge came to the fore as honorary editor of the Devonshire Association from 1995 until 2004. Between 1985 and 1990 he was responsible for the wonderful national Parish Maps Project and, from the year 2000, forged international connections with research on the fascinating Three Hares Project as far away as China. He has worked on various other archaeological and community projects around the country and for many years has led discovery holidays to the Isles of Scilly. He and Lis now reside in deepest Cornwall in Penzance.

‘But it is Dartmoor that has been, and remains, one of Tom’s principal passions. After a spell as Sites and Monuments Officer for the Devon Committee for Rescue Archaeology from 1976, Tom became the Dartmoor National Park Archaeologist from 1979 until 1985. He has been a freelance cultural environmentalist since 1990, working on a wide range of projects.

‘Tom has written prolifically over the past 50 years, especially on Dartmoor subjects and must have

contributed more to the corpus of Dartmoor literature than any other living writer. His personal bibliography stretches to 26 close-spaced A4 pages. Many of his writings have been in periodicals and regional newspapers, reaching a wide audience and influencing public opinion in the process. His academic writing is extensive and extremely well-researched and he has, quite reasonably, expected similar standards in policy writers and decision makers. It’s fair to say that they have rarely lived up to his expectations.

‘Tom demonstrated meticulous attention to detail and diligence when it came to following plans and developments affecting the moor, during his 22-year term as chair of the Society, and he does so still, even though living ‘abroad’ in Cornwall. He has certainly kept people on their toes and hasn’t suffered fools gladly! At the same time, he is a warm, caring man with a rare empathy for the extraordinary ‘ordinary’ people of Dartmoor, past and present. He was fortunate enough to have been able to speak to the last of the Dartmoor miners and many with knowledge and experiences of farming and small-scale industrial enterprises going back to the nineteenth century. His researches tied very early photographs and documents to particular individuals, bringing

a human dimension to otherwise dry history.

‘Tom is a brilliant landscape archaeologist and his knowledge of Dartmoor’s prehistoric and medieval past is second to none, especially of the tin industry in the Middle Ages. If I had to pick one discovery, it has to be the recognition and subsequent investigation of the early Neolithic stone row on Cut Hill, which has caused text books to be re-written regarding the period of the earliest ritual monuments, not only on Dartmoor but in the whole of the South West.

‘Tom is one of those visionary characters who instinctively knows the real value of things. He is a champion of vernacular architecture and has ensured the survival of several unique buildings and structures, once considered of no value due

to their relative late date. He has championed sustainable developments like the Steward Wood community and the rights of commoners, local democratic representation on the National Park Authority and many other causes over the years. As a fitting swan-song during his final year as chair, Tom organised the Dartmoor Resonance Music Festival, a wonderful week-long celebration of music and performance from across the music spectrum and the human timespan of the moor, from the Bronze Age to the present day - and wrote the book to accompany it!

‘In short, Tom has given countless hours of his life to Dartmoor and its communities and this dedication thoroughly deserves recognition through the presentation of the 2020 Dartmoor Society Award.’

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Eamon Crowe addressing the Dartmoor Society AGM

Calendar of Forthcoming Events 2022

The Creation of Burracombe • Parish Hall, Meavy, Yelverton PL20 6PJ • Thursday 24 March 2022 • 7.30 pm

The Dartmoor village of Burracombe is the creation of author Donna Baker, who writes under the name of Lilian Harry. She has written 12 books in this series as well as historical novels and works of non-fiction under her own name and as Nicola West.

Donna will be talking about how she created Burracombe and some of the characters who appear in her books. Meavy Parish Hall is the perfect venue for this meeting, set as it is within the area of Dartmoor that was the inspiration for the series.

Copies of Donna's books are available from booksellers and some will be available on the night at reduced prices, for cash only. The proceeds of the day will be split between The Brain Tumour Charity and the Dartmoor Society.

Talk, tea and biscuits: members and non-members £5 each.

Please book online or by telephoning Bill Murray on 01647 231297 by 18 March at the latest.

Annual General Meeting • Village Hall, Station Approach, South Brent TQ10 9JL • Saturday 7 May 2022 • 2.00 pm

The presentation of the chair's report by Alan Endacott will be followed by the election of officers and executive committee members

and the approval of the accounts. We have two Dartmoor Awards to present. The 2021 award went to Tim Sandles for his website, Legendary Dartmoor and we are delighted that Tim is travelling down from Wales to be with us, receive his award and talk about how the site began and has evolved.

The Sticklepath and Okehampton Conservation group, StOC, are the recipients of this year's award, for the conservation work they have undertaken at many locations around north Dartmoor over the last 30 years.

There will then be an opportunity for members to informally ask questions and make suggestions to the executive committee regarding the future of the Dartmoor Society.

As always, tea and cake will be served at the end of the meeting. There is no charge but please reserve your place by booking online or by telephoning Bill Murray on 01647 231297, by Monday 2 May at the latest.

An Evening Beaver Watch at Rewilding Coombeshead • Upcott Grange, Broadwoodwidger, Lifton, Devon PL16 0JS • Wednesday 25 May 2022 • 6.00 pm

Derek Gow, the founder of Coombeshead Rewilding Project, will talk about the beavers that he has introduced on his land. We will then go outside to watch the

creatures in action. There are plans to reintroduce the Eurasian beaver to Dartmoor. Derek is also active in maintaining the populations of endangered native species such as the water vole and harvest mouse.

More information about this project can be found on the website rewildingcoombeshead.co.uk and in the book *Bringing Back the Beaver: The Story of One Man's Quest to Rewild Britain's Waterways* by Derek Gow, published in 2020.

The event will last about four hours. There is a limit of 25 on the numbers, so book early if you would like to come along. It is wet and muddy in the beavers' area so you will need to wear wellies and suitable clothing. Suggested other items to bring are binoculars, camera and torch.

Members only, £20 each. Please note, no dogs. Book online or by telephoning Bill Murray on 01647 231297.

The Belstone Botanical Walk • Meet at Belstone Village Hall car park EX20 1RB • Saturday 16 July 2022 • 9.15 am – 5.00 pm

In July 1905 a botanical walk took place from Belstone to the heights of High Willhays and Yes Tor, returning to Okehampton railway station. A record was kept of the interesting plants that the party encountered on their journey. On Saturday 16 July, the Dartmoor Society will re-trace the moorland path of this walk to see if we can identify at least some of the flowers and grasses that were found in 1905.

Starting and finishing in the village of Belstone, this will be quite an arduous hike. You will need walking boots and suitable clothing. Walkers who prefer not to climb the tors can search out and survey the flowers in and around the area where we will stop for lunch.

We hope that we will be able to record sight of the following species: marsh St. John's wort, bog asphodel sundew, pale butterwort, small birdsfoot trefoil, heath rush, mountain groundsel, cotton grass, marsh speedwell, water crowfoot bog pimpernel, tawny sedge.

Please bring your own refreshments, there will be a stop along the way for a picnic lunch. Members and guests £5 each, to be collected on the day.

Songs of Dartmoor with Jim Causley and Bill Murray • Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown PL20 6SW • Friday 7 October 2022 • 7.30 pm

Numbers are limited to 100 members and guests, £10 per ticket including tea and biscuits. Please book online or by telephoning Bill Murray on 01647 231297.

'What lies beneath? Dartmoor's Sacred Uplands' • Village Hall, Gidleigh, Chagford TQ13 8HR • Wednesday 16 November 2022 • 7.30pm

Advance notice of the launch of Chris Chapman's latest film. Members and guests only, please consult the website nearer the time for further details, or ring Bill Murray on 01647 231297.



Christabel White step dancing at Chagford Show 2019

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Dartmoor Step Dancing

by Lisa Sture

The Dartmoor Society since its inception has been a great supporter of the Dartmoor Folk Festival, held every year in the village of South Zeal, writes Bill Murray. One of the most popular features of the festival is the Saturday afternoon Dartmoor step dance competition. Lisa Sture, who has been the competition champion on several occasions, has been researching the history of step dancing in Devon and her paper ‘Devonshire Step Dancing: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow’ has now been published. With her kind permission we include below some extracts that relate to the Dartmoor tradition.

By the 1970s, this unbroken tradition had almost died out, with only a handful of the generation born in the early twentieth century, who remembered the days when step dancing flourished, still dancing. We know most about step dancing in Devon from the dancers and communities on and near to a high area of moorland in the centre of the county, called Dartmoor. In the period during and following World War Two, influenced by popular movies

coming to Britain from the US, new forms of dancing and entertainment became fashionable and step dancing increasingly lost its popularity as a pastime and entertainment.

In the 1970s, in fear that the local entertainment traditions would die out, Bob Cann, a step dancer and musician from Dartmoor, started to teach step dancing and broom stick dancing workshops, both locally and

as he travelled around England playing for dances.

In 1977 he started an annual folk festival, the Dartmoor Folk Festival, particularly to both showcase and revive these local entertainment traditions. For the first few years, there was a step dance workshop where everyone who could dance, or who had attended the festival dance workshop, was encouraged to display what they could do. By 1984, encouraged by others teaching classes and the number of dancers increasing, Bob organised a competition in the style of the old competitions, on a low pedestal on top of a wagon. Since then, this competition has continued annually, providing an anchor for the tradition to survive.

It appears that in the past, there was greater variation and individualism than we currently have in our stepping ‘gene pool’. The tradition continues with only a small range of steps that have been passed on from two dancers from the previous generation (Bob Cann and Leslie ‘Les’ Rice) supplemented by variations that have occurred in transmission since and from intended embellishments. In the past, there weren’t set steps, but there was a definite style that was considered acceptable and recognised locally as ‘Devonshire step dancing’. Although, when the older dancer Dickie Cooper commented on Les Rice’s dancing, there was a hint that even this style may have changed.

Research in the British Newspaper Archive reveals step dancing in almost every county of England. Records for

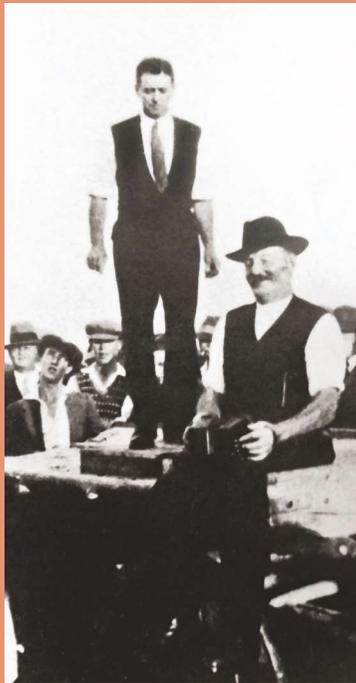
step dance competitions can be found for the neighbouring counties of Somerset and Cornwall, and references to the performance of step dancing can be found, not just in Devon, but also in the neighbouring county of Dorset. Devon newspapers also carried articles that mentioned step dancing in London and in Bristol. Devon theatres advertised step dancing acts from all over the United Kingdom and beyond and so it is clear that step dancing was not a Devon-only activity, it was a countrywide tradition.

The Annual Sports Day at Whiddon Down held the most popular step dance competition in the North Dartmoor area with, reportedly, up to forty competitors. Although there is no film footage of the champion Albert Crocker dancing, there is an eyewitness description of him step dancing with a few others in Whiddon Down on Sports Day. The writer initially describes step dancing as ‘an exceedingly rapid and apparently complicated style of dancing’ and approximates it to the Irish Jig and the Tyrolese ‘Schuh-plattling’. He goes on, ‘in August of this year I had the pleasure of attending the village sports at Whiddon Down. There were refreshment stalls and a tea tent, and the amusements consisted of various games of skill, such as throwing rings for prizes, various races, high jumping, skittle-bowling for a pig, and a step-dancing competition. The dancing was skilfully executed on a box only 2 or 3 ft. square placed on a wagon in the centre of the field. The “fiddler” Mr. Cann was an expert performer of old dance tunes on the concertina, humming them to himself the while, and playing

with half-closed eyes. At my request, Mr. Albert Crocker, accompanied by the "fiddler", kindly performed several rapid step-dances with great vivacity and a high degree of skill, on the pavement opposite the inn in the middle of the village, various other men stepping forward from time to time from the knot of onlookers by the smithy, to take their turn in the dance. The scene presented a true picture of Old English life.' An interesting footnote adds, 'Step-dancing consists mainly of rapid footwork and what is virtually "clog-dancing." The body does not alter its position, and the arms hang by the sides until the climax of the dance, when the sides and feet are vigorously slapped, and the right leg thrown forward to be brought back with a smart stamp of the foot at the final

chord.' George Cann (b. 1875) worked as a horseman on a farm and was the uncle of Bob Cann.

Traditionally, dancers would not have had special dance shoes, they would dance in a pair of shoes or boots that they already possessed – and they may have only possessed one pair of footwear. If you worked in the fields or in a quarry in Devon, you would wear nail or hobnail boots. Other shoes were originally leather-soled, and when Blakeys and segs (small metal plates) were invented, they were commonly nailed into the heels and/or the toes of the footwear to slow down the rate of wear of the leather. Then, hard plastic soles were introduced, and these also made a good sound for dancing.



The earliest photograph of step dancing in Devon: Albert Crocker (b. 1885), accompanied by George Cann playing at the Whiddon Down Annual Sports Day step dance competition, 1932. Albert won many competitions in the area and was classed as a 'champion step-dancer', holding 'several medals he had won dancing at fairs in the district'. His winning 'double backstep' was recounted with admiration by the younger dancer Les Rice.

He would travel round villages competing at the various fairs and sports days, as the prize money for step dancing was good and would have been worth travelling for. He also welcomed 'engagements as an exhibition dancer'.



To date, the earliest record of a step dancer in Devon is of Mrs Jane Arscott (seen here with Father Gambier Lowe), who lived in Throwleigh on the northern edge of Dartmoor. She was born in 1827 and died in the same area, at the age of 94, in 1921. It is reported that 'she had great accomplishments and when well over 80 would do her step-dances and broom-dance very gracefully in the Barn on gala occasions, holding herself very upright and keeping that set expression of face meanwhile which is peculiar I think to all step dancers'.

In the last couple of decades of the twentieth century 'trainers', casual shoes with rubber or plastic soles, became popular, along with many other new, soft-soled shoes. These are not good for percussive dance and so now dancers generally wear shoes specifically chosen to step dance in. The shoes that make the clearest and loudest beats are tap shoes, but these have not been favoured in the tradition because they were seen as possibly giving an advantage, and so viewed as unsuitable to wear for the competition. However, since 2007, hobnail boots have been reintroduced to the tradition and a number of dancers favour them.

In a competition, there are three aspects that are judged: timing, complexity of steps, and style; you are disqualified if you fall off the board. Without elaboration, it can be said that timing is critical, and there is a local saying that the dancing has to be 'every nail

knocking'. When it comes to style, Bob Cann and Les Rice considered an upright stance with arms relaxed by the sides, looking ahead rather than at your feet, to be the basis. There was a tacit knowledge of what was considered the 'local style'. The steps are judged on their complexity and whether they fit well with the rhythm. The steps that were taught by Les Rice and Bob Cann, along with video footage we have are all based on heel, toe and whole foot beats, without either tap-style or clog shuffles (although Les Rice did perform a step he called 'the box step' where he shunted forward and back on both feet). The steps were generally performed low to the ground, and on the spot. When tap dancing steps, or other steps, were offered that stood out from 'the style', they were not well regarded.

The Dartmoor Folk Festival will take place this year over the weekend of 5-7 August 2022.

Legendary Dartmoor

The 2021 Dartmoor Society Award was given to Tim Sandles (a Dartmoor Society member) for his website **Legendary Dartmoor**. Tim was unable to join us and receive the award at the time of our 2021 AGM, so we are looking forward to presenting it to him at this year's AGM in May when he will be in conversation with Bill Murray about the website's origins and development.

Legendary Dartmoor is a website full of character and diversity – a refreshing change from the corporate-style websites that have become normal. It is independently produced and able to flourish through Tim's energy and enthusiasm and with voluntary donations from its readers.

Tim has been gathering information and making it available online since 1997. There is always something new to read and more than 1,000 pages of fascinating facts and

anecdotes arranged in an easily accessible way. Around 40,000 people per month turn to this online resource for well-researched stories, facts and folklore. **Legendary Dartmoor** has a Facebook page with 4,000 followers and a quarterly free newsletter that goes to 1,000 recipients who keep in touch with what is happening on Dartmoor from across the globe. Tim's knowledge of the history and archaeology of Dartmoor is the backbone of this site. www.legendarydartmoor.co.uk.

Richard Hull
Sean Lezni Jeremy
McKnight Derek
Mortimore Judith
Oakes Michaela
Reddaway Mike
Rego Stephanie Reiss
Gerard Rice
Georgina Sanders

Charles Scott Dr
Len Seymour
Geri Skeens
Nadine Stuart
Yvonne Sutton
Stephen Szytko
William Wedlake
Tony Whitehead
Dawn Williamson
John Winckler

Membership Matters

Dartmoor Society Climate Change Statement

The issue of climate change has climbed so high on the international agenda that it is sometimes difficult to see how we might make a difference as communities or individuals. Undoubtedly global action needs to be taken swiftly; but there are many 'quick-fix' policies and commercial carbon-offset schemes around that could inadvertently do more harm than good, and it is crucial that their impact on special areas like Dartmoor is considered carefully and at a local level.

We have commented on a number of plans and policies over recent years, with specific regard to local issues thrown up by climate change. We are conscious, however, that these don't necessarily reflect the views of all our members, or capture other innovative and constructive ideas that might be relevant to Dartmoor.

Consequently, we have gathered together in a single document a

number of previous comments, along with some fresh ideas, as the basis for discussion. This will soon be posted on our website and you will be invited to have your say. If you don't have access to the internet, please feel free to request a hard copy. Your comments will subsequently be published on the website and taken into account in any future public consultation exercises, so we would be grateful for your input.

Since publication of the last Newsletter, we are delighted to welcome 37 new members to the Society:

Crispin Alford
Jacqueline Barrett
James Brown
Amelia Childs
Tessa Clarke
Adele Dawson
James Daymond
Stephen Durney
Tim Ferry

Katie Finn
Alan Francis
John Francis
Beth Frangleton
Vanessa French Liz
Fulton Charlotte
Greenaway Carolyn
Hillyer and Nigel
Shaw

The Dartmoor Society

*An independent voice for those who find
Dartmoor a source of livelihood or inspiration*

President: Peter Beacham OBE | 01392 435074

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Chair | Vacant

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