



The
Dartmoor
Society

Newsletter

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Introducti on

*Dear Friends,
by Bill Murray | Chair*

2023 marks the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the Dartmoor Society and up here on the moor, many things have changed since 1998. Over the years, commentaries on these changes have appeared regularly in local and occasionally national media but none has received more publicity than the High Court judgement on 13 January 2023 of Sir Julian Flaux in the case of *Darwall v Dartmoor National Park Authority*.

The Chancellor of the High Court found that Section 10(1) of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985 does not confer on the public any right to pitch tents or otherwise make camp overnight on the Dartmoor commons. Any camping requires the consent of the landowner.

Within the Dartmoor Society, there will be members who welcome the decision to bring Dartmoor into line with all the other countryside access areas in England. However, I think most of us are sad to see the disappearance of what is in England a unique concession, enjoyed by so many outdoor enthusiasts, including many young people, over the past 37 years.

There can be no one who knows more about this subject than Kate Ashbrook and I would like to thank her for writing, at very short notice, our cover story, 'To camp or not to camp', which you can find on page 4 of this Newsletter.

In view of the importance of the wild camping debate, you will see in the Calendar of Forthcoming Events on page 36 that we have replaced the advertised Farmers Forum meeting with a Wild Camping Discussion. The venue, timings and cost for the meeting remain unchanged. I hope as many members as possible will attend this event. Please let me know if you would like to speak: my contact details are on the back cover.

We have the knowledge and expertise within our Society to advise on all matters relating to Dartmoor and in this Newsletter, in addition to Kate, I am grateful to Charlotte Faulkner for her article on Dartmoor Hill Pony research and to Adrian Colston for his piece on Dartmoor's temperate rainforests.

*The decision by the DNPA to seek permission to appeal the High Court judgement in the case of *Darwall v DNPA* has delayed the progress of the final version of the revised Dartmoor National Park byelaws. The whole process of revising the byelaws is laboursome and I recognise the resilience shown by DNPA officers and the obliging way in which they have worked their way through the consultation stages.*

On another matter, I'm sure you will be pleased to learn that Natural England now considers the Dartmoor Society to be an 'interested party' and an organisation worth contacting regarding matters that relate to Dartmoor.

The Dartmoor Society AGM will be held at the Bedford Hotel in Tavistock on Saturday 15 April. It is always a friendly occasion and I am very much looking forward to meeting you there and listening to Helen Booker, senior conservationist with the RSPB, talking about her work on Dartmoor.

The Dartmoor Society book stall will be at the AGM. During the past year we have been fortunate to receive two bequests of books, one from Paignton and another from Plymouth. We are always happy to collect books from donors so, if you have any to spare, please let me know. This year we have raised just under £500 from the sale of books and greetings cards. If there is anyone out there who has storage space and would like to take on this enjoyable and worthwhile enterprise, please let me know.

Bill Murray | Chair



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Kate Ashbrook

To Camp or Not to Camp?

by Kate Ashbrook

The jury is out on whether there is a right to backpack (or wild) camp on the Dartmoor commons. On 26 January the members of the Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) decided unanimously to appeal against the High Court judgement outlawing such camping without the landowner's permission (*Darwall v Dartmoor National Park Authority* [2023] EWHC 35 (Ch)). This ruling came as a shock and a surprise to many who had assumed that there was a right to backpack camping.

The Dartmoor Commons Act 1985 was a pioneering piece of legislation. Section 10 of the act states: 'the public shall have a right of access to the commons on foot and on horseback for the purpose of open-air recreation',

but it does not spell out exactly what 'open-air recreation' means – only to say what it does not include (and camping is not mentioned). Camping was not discussed by parliament at the time.

The action came about because the DNPA decided, post pandemic, to review the bylaws for the Dartmoor commons. The bylaws contained a schedule of areas, mostly near roads, where backpack camping was not permitted. In 2013 Alexander and Diana Darwall had bought Stall Moor common, part of Blachford near Cornwood. They objected to the bylaws, claiming that the right of access under the 1985 Act did not allow wild camping. The DNPA disagreed and the Darwalls applied to the court for a declaration in their favour. The High Court heard the case in December 2022 and on 13 January the judgement was published.

Sir Julian Flaux, Chancellor of the High Court, concluded that 'in my judgment, the meaning of section 10(1) is clear and unambiguous: it confers the right to roam on the commons, which does not include ... a right to wild camp without permission.' He considered that wild camping is not a 'necessary implication' of open-air recreation, 'wild camping is ... a facility to enable the person in question to enjoy the open-air recreation of hiking'.

But there are other interpretations, especially if one studies the legislation from which the 1985 act was drawn, such as the National Parks and Access to

the Countryside Act 1949. Let us hope that the appeal court will grant leave so that these arguments can be addressed.

This is now far more than a local issue – the rally of more than 3,000 protesters at Cornwood on 21 January is testament to that. The challenge to backpack camping, which has always been a nominal trespass in the rest of England's uplands, has struck a chord in the public's collective heart. It has led to calls for greater freedoms and rights, and has demonstrated not only that those we have are fragile, but that we have no right to 92 per cent of England. This case has also highlighted the severe underfunding for national park authorities. The DNPA is acting in the public interest but it will need support from crowd funding because government starves our protected landscapes of the resources they need.

Dartmoor Society members will no doubt agree that Dartmoor is unique – and since 1985 until now it has been unique in having a right to wild camping. Long may that continue.

Kate Ashbrook is general secretary of the Open Spaces Society, patron of the Walkers are Welcome Towns network, vice-chair of the Campaign for National Parks, and of the Dart-moor Preservation Association, and vice-president of the Ramblers



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Bill Murray leading a circular walk with Dartmoor Society members

Summer Barbecue

by Bill Murray

The Dartmoor Society's annual barbecue took place on Saturday 13 August 2022 at Little Ensworth, the home of Carolyn and Bill Murray. The house stands on the edge of moorland in the parish of Gidleigh, between Chagford and Throwleigh. It was a lovely summer's afternoon and 31 members came along to enjoy the warm sunshine and to take part in two circular walks that were led by Bill before and after the food.

The first walk was across Moortown Bottoms. Passing an area known locally as Beara, we climbed Rocky Path and then through head-high bracken up the lower slopes of Buttern Hill to a large hut circle (Sheet SX68/78 658889) that is kept clear by Dartmoor National Park rangers. Continuing up the

hill, we came to Buttern Farm's enclosures and the dry Bradford Leat. At 12 miles this is one of the longest leats on Dartmoor, built to take water from the Wallabrook and Gallaven Brook, on the open moor near Wild Tor Well, all the way to the tin mines close to Spinsters' Rock in Drewsteignton parish.

To return to Little Ensworth we took the Buttern Farm lane, stopping off on the way to have a look at Great Ensworth, a delightful small medieval Dartmoor longhouse with adjacent stone outbuildings.

Now it was time to relax and chat with the appetising smell of burgers, sausages and kebabs in the air.

The second walk was inland and shorter than the first. We went along the road towards Shilstone Tor and then to the cattle grid at the top of the lane to Throwleigh, where there is a fairy garden in amongst the tangled roots of a large beech tree. A short distance down this road is Shilstone Farm, undoubtedly one of the finest

medieval buildings on Dartmoor. The owner, who was tending to his poultry in the yard, kindly allowed us to enter his property to view the wonderful frontage of the building.

We then took the footpath down to Ash Green and looked at a stone cave-like structure in a wall that is thought to have been a cache for tinnners' tools. Crossing a hidden packhorse clapper bridge, we walked along the Forder Brook for a short distance before returning to Little Ensworth along a section of the Mariners' Way footpath.

It is fair to say that 'a good time was had by all'. If anyone would like to host the event next year, please let us know.



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Charolais cross calf

Farm Visit to Lowertown, near Poundsgate

by Bill Murray

On the lovely afternoon of 17 September 2022, 31 Dartmoor Society members arrived at Hannah and Luke Fursdon's Lowertown Farm for the Society's annual farm visit. Lowertown lies just below Leusdon Church between Ponsworthy and Poundsgate, in the valley of the River Webburn, a tributary of the River Dart.

Luke's parents Miles and Gail Fursdon took over the tenancy of Lowertown Farm in 1972. Miles,

who had worked for the previous tenant, set about upgrading the outbuildings and the farmyard

to make the business viable. In 2009, Luke and Hannah took over the tenancy.

Today the farm's main source of income is rearing single suckler calves, in addition to which they run a retirement livery for 16 horses whose ages range from 12 to 30 years. Luke also works as an activity instructor at the Pixies Holt Outdoor Centre at Dartmeet.

Before starting our walk we saw some of the old shippens and went into the farmhouse – believed to be 400 to 500 years old – to look at the wonderful inglenook fireplace in the dining room.

We started with a steep uphill walk along the road, passing

the former Leusdon Lodge Hotel on the left and then the beautifully situated Leusdon Church on the right. Through a farm gate we entered Top Field, where a mixture of Friesian and Hereford cows were grazing contentedly with their calves close by. From this vantage point we could view most of the farm and, beyond, the hills of South Devon. Five church towers could be identified: Widecombe, Leusdon, Buckland in the Moor, Ashburton and Buckfast Abbey.

Luke showed us the header tank for the farm's water supply, which is fed from a spring on Sherberton Down. The water is acidic and he plans to change the cattle troughs in the fields from metal to concrete when they need replacing.

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Hannah Fursdon speaking to members at Lowertown Farm

There are 19 fields on the 95-acre farm, some with ancient names such as Great Broom, Little Broom, Long Bunes, Gratner, Homer, Yonder and Gribbles. It was suggested that one field called Glebelands would formerly have been owned by Leusdon Church. Another called Grassy had once comprised five fields. Several stone walls had been removed and the field used to cultivate spring daffodils.

The Fursdons' mixed herd of Friesian and Hereford cows are artificially inseminated with semen from Charolais bulls. The calves are kept on the farm for up to 14 months and then sold in one lot, at the Exeter Livestock Market.

Suckler cows can be expected to live up to 14 years, which is about twice the lifespan of dairy cattle. They are fed on arable grain feed in preference to concentrates. The life history of each animal is recorded and the information is accessible on an app on Luke's phone.

The farm has rights to graze stock on the Dartmoor commons and Luke and Hannah keep 28 ponies on the moor. These all have named passports and in addition are microchipped in the neck and hot-iron branded on the back right side. Ear tags are not used because they can be removed. After the Spitchwick Drift at the end of every September, when ponies are brought in



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from the commons, Hannah selects those with the potential to be trained for riding and others are taken to auction.

We walked down through two fields with wonderful views of the Webburn Valley and across to Eagle Rock. In the field behind the farm, the Fursdon family have planted an orchard with varieties of pear, plum, cherry and apple that were around in the 16th and 17th centuries and also a 'Sops in Wine' apple tree, a small dessert apple that can also be used for making cider.

Luke explained that he and his family carry out nearly all the farm work using their own machinery, seldom employing contractors.

The retirement livery side of the farm business is, for most of the horses, end of life care. Others however have come to Lowertown after being injured or becoming arthritic, or when their owners have moved abroad. The horses are clearly extremely well looked after, including having regular visits from the dentist and farrier.

We arrived back at the farm to find that Luke's mother Gail had prepared and set out a lovely traditional farmhouse spread for us in front of the stables. Delicious sandwiches, tarts, cakes and a cup of tea made a fine conclusion to the afternoon.



Bill Murray and Jim Causley at Halstow Farm

Songs of Old Dartmoor

by Caya Edwards

During the 1890s, Sabine Baring-Gould began a number of journeys with pen and paper across Dartmoor with appointments to meet people who knew the words and the tunes to traditional songs. Later he recorded that the recovery of these melodies, now held in Plymouth's museum, had been the principal achievement of his life. Dartmoor song culture, preserved through those meetings across the moor, has resonated through the decades; and modern audiences still have the chance to hear them and join in with just as much gusto and vitality as in former times.

The current enthusiasm for traditional music making on Dartmoor is in large part down to Jim Causley and Bill Murray, two of our best-known singers, song writers and entertainers.

Jim has won recognition far and wide but he is never far from his Devonshire roots and was recently commissioned to write a new song 'The Archangel's Way', celebrating the 35-mile

pilgrimage route from Brent Tor to Chagford. His evocative 'Pride of the Moor' is his homage to Dartmoor tin and tin miners with its haunting refrain 'We'll call and we'll listen for the cry of the tin', describing the 'cry' made when a tin bar is bent.

Bill Murray, the other half of this double act and current Dartmoor Society chairman, is well-known for keeping alive the tradition of unaccompanied singing on Dartmoor. He has spent the last 50 years absorbing folk tales and stories that document the ways Dartmoor people lived and how they recorded their lives in song. Many of these songs consist of a number of short verses each with a repeating chorus so that by the end of the song audiences have sufficient confidence to end with a resounding flourish.

The performance by Jim and Bill at the Two Bridges Hotel on 7 October 2022 was a sell-out. When Baring-Gould visited the inn – known at the time as the Saracen's Head – he recorded 'The Bell Ringing' from William Kerswell and noted: 'When sung by the old farmer over a great fire in the kitchens, his clear, robust voice imitating the bells produced an indescribable charm.'

Modern local folk heroes Val and Graham Lobb and Ben Campbell also performed on our memorable evening; no fewer than five accomplished musicians performing in the true Dartmoor tradition. From the ridiculously jolly to the terribly sad, their songs transported the audience to the parlours and even the bedrooms of Dartmoor folk, and to places and events of legend and folklore.

For more information about other performances or to find out more see www.jimcausley.co.uk/ • www.moorfolk.co.uk/ • www.dartmoorsociety.com • www.sbgssongs.org/ • www.vwml.org/



Jim Causley singing at the launch of The Archangel's Way in Belstone, 2021

The Bell Ringing

One day in October, Neither
drunken nor sober,
O'er Broadbury Down I was wending my way.
When I heard of some ringing,
Some dancing and singing,
I ought to remember that Jubilee Day.

Refrain

'Twas in Ashwater Town,
The bells they did soun'
They rang for a belt and a hat laced with gold.
But the men of North Lew
Rang so steady and true,
That never were better in Devon, I hdd.

'Twas misunderstood,
For the men of Broadwood,
Gave a blow on the tenor should never have been.
But the men of North Lew,
Rang so faultlessly true,
A difficult matter to beat them I ween.

Refrain

'Twas in Ashwater Town &c

They of Broadwood being naughty
Then said to our party,
We'll ring you a challenge again in a round,
We'll give you the chance,
At St Stephen's or Launce-
ston the prize to the winner's a note of five pound.

Refrain

'Twas in Callington Town
The bells next did soun'
They rang, &c

When the match it came on,
At good Callington,
The bells they rang out o'er the valleys below.
Then dd and young people,
The hale and the feeble,
They came out to hear the sweet bell music flow.

Refrain

'Twas at Callington Town
The bells then did soun'
They rang, &c

Those of Broadwood once more,
Were obliged to give o'er,
They were beaten completely and done in a round.
For the men of North Lew
Pull so steady and true,
That no better than they in the West can be found.

Refrain

'Twas at Ashwater Town
Then at Callington Town
They rang, &c



The Saracen's Head, now known as The Two Bridges Hotel, where Baring-Gould recorded 'The Bell Ringing' from William Kerswell in the 1890s



Dartmoor Society members at Schumacher College, Dartington

Visit to Schumacher College, Dartington

by Annabel Crowley

On Saturday 3 December a group of Dartmoor Society members visited Schumacher College, on the Dartington Estate. We were there to meet Isaac Dana, a student and outdoor guide from the USA, and join in a workshop entitled *'Protected Dartmoor, more than a park'* which he held as part of his post-graduate course.

Schumacher is a college for ecological studies, whether undergraduate, post-graduate or research degrees, short courses or practical agro-ecology residencies. The ethos focusses on practical engagement in the field and 'whole systems thinking that can help to break

down traditional disciplines and foster collaborations that reach towards a better understanding of the truth'.

With this in mind, there was an initial discussion in which DS members talked about farming on Dartmoor and Isaac told us

a little about the six-million-acre Adirondack Park, near his home in New York State. We then walked a short way from the college to a mature softwood plantation where we used rope to mark out 'mini parks' in very small areas and consider the interconnectedness of even the smallest landscape. This was followed by a walk down to the River Dart. Isaac later wrote that he appreciated 'the openness of members to learn and converse about the environment and communities near and far away' and that the open conversation and mutual respect 'reconfirmed a suspicion from my masters course already, that context ... matters just as well as the content of what is taught'.

During the afternoon I talked with another student, Rachael, who explained that she was taking the masters course in order to develop a way of thinking about the environment, sustainability and nature that could bring



Isaac Dana, a student at Schumacher College

change by crossing boundaries in culture, thinking and politics. She described how the course looked at 'deep mapping, creating layers of experience and knowledge to build bigger and more collaborative pictures' that encompass everything from the microbial to the planetary.

Schumacher's emphasis on equipping students with the tools to address social, environmental and economic challenges by prioritising the well-being of the planet is a hopeful message, for Dartmoor as for everywhere else in the world.



Schumacher students on a Chris Chapman guided walk



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Walking with Pooh Sticks

by Chris Chapman

If like me you have spent a lifetime walking the moors and acknowledge that you're on the last lap, as it were, this article will not only hit home but will probably come as no surprise.

Having recently reached the age of 70 I've accepted that, while my mind tells me that I'm still in my 30s and have gained enough wisdom to tackle nearly every adversity, my body has taken a different path and has begun to creak and groan.

One Sunday Liz and I were discussing going for a walk on Peter Tavy Great Common. It had been years since I last visited and I wanted a picture of the bullet-riddled standing stone and shattered circle that had been vandalised during World War 2.

In my defence I need to say that I wasn't wearing my hearing aids ...

Liz: *Do you want to try two sticks?*

Me: *Do I want to play Pooh Sticks?*

Liz: *I didn't say do you want to play Pooh Sticks, I said would you like to try TWO STICKS!*

Me: *No I wouldn't. I'm not an old man!*

I then listened to a brief and tender lecture on my partner's experience in the Alps, where apparently every one latches on to two walking poles to

steady themselves. With age I've learnt it's often best to appease so I agreed to give them a try. To my surprise I found them a great help. No stopping to catch my breath, no annoying stabs from my knees and hips and, what's more, so light that I could dangle them by their wrist bands and work my camera at the same time.

So, I'm now the proud owner of Pooh Sticks. They say pride comes before a fall, so I think I may have avoided that one; and just in case you were wondering, I have said thank you to Liz.

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Liz Miall



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Charlotte Faulkner at a pony drift

Dartmoor Hill Pony Research

by Charlotte Faulkner

The charity Friends of the Dartmoor Hill Pony aims to support and promote the ponies on Dartmoor to ensure their future, which in turn helps to protect the commons of Dartmoor that we love and cherish for so many reasons. Our ancestors' knowledge about grazing and the animals best suited to achieve wild farming has been passed on through the generations by word of mouth. However, the charity recognised that evidence and scientific proof were needed to confirm what our ancestors knew if this knowledge was to be recognised for the future. A chance meeting led to an opportunity to prove the theories and put scientific evidence in place.

In 2017 it was arranged for the DNA of 105 Dartmoor Hill Ponies from all four quarters of Dartmoor to be genetically analysed for the first time. The results showed that those 105 ponies were

recognisable as one equine type, distinct from all other equines. Dartmoor Hill Ponies are far from uniform in height, shape and colour (as represented in the charity's logo) so, until this initial study, the ponies'

value had been misunderstood and underestimated. We are learning that looks are not everything.

The same initial genetic analysis discovered that something wonderful had been hiding in plain sight on Dartmoor: it found that the semi-wild Dartmoor Hill Pony population holds internationally rare equine genetics. These two discoveries, by the Institute of Environmental and Rural Services at Aberystwyth University, led other researchers in the world of equine genetics to include the native semi-wild Dartmoor Hill Pony in their research for the first time.

An international consortium of equine genetics researchers analysed horses and ponies worldwide and discovered that 19th-century horse breeders had crashed the diversity of equine species across the globe by breeding-in their favoured Arab pony. Only a handful of equine types remain substantially free of Arab blood and they discovered that the Dartmoor Hill Pony is one of that handful found in Western Britain and Iceland. (The same team of researchers has gone on to use the Dartmoor Hill Pony genome as being archetypically British when investigating the history and genetic influence of the horse in America).

Now we have scientific evidence that Dartmoor Hill Ponies are very rare, the time has come to identify, map and conserve this genetic rarity in the moor's pony herds before they disappear due to our lack of understanding. Twenty years ago there were at least 7,000 Dartmoor Hill Ponies; now there are fewer than 1,000 breeding mares. Time is running out.

Dartmoor now knows it is responsible for an internationally important equine. In response, members of the Dartmoor Hill Pony Association and the charity Friends of the Dartmoor Hill Pony are working together on possibly the biggest genetic investigation of any UK native pony. We are so pleased that the Dartmoor Society has offered



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Taking samples of pony hair

support through its research grant scheme to help us preserve this part of our heritage.

The semi-wild Dartmoor Hill Ponies live in a natural state but are owned by Dartmoor commoners/hill farmers who use their ancient right to graze ponies, cattle and sheep on the moor's upland commons. In the annual pony drifts each autumn the ponies come in for health checks and the foals are weaned from their mothers.

Ponies are gathered from a huge area of the moor to a fenced yard usually the size of a school playground. Here they are sorted into individual herds and returned to the home farms. This is the time when we are able to take tail hair samples for genetic testing and register each semi-wild Dartmoor Hill Pony on a central register held by the DHPA.

In 2020, the DHPA and Friends of the Dartmoor Hill Pony worked with a genetics testing laboratory and Aberystwyth University to develop a new test which can both identify the existence of the rare genetics in a specific pony and also confirm a foal's parentage from mares and stallions in the herds. The initial findings from pilot 1 were so important that funding had to be found to continue with a larger pilot, to see if it was

possible to create a way forward to include all the Dartmoor Hill Pony herds.

Having proved the efficacy of the test, a team of vets, volunteers and pony keepers were able to identify 300 further ponies to test. At the same time each pony was identified with a microchip which, alongside the pony's brand, identified each pony and its owner. The research grant from the Dartmoor Society has enabled 24 genetic analysis tests to be run.

Further work is planned for the 2023 and 2024 drifts. If you would like to see a video showing one of the herds having their hair pulls and bloods taken, you can find it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jU6eJXdjpTEIt>.

We hope that completion of this project will lead to moorland farmers being rewarded for their skills so they will continue wild farming, using free-roaming animals, ponies, cattle and sheep to keep Dartmoor as we know and love it.

A debt of gratitude is owed to the Dartmoor Society who have supported the DHPA and Friends of the Dartmoor Hill Pony to help bring an exciting project to reality, important not only to Dartmoor but, as it turns out, nationally and

internationally. We look forward to being able to update the Dartmoor Society members in May, when all members are invited to visit our base at Corndonford Farm, near

Dartmeet (see page 36 for details of this visit).

Charlotte Faulkner is chair of both the DHPA and Friends of the Dartmoor Hill Pony.



Lascaux cave paintings depicting the same pony types found on Dartmoor



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Drizzlecombe Menhir and Giant's Basin, Dartmoor

Cultural Heritage and Archaeology Group

by Nick Fennemore

The Dartmoor Society is represented on the Cultural Heritage and Archaeology Group, which is a section of the Dartmoor Partnership Plan 2021–2026 (the Management Plan for the DNP). This group is one of seven – the others are Climate Change, the Next Generation, Nature and Natural Beauty, Farming and Forestry, People, and Communities and Business. These groups are to be the focus for the Partnership Plan over the next four years.

As we know, Dartmoor is internationally renowned as a rich cultural landscape, with evidence of thousands of years of human influence from the Mesolithic period to the present day. Archaeological remains range from Bronze Age cists, stone rows and hut circles to medieval field systems and the remains of tin-mining works.

We know the history and culture of Dartmoor is seen in its buildings, historic landscapes, towns and villages. The National Park is also rich in intangible cultural heritage, having many distinctive local traditions, festivals, markets and celebrations, customs and skills.

Dartmoor's cultural heritage is



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Prehistoric stone setting, Cut Hill, Dartmoor

threatened by climate change, lack of or inappropriate management and recreational pressures. It is imperative to identify and designate the heritage assets so that they can be more easily protected. If this can be done, our cultural heritage will have a positive

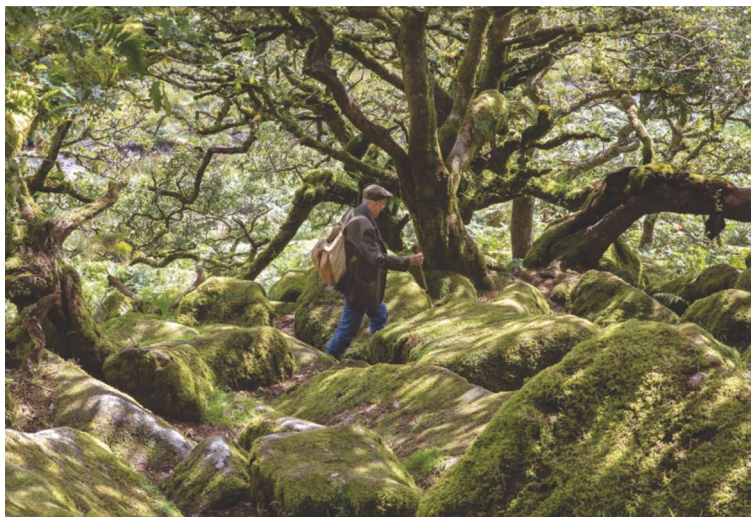
future. The hope is that people will come to value this cultural heritage, have a better understanding of it, care for it and, therefore, enjoy it!

As this group develops, I will give regular updates on its progress through our Newsletter.



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Neil Cole with Galloways, Phym Valley, Dartmoor



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Temperate rainforest, Dartmoor

Dartmoor's Atlantic Oak Woodlands

by Adrian Colston

In recent months there has been a resurgence of interest in what I used to call Atlantic oak woodlands thanks to Guy Shrubsole's excellent book *'The Lost Rainforests of Britain'*. I have often visited and historically have been responsible for the management of many of the remaining fragments of our temperate rainforests – they are magical but threatened places.

Guy's new book makes frequent reference to Dartmoor and its woodlands. One story that caught my attention was the re-birth of a temperate rainforest in Lustleigh Cleave following the decline of stock grazing by local commoners. The woodland seems to have regenerated of its own accord over the past 50 years or so and today is a

beautiful and wildlife-rich place – a place of hope perhaps?

In the Mesolithic period much of Dartmoor, barring the high tors and blanket bogs, would have been clothed in temperate rainforest. As the Bronze Age unfolded the first settlers began to clear the forests for agriculture, replacing the earlier

hunter-gatherer existence. Woodland clearance continued into the Iron Age, leaving Dartmoor as a place with only fragmentary areas of natural woodland, mainly on the steep slopes of river valleys in places dominated by granite rock fields.

Many organisations and individuals, including government, the Dartmoor National Park Authority, Moor Trees and of course Guy Shrubsole, are encouraging landowners and occupiers to plant more trees or allow them to regenerate naturally, to encourage wildlife and combat climate change by capturing carbon. Despite the financial incentives progress has been and is very slow. There is, however one exception to this trend.

On many of the commons around the moor and particularly on the fringes, natural regeneration is occurring. In some cases this is being encouraged by the owners and the occupiers of the land but mostly it is a direct result of the reduction in stocking levels on the moor since the 1990s. And therein lies the rub. Conservationists may welcome the return of the trees but hill-farmers see them as a consequence of changes in stocking and swaling practices and do not take kindly to their expansion. Different stakeholders

want different outcomes from the same piece of land, not a new Dartmoor story but one with a slightly different slant.

Looking to the future, the wildlife, heritage, traditions and hill-farmers of Dartmoor face many threats but there are also opportunities. Agricultural funding is in transition and details of the new Environmental Land Management Scheme, especially in the uplands, are still murky. However, I am an optimist and I think the general direction of travel is clear – the government wants to see environmental outcomes from its future funding programmes. Commoners are currently being encouraged to plan ahead and identify what public goods their commons can provide. With friendly dialogue, co-operation, adequate funding and consent, one outcome could be a modest expansion of Dartmoor's temperate rainforest in some places, done in a fashion that does not undermine the pastoral landscape or its economy.

Dr Adrian Colston is an Associate Research Fellow at the Centre for Rural Policy Research at the University of Exeter. He recently completed a PhD which investigated the conflicts between hill-farming and the environment. Prior to that he had a 35-year career as a conservation practitioner, most recently working for the National Trust on Dartmoor.



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Visit to the Peatland Partnership works on Prison Farm Estate

Peatland Partnership Update

by Bill Murray

At a Peatland Partnership meeting at Tor Royal, Princetown, on Tuesday 11 October 2022 we were given an update on the project's latest work, including a walk around the restoration works that have been carried out on the Prison Farm at Princetown.

The farm is run by Neil Cole and his brother Matt Cole who was with us along with representatives from the Dartmoor National Park Authority and South West Water who are managers of the project.

There were no works being carried out on the day but the excavation plant and the vehicles for transport were parked near the entrance to the site, which is close to the Fices Well ancient monument and the source of the Blackbrook River.

The managers explained that the excavators had been adapted to reduce pressure on the ground when digging. The buckets were fixed with tilt rotators and two excavators could work in tandem to reduce the amount of tracking.

The team working on this project are not local but have previous experience on other peatland restoration projects in northern England. Aiming to provide local employment, SWW has now purchased six

adapted excavators so that local contractors can tender for forthcoming works at Ockerton Court, using the SWW equipment rather than having to invest in specialist machinery themselves. SWW will also run training courses (including a video for archaeology), for the potential contractors to attend. The Prince's Trust is involved in the discussions.

The Prison Farm works involved forming arc-shaped bunds on the slopes of the hills that had in the past been excavated for the extraction of peat, much of which was used in the production of naphtha (a flammable liquid hydrocarbon mixture) at the works in Princetown.

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DNPA Martin Gillard discussing an artefact on the Prison Farm estate

Water levels are now being monitored and this will continue until March 2025. Dip wells, which can be recognised by pipes protruding from the ground, record the data every 15 minutes. This work is being carried out by Exeter University.

Vegetation surveys are also being made to record any changes in habitat. The surveyors set out a 10-meter square for a general analysis and, within that grid, a two-meter square for a more concentrated survey.

In places, a boundary ditch has been constructed using timber posts and two planks. The timber has been sourced locally from The Woodland Trust.

In the opinion of the farmer, it is now no more difficult to walk across the restored area than it was prior to restoration works. There are, however, some pools that are 120cm deep, so care needs to be taken. Matt Cole thought that since the restoration works, his stock preferred to graze in the wetter areas; but this might just be due to the very dry weather experienced over the period.

Martin Gillard, the DNPA Historic Environmental Officer, has carried out a thorough survey of the area. Exclusion zones have been set up and he has monitored the works as they proceeded.



Dunlin and teal, Hangingstone Hill, Dartmoor, June 2020

Dartmoor's Wetland Birds

by Caya Edwards

The birdwatching and preservation charity Devon Birds held a conference dedicated to wetland birds last November and I decided to go along and report back on the information relating to Dartmoor.

Peter Reay explained that much of what we know about Dartmoor wetland bird populations is based on data from the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) for which he is a local organiser and which is now in its 75th year. Of the 77 WeBS sites in Devon, 17 are on Dartmoor and each month volunteer counters record the

numbers of water bird species including wildfowl, grebes, cormorant, heron waders and gulls. These birds are drawn to artificial bodies of water such as reservoirs and to holes and scrapes that have formed in one way or another.

Jon Avon gave a fascinating talk about the Dartmoor Curlew

Recovery Project, where he is project officer for the Duchy of Cornwall. Run by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, the project aims to reverse the decline of curlew on Dartmoor. Work involves the rearing and release of young birds from eggs sourced from nests on RAF bases in eastern England, where they are normally removed to protect against bird and aircraft strikes. The young curlew carry identifying tags, in the hope that some will stay and breed.

Curlew are now all but extinct as a breeding species on Dartmoor. Drawing on 18 years of data, Jon explained that two sites have supported breeding pairs in the recent past but in the last few

years the nests have failed. Likely reasons for this are predation by crows or foxes and loss of habitat caused by a reduction in swaling (burning) and in the numbers of grazing animals on the moor.

Rearing curlew chicks from eggs is a complex operation and the chicks have five-star treatment in predator-proof rearing pens adapted to their growing needs from the moment they hatch to the time they are released. A total of 27 curlews were released in 2022 to join 33 tagged juveniles released in 2021, when the small wild population had its best breeding season for 16 years. More curlew re-introductions are planned this year.

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Dunlin

In partnership with local farmers, the landscape is managed to provide the required habitats. This includes flailing to cut long grass and the formation of scrapes in the ground to provide shallow pools. Not all birds and other animal species and plants on Dartmoor benefit from short turf but certainly this is one bird that does.

While few curlews appear to be breeding on Dartmoor at the moment, dunlin seem to be slowly gaining ground and photographic evidence suggests that the increase in shallow bodies of water resulting from peat restoration are attracting

them. During the lunch break we saw still photographs by Dartmoor Society member Mike Sampson, taken by movement-sensitive cameras, of dunlin chicks recently fledged on Dartmoor at some of these sites.

The morning session was chaired by Tim Frayling, Marine Ornithology Team Leader at Natural England and the afternoon session by Malcolm Burgess, Principal Conservation Scientist at the RSPB Centre for Conservation Science and an Hon Fellow at Exeter University. The room was full of the people who organise and take part in 'citizen science'

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Fledged curlew, Emsworthy Gate, Dartmoor

and this was a real insight into the ways that data is gathered through WeBS and how this informs conservation initiatives

designed to encourage breeding and visiting birds to our wetland habitats, including inland areas such as Dartmoor.



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Headstarted curlews, four weeks old



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Rainwater gauge, Dartmoor

Recording Birds and Rainfall on High Dartmoor

by Caya Edwards

Back in 2019, the Dartmoor Society's conference 'The Secret Life of Dartmoor Birds' gave us a greater appreciation of how many scientists, enthusiasts and volunteers contribute to our understanding of birds on Dartmoor, why some are successful and others decline.

DS member Mike Sampson is one of those people and he has been collecting data for more than 50 years. He regularly traverses some of the most remote parts of Dartmoor. In the early days it was to record rainfall and gauge river flows; later he began to note the birds he observed and found his first golden plover nest in 1970.

His knowledge of the ground conditions at some of the most inaccessible parts of Dartmoor is unparalleled. He has gauged the flow of all the Dartmoor and Exmoor rivers and witnessed their power when in full spate. He was approached by the explorer and radio broadcaster Duncan Carse while he was filming on

Dartmoor in the late 1960s, and asked to provide the crew with a daily forecast during filming. Regular visits to gather rainfall data provided the ideal opportunity to observe birds at all times of the year and he quickly recognised that these observations could feed into existing data held by organisations such as the RSPB, Devon Birds and what was then the Dartmoor Study Group.

This impressive long-term commitment stems from his decision on leaving school to install a Met Office weather station on the farm he worked with his father in Chulmleigh. He joined South West Water in 1974 and then the National Rivers Authority, later subsumed into the Environment Agency. In 1973 he installed his first rain gauge on Dartmoor at Taw Head and gradually built up a network that

comprised 70 sites, some official and others unregistered but covering areas where he saw gaps in the network.

On his retirement in 2011, Mike was presented with the Imperial Service Medal. For the past four years he has experimented with trail cameras and these have provided new information, as the birds can be observed continuously and undisturbed. On 18 July 2022 a juvenile dunlin was recorded at one of his sites, proving that breeding dunlin were present and suggesting that there was a nearby nest. He continues to visit many of his own rain gauge sites, including the one on Cut Hill that he installed for the Environment Agency in 1976; but the focus now is on recording breeding birds on the shallow pools of peatland restoration sites on the north moor.



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The Secret Life of Dartmoor Birds, 2019

Calendar of Forthcoming Events 2023



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PLEASE NOTE: This new event has replaced the advertised Farmers' Forum.
Wild Camping Discussion, Moretonhampstead Parish Hall, Fore Street, Moretonhampstead TQ13 8LL • Wednesday 29 March 2023 • 7:30pm

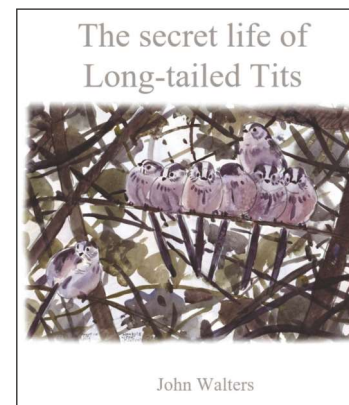
Given the topicality of wild camping, we feel it important that Dartmoor Society members should have an opportunity to discuss it together. Speakers to be announced. Members only,

tickets £5. Please book online at dartmoorsociety.com/events or, if you are unable to book through the website, call Bill Murray on 01647 231297. (The Farmers' Forum will be rescheduled.)

Dartmoor Society Annual General Meeting • The Bedford Hotel, 1 Plymouth Road, Tavistock PL19 8BB • Saturday 15 April 2023 • 2pm–4.30pm

We look forward to welcoming members to our AGM. This year we will be discussing and voting on some changes to the constitution and introducing a new category of student membership. Our guest speaker Helen Booker, senior conservationist with the RSPB, has kindly agreed to talk about her work on Dartmoor.

Please book online if you will be attending, as coffee and biscuits will be served. If you are unable to book through the website call Bill Murray on 01647 231297.



The recipient of this year's DS Award is the Buckfastleigh-based artist and ecologist John Walters. John was one of the speakers at our 2019 debate, The Secret Life of Dartmoor Birds and has been giving talks on natural history subjects for 20 years. He has made numerous ecological studies with a specialist interest in invertebrates and has

worked on many television and radio programmes as a consultant entomologist and naturalist. With Norman Baldock he is the author of The Wildlife of Dartmoor (2018, currently out of print). His expressive watercolours, made in the field, can be seen regularly in Dartmoor Magazine and his wildlife videos on YouTube include unique footage of roosting long-tailed tits, amongst much else. We very much look forward to presenting John with his award at our AGM on 15 April 2023.

Visit to Corndonford Farm hosted by Charlotte Faulkner of the Dartmoor Hill Pony Association • Corndonford Farm, Poundsgate TQ13 7PP, grid reference SX692745 • Wednesday 10 May 2023 • 2.30pm–4.30pm

On our farm visit this year we will be the guests of Charlotte Faulkner. Charlotte is chair of the Dartmoor Hill Pony Association and in 2011 she was presented with the Dartmoor Society Award for successfully raising the profile of the Dartmoor Hill Pony both nationally and internationally. In 2013 she was a key speaker at our debate 'What Future for Hill Ponies on Dartmoor?'. See page 20 of this Newsletter for news of the DHPA's latest research.

We will be given a tour of the farm where much of the practical work with the ponies is carried out and the event will be rounded off with tea and cake. Members only. Numbers limited to 30. Cost £7.50. Please book online or call Bill on 01647 231297.

A Walk along The Archangel's Way • Meet at St Petrock's Church, Lydford EX17 4JB • Sunday 18 June 2023 • 1.45pm

We are planning walks of varying lengths and from different directions along The Archangel's Way that will converge on St Petrock's church, Lydford, in time for a gathering at 2pm to celebrate the spiritual side of Dartmoor.

The Archangel's Way is a new and beautiful route that crosses north Dartmoor from Brentor to Chagford. Along the way there are indications of deep human roots in the unique landscape, from Neolithic stone circles and ancient wells to the more recent industrial past.

Details of walk routes, lengths and timings will be available nearer the time. Members are invited to join them or to make their own way to Lydford in time for the 2pm celebration. Please bring your own refreshments.

Further information on the route can be found at <https://www.devonpilgrim.org.uk/route/archangels-way/>.

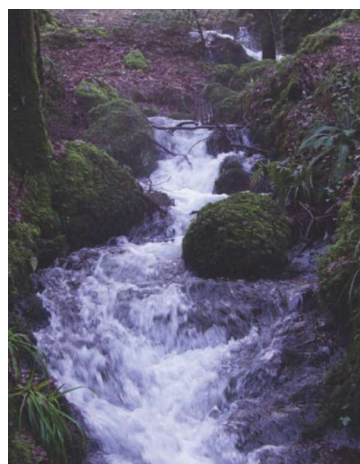
Visit to Ausewell Wood, Ashburton • July 2023 • date and meeting place to be confirmed

Ausewell Wood lies between Ashburton and Buckland in the Moor on the eastern edge of Dartmoor. It is owned by the Woodland Trust in partnership with the National Trust who have been working to protect and restore its habitats and wildlife since acquiring it in 2020.

Ausewell covers 342 acres of wild, rugged wood and heath with dramatic rocky outcrops, boulders and screes, dense woodland and damp temperate rainforest along the River Dart. This event will be an interesting precursor to our conference on Dartmoor's temperate rainforests in November.

The Dartmoor Society Barbecue August 2023 • date and venue to be confirmed

Our August barbecue is held for members, friends and guests. The afternoon will include a local walk.



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South West Water, Upstream Thinking site visit • September 2023 • date and venue to be confirmed

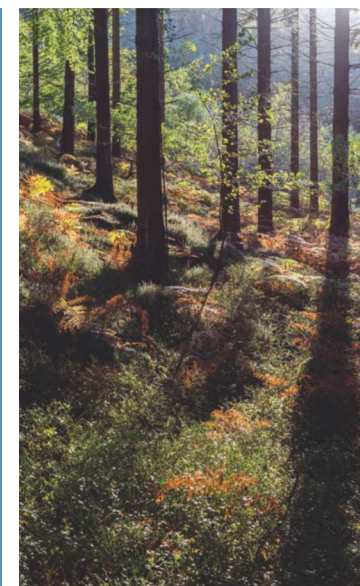
SWW's Upstream Thinking team will host us on a project site on Dartmoor to tell us about their catchment management scheme which applies natural landscape-scale solutions to improve water quality and supply. The project is delivered through partnerships that include

the Westcountry Rivers Trust and Devon and Cornwall Wildlife Trusts, government agencies, environmental experts, landowners and tenant farmers, while the evaluation of the change in water quality at catchment scale is undertaken by the University of Exeter.

Francis Bedford and his Contemporaries: Dartmoor's Greatest Photographer of the 1860s and 1870s – an illustrated talk by Dr Tom Greeves • Ashburton Arts Centre, 15 West St, Ashburton TQ13 7DT • Tuesday 3 October 2023 • 7.30pm

We are very pleased that Tom Greeves will be returning to Dartmoor to give a talk on Francis Bedford (1815–1894), one of the earliest Dartmoor photographers and amongst the finest landscape photographers of the Victorian era. He had a national and international reputation, having been commissioned by Queen Victoria in 1862 to accompany her son, the future Edward VII, on a tour of the Middle East.

The talk will explore the significance of these earliest images of Dartmoor and will reveal several newly discovered examples not seen for 150 years. Tom Greeves has studied and collected early photographic images of Dartmoor for more than 20 years. His book *'Dartmoor's Earliest Photographs – Landscape and Place 1860–1880'* was the first compilation of these (published in 2015 by Twelveheads Press).



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The Dartmoor Society Conference 2023: Dartmoor's Temperate Rainforest – Past, Present and Future • Fingle Bridge Inn, Drewsteignton EX6 6PW grid reference SX743899 • Friday 17 November 2023 • 9.30am – 3.30pm

Dartmoor temperate woodlands with their lichens, mosses and understory of shrubs are one of the wonders of Dartmoor. When and how did they evolve, what steps are being taken to conserve them and what is the future for these climate-sensitive wooded landscapes? Speakers will be from the Woodland Trust, Plantlife, Moor Trees and Westcountry Rivers Trust amongst others and the conference will be preceded by a guided walk in Fingle Woods. Full details and speakers to be confirmed.

Membership Matters

Chris Wright, creator of our current website, steps down after 15 years

Many members will not know that Chris Wright has been our website manager and technical adviser for 15 years, making him one of the longest-serving volunteers working for the Dartmoor Society. Not only did he build our current website from scratch but he has been our steady and knowledgeable sounding board and guide in the ever-changing world of technology and the internet.

Chris works at Dartcom, a leading manufacturer and integrator of weather satellite and remote sensing ground stations based at Powdermills, Princetown where he, his brother and his parents are directors. It was during a DS visit to the company in 2006 that Mike Hedges, creator of the Society's original website, realised Chris might be a suitable successor. In 2008, when Mike stepped down as newsletter editor and membership secretary, Chris took over the website and redeveloped it entirely in time for a relaunch in 2010.

The website he created has been in use constantly and remained largely unchanged for 12 years. He added functions so that members could join online, book events and update their details. To facilitate this, the membership database was moved online. In April 2011 he added the

ability to pay online via credit/debit card or PayPal.

Technology moves on and the time has come to commission a new website, one that we can update ourselves rather than relying on Chris to add new information for us. We are working with a local website developer, Guy Collins from AmplifyMe in Kingsbridge, who recently built and launched the Devon Birds website and understands what we need. The new website will streamline the ability to join and to book events, and will help our membership secretary Andrew John with administrative tasks.

It has been an absolute pleasure to work with Chris. I will miss his sound and steady advice and henceforth I must keep a keen eye on my copy typing as I will have the responsibility of updating our website myself! *Caya Edwards*

Newsletter Editor

In early 2020, the position of DS Newsletter editor became vacant and member and former journalist Annabel Crowley agreed to take on the role. The Covid-19 pandemic made normal meetings impossible but we were able to see each other at a distance, across a prehistoric hut circle in one of the Crowleys' fields! The DS committee commissioned a redesign from Helen Duvall, a graphic designer

and artist based in Okehampton, and Chris Chapman offered the riches of his photographic archive as our picture library.

Since then, the Newsletter has attracted many compliments and has become a significant benefit of membership. It is also relatively expensive to produce in its current form and the committee is therefore looking at how it might evolve, including making it accessible electronically – though it will always be available in print for those who want it in physical form.

At the end of this year Annabel will be stepping down in order to make more time for her garden design business and her own garden. The DS committee would therefore be pleased to hear from anyone interested in replacing her as editor. Please contact our secretary, Caya Edwards, at secretary@dartmoorsociety.com.

Reminder of Subscription Increase

At our AGM in May last year, a motion was carried to increase the subscription rates. The new rates are:

Single Membership Fee

from £14 to £17

Family Membership Fee

from £21 to £25

Life Membership Fee

from £280 to £340

We would be grateful if you would check that you have changed the

amount you pay from 1 January 2023. This is easy to do online if you use online banking.

Reminder of PO Box Closure

Please note that the Dartmoor Society no longer has a PO Box address. Please email any general enquiries to info@dartmoorsociety.com and membership enquiries to membership@dartmoorsociety.com. Any written correspondence should be sent to the membership secretary, Andrew John, at Larkhill, Devon House Drive, Bovey Tracey, Devon TQ13 9HA.

Gift Aid

If you are a UK taxpayer, Gift Aid allows us to claim an additional 25p for every £1 you donate to the Dartmoor Society at no cost to yourself. Please contact Andrew John on membership@dartmoorsociety.com or 07472 662250 if you have not already completed a Gift Aid declaration or if you are unsure if you have already done so.

New Members since September 2022

Naomi Bradwell, Peter Caton, David Gower, Marie Hale, William Hardiman, Nigel Hill, Hazel Land, Zodiac and Chris Marsh, Philip McKenzie-Smith, Maggy Meade-King, Mary Sherrill Morgan, Siobham Murphy, Jenny O'Brien, Gill Povey, Heather Somerville, Alison Thomas, Claire Turquet, Simon Whewell, Jo Williamson.

The Dartmoor Society

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

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