



The
Dartmoor
Society

Newsletter

Issue No. 75 • September 2024



Contents

- 02** Introduction
by Bill Murray
- 05** Mike Steward
by Bill Murray
- 06** The Dartmoor Entertainers Evening
by Bill Murray
- 10** Cranmere Pool: past, present and future
by Annabel Crowley
- 16** The Dartmoor Society AGM 2024
by Steve Mason
- 24** The Dartmoor Society Annual Award 2024
by Steve Mason
- 27** Curlews on Dartmoor
by Anthea Hoey
- 30** The Dartmoor Society Farming Forum
by Caya Edwards
- 40** Visit to Bowden Farm, Buckfastleigh
by Bill Murray
- 44** For the Love of Wool
by Bridget Cole and Barbara John
- 47** Celebrating Spirituality at Gidleigh
by Nick Fennemore
- 50** Calendar of Forthcoming Events
- 52** Membership Matters

Photo credits

Front cover | Leather Tor from Peek Hill © Steve Mason

Inside front cover | Autumnal trees in Fernworthy Forest
© Steve Mason

Inside back cover | Redstart © David Land

Introduction

By Bill Murray | Chair

It is the last week in July, I have been watching the Olympics and by the time that you read this we will be into the autumn, and I really hope that these important issues have been sorted out by then.

The Fursdon Review

The General Election announcement halted the implementation of the recommendations of the Fursdon Review. However, I am pleased to report that the new Government have agreed to establish the Dartmoor Land Use Management Group (do not try to utter the unpronounceable DLUMG acronym) and that the role of its Chair is now being advertised. DLUMG will be charged with taking forward the recommendations of the Fursdon Review and its independent Chair will report direct to Ministers and the Secretary of State. Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) will provide the secretariat for the group.

Wild Camping on Dartmoor

The date for the Supreme Court hearing of the Darwall v DNPA saga has been confirmed as 8 October 2024. The Open Spaces Society has been given permission to submit written evidence but not to speak at the hearing.

Progress to date: Section 10(1) of the Dartmoor Commons Act 1985 granted to the public 'a right of access to the Commons on foot and on horseback for the purpose of open air recreation'.

In the High Court the Chancellor, Sir Julian Flaux, held that those words unambiguously excluded a right to camp on Dartmoor. He found in favour of the landowners. In the Court of Appeal the Master of the Rolls, Sir Geoffrey Vos, held that those words unambiguously included a right to camp. The Court of Appeal allowed DNPA's appeal. The appeal to the Supreme Court will determine once and for all this important issue, namely whether members of the public enjoy a right to camp on the Dartmoor Commons.

If DNPA lose in the Supreme Court it is likely that they will have to pay the Darwall's costs, which is likely to be a six figure amount, plus their own costs. The Dartmoor Preservation Association's official fund raiser which was set up to accept donations to cover these costs is about to restart. It has already raised a fantastic £110k. If DNPA win in the Supreme Court, the money will be spent on good causes supporting access to the National Park. So keep your fingers crossed.

True backpack campers are seldom seen. They camp away from the places that most people get to, away from the rivers and leave no trace behind when they go on their way. If they see debris which has been left behind by others they pick it up and take it home with them. They are a very special group of people who deserve to be able to carry on their activity. True backpack campers are an elite group, I think that they should wear a badge on their jackets in recognition of their dedication to Dartmoor.

Peatland Restoration

Will South West Water (SWW) be successful in their bid to undertake the next phase of peatland restoration works on Dartmoor? There does seem to be a lot of secrecy behind the tendering process for the awarding of this contract. The Dartmoor Society is one of the Partners in the South West Peatland Partnership and in future we will be asking more questions. Those of you who have viewed the works that have been carried out at Great Gnats Head this year will understand our concerns.



Image © Charlie Potter

Bill on his way to the Dartmoor Folk Festival

Wild Justice

The wildlife conservation group Wild Justice is challenging the over grazing of Dartmoor's Commons to try to help internationally important areas of heathland back into favourable condition.

The organisation has written to the Dartmoor Commoners' Council calling for Commoners to be ordered to reduce stock on all Sites of Special Scientific Interest making up the Special Areas of Conservation where grazing pressure is a problem (particularly from sheep in winter) so that their habitats can recover.

Well, this challenge is flawed. The stocking numbers for sheep, cattle and ponies grazing on the Dartmoor Commons have been reduced considerably in recent years. It was Caya Edwards who first responded to this issue and excellent letters to Wild Justice from Alan Endacott and Tom Greeves can be viewed in the News section of our website.

In this Newsletter are reports on the five events that we have held since March.

Thanks to Annabel Crowley for her report on the Future of Cranmere Pool. It came as a surprise to me to learn that SWW had withdrawn their proposal to fill Cranmere Pool with water. I wonder if this change was the result of the amount work needed to carry out the surveys that The Dartmoor Society requested?

The society's Annual General Meeting at the Two Bridges Hotel was a very enjoyable occasion. It gave me immense pleasure to talk to our members and to listen to suggestions for future meetings, and for other matters that they think we should address. Everyone was delighted to witness our President, Peter Beacham OBE, present the 2024 Dartmoor Society Award to Alan Endacott. Thanks to Anthea Hoey who compiled the report of the AGM and to Jon Avon for his excellent talk about the Dartmoor Curlew Conservation Project.

Our Farmers Forum at Postbridge was very well attended and the panel comprising Prof Janet Dwyer, Dr Adrian Colston and Layland Branfield were excellent.

Our visit to Russell and Sandy Ashford's Bowden Farm near Scoriton was thrilling. We learnt all about farming on the southern slopes of the moor and the excitement of a tractor and trailer ride through the fields was memorable.

The Celebrating Dartmoor Day in Gidleigh was very special learning all about Dartmoor wool. I think that Bridget Cole's dream of creating a wool mill and craft centre on Dartmoor is a great idea. Barbara John's creative workshop was a pleasure to witness, skilled embroiderers stitching away, chatting happily and drinking tea. Then a picnic lunch on the lawn of Gidleigh Castle followed by a very tranquil and relaxing spiritual celebration in Gidleigh Church. How fortunate we are to be connected to Dartmoor.

My thanks go to the members who organise and support these events and to the committee members who report on the proceedings. These social gatherings are a very important constituent of The Dartmoor Society and provide an opportunity to meet and make friends with other members.

My three year tenure as Dartmoor Society Chair will end at the Annual General Meeting in April next year and I very much hope that by then we will have found a new Honorary Secretary. We will also looking for a new Honorary Treasurer to replace Tom Orchard, who has fulfilled this role for many years. If you are interested in finding out more about these vacancies, or if you would like to join our committee, please contact me on 01647 231297.

Mike Steward

by Bill Murray

Mike Steward (pictured) lived in Sampford Courtenay and was a Dartmoor Society member for many years. Sadly, he passed away last summer and his sister Linda Thorne informed us that he had very kindly left his Dartmoor books to the society.

Mike's collection of books have been well cared for and will make a welcome addition to our book stalls at the Chagford Show, Widecombe Fair and some of The Dartmoor Society events.

Mike loved Dartmoor. He was an enthusiastic hasher and I will miss seeing him, usually in the distance, running at speed up and over the Commons of North Dartmoor.

Thank you Mike and thanks also to Linda for sorting out and boxing the books so carefully.

Gina Sanders (07974 849127) looks after our books.

If you are looking for a particular book about Dartmoor, or if you have some books that you would like to donate to The Dartmoor Society, please contact Gina.

Image © Linda Thorne





Members and guests enjoying the entertainment

The Dartmoor Entertainers Evening

by Bill Murray

Dartmoor Society members and friends filled Gidleigh Village Hall to watch a rare showing of Westward Television's *Dartmoor Entertainers*. The film was made in 1979 at this very venue on the north east slopes of Dartmoor where, 45 years later, time honoured local folk traditions are still maintained. It has been shown all over England and is an example of the way in which locally generated entertainment kept people amused on days of celebration such as harvest suppers, beating the bounds, dances and other village get-togethers.

The reason why these traditions survived longer in this area was very much down to one man, Bob Cann, who farmed on Dartmoor, both at Batworthy near Chagford, and at Ford Farm, South Zeal. Bob had a passion for folk traditions and he is one of the finest melodeon (a

musical instrument similar to an accordion but which sounds a different note when the bellows are pushed in, to that which is produced when the bellows are pulled out) players in the country. In the early 1950s, Peter Kennedy, whilst working for the BBC, toured Great



Bob Cann and Dave Alford

Britain in a quest to find traditional singers, musicians and dancers, and down here on Dartmoor he found Bob. In 1953 Bob was invited by the English Folk Song and Dance Society to play at their annual gathering at the Royal Albert Hall. He went up to London with three friends, Les Rice, the Chagford step dancer, Tom Wonnacott, whose skill was the Monkey's Hornpipe, and Dave Alford, the Dartmoor Bone Rattler, and they put on a fine show of Dartmoor entertainment.

I met Bob in 1968 at the Seven Stars in South Tawton, he was 52 then and still farming locally. On Wednesday evenings, in a room behind the inn, he ran a weekly folk evening for youngsters learning to dance. The children were collected at

about nine o'clock but some of the parents would stay for a while and other people would come along to sing or join Bob to play the music. It was where I first watched traditional Dartmoor Step Dancing and Bone Rattling. Sadly, the



Mark Bazeley playing Daisy Daisy

Image © Bill Murray



Sailor Jan

Monkey's Hornpipe has all but died out and so has the Bone Rattling, but the songs and the dances still thrive. The Dartmoor Step Dance Championships are held every August at the Dartmoor Folk Festival in South Zeal attracting around 50 entrants of all ages.

In 1979 I wrote to John Bartlett, a senior director and producer at Westward Television who I had worked with before, and suggested that he should make a film about these old Dartmoor traditions. He was very enthusiastic about the idea and within days we had met with Bob and discussed and arranged everything. Throughout the film,

Bob with his natural Devon accent, is the commentator. He introduces the acts that appear during the evening's entertainment in the hall, leads the band with the music for the dances and interviews the performers as they carry out their daily work, sewing saddles, feeding pigs and posting letters etc.

You need to see the film to appreciate how well Bob succeeded in the task. It was unscripted and I cannot recall any retakes, except when Frank Webber 'got the cramp' while he was recalling the old-time dances that were held at the hall. John Bartlett's film crew were



Christabel White step dancing

Image © Bill Murray

wonderful, capturing the expression on the faces of the many characters in the audience on the night of the film perfectly.... it was not just about the performers.

The audience on 14 February were shown the film which provoked lots of laughter and merriment. Afterwards we were entertained by some of the people who had performed in the film in 1979. Mark Bazeley was taught to play the melodeon by his grandad Bob Cann. In the film he is seen as an eight-year-old, playing Daisy Daisy on the Anglo concertina. Mark had with him his grandad's wooden jig-doll, Sailor Jan, which was carved over a century ago by Harry Price of Drewsteignton.

Carl Allerfeldt, Len Harvey and Richard Prince, members of the famous Kelly Quarry Band, were with us and so were some members of the original audience. Rob Murch, whose father Bill was a member of Bob Cann's Dartmoor Pixie Band, played the banjo, and Christabel White showed us some fine Dartmoor step dancing and also Appalachian dancing, which may one day find its way into the Dartmoor tradition. Both Carl Allerfeldt and Rob Murch now play in the Red Dirt Band and with Busker Bernie they played out the evening with songs that we could all join in with.

It is thanks to Bob Cann that these traditions remain a part of Dartmoor life and move on through the generations.



The Kelly Quarry Blasters performing in the 1979 film

Image © Westward Television

Image © Steve Mason



CRANMERE POOL: past, present, future

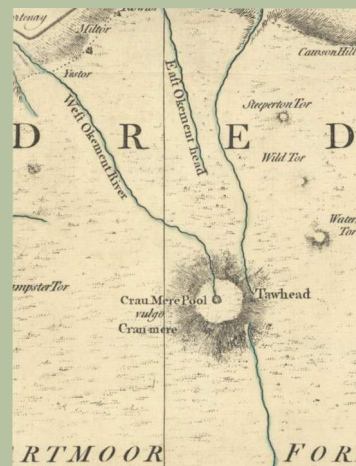
by Annabel Crowley

Members of The Dartmoor Society met at Belstone Village Hall on 20 March to learn more about Cranmere Pool and recent suggestions that it might once again hold water. DS chair Bill Murray introduced the afternoon with a brief resume of the work of the South West Peatland Partnership (SWPP) on the high moor, and a look at the ways in which Cranmere Pool has been depicted on maps and in illustrations over the centuries.

The pool lies 560m above sea level, 10 km south of Okehampton and roughly the same distance from Lydford, Chagford and Postbridge. On Benjamin Donn's map of 1765 it appears as 'Crau Mere Pool' and as the source of the West Okement, with Taw Head and Dart Head lying immediately outside its eastern edge. The 1 inch Ordnance Survey map of 1809 agrees in depicting it as the source of the

West Okement but shows the other two rivers rising well to the east of the pool, and this remains the case on the most recent OS Explorer map.

Bill contrasted modern photographs of the pool with one taken in about 1890 by Robert Burnard and with a Frederick Widgery painting of 1896. A long narrow body of water is clearly

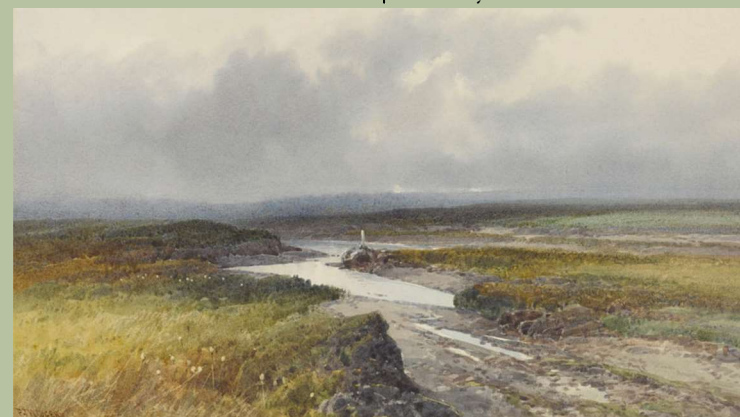


Benjamin Donn's map of 1765

visible in the earlier images, whereas today no water is visible. These days, the letterbox erected by the Dartmoor guide James Perrott stands amid a sea of *Molinia* grass, which also obscures many of the peat hags. If the pool is the source of the West Okement, it is likely to be via peat pipes – underground erosion channels – rather than surface water. Rounding off his introduction, Bill itemised the work he felt should be

done before any interventions are made at the site. These included a geomorphological survey to establish why there is a hollow at this spot; a levels survey; paleo-environmental sampling to determine the age of the peat and whether the entire hollow has ever been permanently full of water; a metal detection survey; a vegetation survey; an historical survey of printed and photographic records and a record of poems, plays, songs and artwork.

The main speaker of the afternoon, Dr Martin Gillard, is a Dartmoor National Park Authority historic environment officer with SWPP. Looking at the history of written references to the pool, he said the earliest is believed to be William Worcester's of 1478, when it was spelt 'Cremere'. The meaning of 'cran' or 'crau' might come from the Old English word for the crane, birds that were certainly hunted and shot around



Frederick Widgery's painting Cranmere Pool c1896

the edge of Dartmoor until the 19th century; or it could refer to crows.

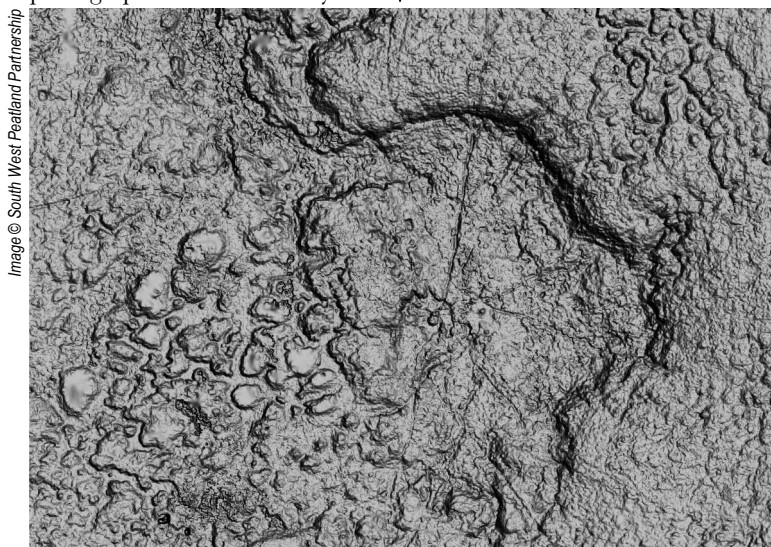
Repeated references to the pool across the centuries strongly suggest its cultural importance, whether or not it ever formed a permanent body of water. It appears as 'the urn of Cranmere' in N T Carrington's *Dartmoor: A Descriptive Poem* of 1826; and in his *Perambulation of the royal and antient forest of Dartmoor* Samuel Rowe remarked that its northern bank appeared to have been cut through when he saw it in 1844. In 1914, William Crossing observed that the pool 'has contained no water for a century'.

Martin said that SWPP has used a drone to make high resolution photographs and a 3D survey of



Martin Gillard

the area. These show the basic oblong depression that many early records refer to, with a spread in the south east corner that could be eroded material. Probing shows that peat pipes lie below the lower part of the pool, with granite about a meter below them. Channels of erosion also run into it: could it have filled up with material that washed into it?



High resolution 3D image clearly indicating the outline of the pool, from a survey carried out by SWPP using an aerial drone

Image © Mike Rego

A programme of sampling is planned for the spring and summer months, to be undertaken by a suitable archaeological contractor. They will be looking at the geomorphology of the pool itself and adjacent areas, as well as at pollen records, to reconstruct the story of how the peat has formed. As far as restoration of a body of water is concerned, Martin said there is a possibility of creating a deep bund across the north west end of the pool to seal off the exit there. If this were to go ahead, the work would be carried out under archaeological supervision. However, it cannot be guaranteed that a permanent pool would be created.

In order to answer questions on restoration and features of the bog, Martin then introduced a colleague, Conrad Barrowclough, who grew up on



A peat core sample

Image © South West Peatland Partnership



Conrad Barrowclough

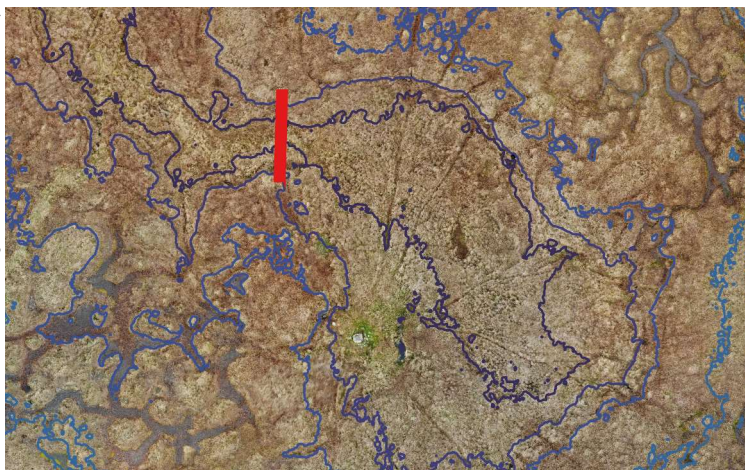
Exmoor and is employed by South West Water to work as restoration manager at SWPP.

Tom Greeves asked if we know what the hollow is, why it's there and how it was created? The answer to this seems fundamental to an understanding of the site. For example, we know that the stone row on Cut Hill was already covered by peat by 2,400BC. Was Cranmere Pool on top of peat, or gravel?

Conrad observed that any written references to the pool are of course very recent compared with the development of peat over 6,000 or 7,000 years. Mike Rego, a geologist, commented that the only historic references we know of that describe the pool being full of water are conjectural. Martin said that a review of all the literature is currently being undertaken by Phil Newman, a freelance archaeologist who

Image © Mike Rego

Image © South West Peatland Partnership



Aerial image from the SWPP drone survey showing the extent of the pool and 1m contours with approximate location of the proposed bund in red

formerly worked for English Heritage and the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments, and who was among the audience.

Both Tom Greeves and Alan Endecott pointed out that high ground and bodies of water were held to be sacred in ancient times and that it is vital to retain the idea of Cranmere Pool as hallowed ground. Tom described it as 'one of the great cultural artifacts of Dartmoor' and said he would support the creation of a blockage as an experiment made in the interests of cultural heritage rather than the normal work of SWPP.

Mike Rego described the process of peat 'slumps', where the saturated peat slips and tears, creating a network of peat pipes all over hillsides. Could

rewetting projects make the peat more likely to slump, creating exposed edges and emitting methane? Do we really need to worry about the storage of CO₂ on the moor when the amounts are so small compared with what large industry is emitting elsewhere in the world?

Conrad freely acknowledged that peatland works are never going to rectify all the problems but that it was important to look after what we have and aim to support a fully functioning landscape. Unfortunately, most valley mires on the moor are badly damaged by past tinning activities; however, in warm valleys in this region, peat can grow at a rate of 8mm per annum.

Ines Penning asked if we know what the vegetation at Cranmere Pool was like 200-300 years ago,

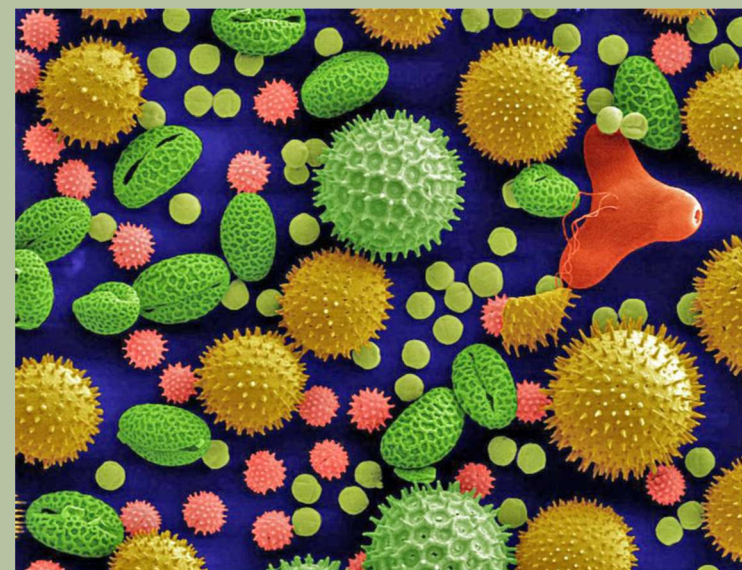
and Martin replied that sampling will provide some answers.

Kate Butterworth asked the speakers about Commoners' reactions to rewetting works. Conrad replied that the land in question was transitioning 'from one sort of marginal to another'. If anything, the grazing season would be extended by the availability of nutrition on wetter ground and the suppression of *Molinia*, which dislikes standing water.

Conrad said that access is the biggest issue and that, while access could change, it might simply be different, rather than better or worse. Gulleys are dangerous for stock; at least open water is easily

seen. He commented that there are as many views on this issue as there are people giving them.

Adrian Colston, ecologist and social scientist, agreed that there are many different opinions and has found in his work with Commoners that those who were involved with rewetting at its earliest stages are often the most opposed. During an ongoing research project into *Molinia*, he has noticed that cattle are returning to rewetted areas in significant numbers. While he welcomed this, he asked the question, what will happen to the areas the cattle are leaving in order to come back? And he answered it with a closing remark 'Dartmoor needs more cattle!'



Colorised image of plant macro fossils from core sampling indicating historic vegetation which may date back centuries or even millennia

The Dartmoor Society Annual General Meeting 2024

The Dartmoor Society's 26th AGM was held to the Two Bridges Hotel, Princetown, on Saturday 13 April. The afternoon's proceedings comprised the following three parts. First Chairman Bill Murray conducted the formal business of the AGM. Then the presentation of the society's annual award was made to Alan Endacott. Lastly Jon Avon of the Duchy of Cornwall gave an illustrated presentation on the Dartmoor Curlew Conservation Project.

Chairman's Report

This has been another busy year for Dartmoor.

A year has gone by and it is still uncertain whether Alexander and Diana Darwall will succeed in their legal action to prevent backpackers from camping on designated areas of Dartmoor, without the permission of the landowner.

The Government Response to the Fursdon Review was published earlier this week and I have not yet had the time to study the document or to discuss the implications with anyone.

My special thanks go to Caya Edwards who compiled and wrote The Dartmoor Society evidence for the Fursdon Review, which was submitted in my name.

Over the last twelve months, we have held eight events, reports on which have, or will, appear in our autumn and spring Newsletters.

1 Visit to the Friends of the Dartmoor Hill Pony at Corndonford Farm.

2 Celebrating the Spirituality of Dartmoor through song, literature and poetry on a lovely sunny day at St Petroc's Church, Lydford.

3 The annual barbecue held at Great Ensworth in Gidleigh on another sunny afternoon.

4 An open meeting to hear about the Current Approaches to Peatland Restoration on Dartmoor held at Belstone Village Hall. The Dartmoor Society is one of the 22 partners that comprise the South West Peatland Partnership. We are not afraid to challenge the plans and proposals of the management team or the way in which the works are undertaken.

5 Tom Greeves' very interesting lecture at Ashburton Arts Centre *A Revelatory Eye – Dartmoor Photography from the 1850s to the 1870s*.

6 The Dartmoor Society Conference 2023 – Dartmoor's Temperate Rainforests: Past, Present and Future. This well planned and successful event was held at the Fingle Bridge Inn. It was a sell out and the invited speakers were excellent. My thanks go to the sub-committee of Caya Edwards, Annabel Crowleigh, Anthea Hoey and Nick Fennemore who organized the event.

7 In February, we presented the 1979 Westward Television *Dartmoor Entertainers* film which was followed by live Dartmoor entertainment.

8 Last month, we held an open meeting at Belstone Village Hall to discuss the South West Peatland Partnership's proposal to fill Cranmere Pool with water. Well, we soon found out that they had changed their plans and that they would not be carrying out any restoration works in the depression that forms the pool.

We try to be fair to all Dartmoor Society members, by holding meetings in all quarters of the moor and on different days of the week whenever we can.

There have been seven committee meetings during the year.

We have grant funded the following three projects.

Jim Causley received £200 to research Dartmoor songs for his CD recording of *The Songs of Dartmoor*.

Wren Music received £200 towards further research into the William Andrews' fiddle tunes which were republished in 2023.

Alan Endacott received £1000 towards the cost of specialist services that he has engaged in connection with the archaeological survey work that he is undertaking on Taw Marsh.

The development of the new Dartmoor Society website has continued over the last twelve months. Our committee members, Caya Edwards, Andrew John and, in recent months, Steve Mason have all worked with our website facilitator Guy Collins, of Kingsbridge based Amplifyme, to ensure that all functions worked well. There have been one or two problems with booking events online, but these have now been sorted out.

This is the start of my third and final year as Chairman of The Dartmoor Society.

My thanks must go to the other members of the committee. They have supported me throughout the year.

We are very much in need of an Honorary Secretary to help with the organisation of meetings and to liaise with our Website Editor on general matters.

Caya Edwards, who now lives in Cornwall, retires now as Honorary Secretary, but I am pleased to say that she is happy to take on the new office of Website Editor, which will allow the Honorary Secretary to concentrate on the secretarial duties without the burden of controlling the website.

Under item 6 of the agenda, Minor Changes to Constitution, I will be proposing that the constitution be amended to allow for the new officer appointment of Website Editor.

My special thanks go to Tom Orchard for looking after the financial accounts so efficiently and to Annabel Crowley who did not seek re-election to the committee last year but did stay on to edit the autumn 2023 Newsletter and to help with the November Conference.

I would also like once again to record my thanks to the many non-committee members whose advice and help I rely on.

I do read and listen to what you say, think it over and react. I have come to learn that we all want to do the best that we can for our wonderful Dartmoor.

Looking forward to the next twelve months.

There will be a lot of discussion about the Government Response to the Fursdon Review. It states that the main priority is the re-wetting of the peatland moors.

The second priority is the control of the Purple Moor Grass or *Molinia*. The future of swaling is also mentioned, as is of course stock grazing on the moor.

And we will all have to wait until the autumn to learn the outcome of The Supreme Court hearing on backpack camping.

Minutes

1. Welcome and apologies

Bill welcomed members to the meeting. Apologies were received from: Christopher Gardner-Thorpe, Caya Edwards, Rachel and Allen Van der Steen, Tom Orchard, Simon Murray, Kate Ashbrook, Paul Wilson, Sue Viccars, Mike Rego, Jane Emberson, Robert Powell, Sue Andrew, John Page, Steve Alford, Layland Branfield and Chris Hoey.

2. Approval of previous AGM minutes held at The Bedford Hotel 15 April 2023

Agreement proposed by Nick Fennemore and seconded by Jeanne Silvestri.

3. Chairman's report (attached)

Bill thanked the committee for all their work over the past year. He described the main activities of The Dartmoor Society, reflected on his second busy year as chair and briefly outlined how current issues could develop in the coming year.

4. Treasurer's report for year 2023/24 (attached)

Agreement proposed by Peter Fillingham and seconded by Alan Endacott.

5. Appointment of Auditor for 2024

Simon Murray previously of Blackwell Bate, Chartered Accountants in Yelverton. *Proposed by Bill Murray and seconded by Peter Fillingham.*

6. Minor changes to the constitution

Bill referred to the minor changes to the constitution re student members, change of the nomination deadline to end of March and to allow for electronic voting as set out on the website.

Agreement was proposed by Bill Murray and seconded by Alan Endacott. The members voted their agreement as well.

Bill added that following Caya's resignation as Secretary, the recommendation was to add the post of Website Editor to the list of officer positions on the committee.

Agreement was proposed by Bill Murray and seconded by Alan Endacott.

Bill pointed out that this change meant that the committee now numbered 13 members, so he suggested including the President's position in the list for those who are superstitious!

7. Committee as it stands / retirements

Bill went through the current committee membership and their dates of service.

Following Annabel Crowley's retirement from the committee as Newsletter Editor last year, Steve Mason had been co-opted to the committee in this role. Bill thanked Steve for his help adding that he will also be designing and setting the layout of the newsletter, which will save the society about £800 for each edition as this work had been outsourced previously.

Caya Edwards is retiring as Honorary Secretary, but she would like to take on the new officer appointment of Website Editor.

Two members, Steve Alford and Layland Branfield had finished their 3 year terms but wished to stand again.

Mike Rego has applied to join the committee. Bill read a statement from Mike describing his work and experience.

No applications have been received for Honorary Secretary and so that position is vacant.

Alan Endacott proposed a vote of thanks to the committee which was responded to with a round of applause from the meeting.

8. Election of officers and committee members

The following to serve for three years:

Newsletter Editor – Steve Mason *proposed by Anthea Hoey and seconded by Nick Fennemore.*

Website Editor – Caya Edwards *proposed by Bill Murray and seconded by Alan Endacott.*

Committee Member – Mike Rego *proposed by Alan Endacott and seconded by Andrew John.*

Re-election of committee members – Steve Alford and Layland Branfield *proposed by Aylett and seconded by Nick Fennemore.*

9. Any Other Business

There were no matters arising from the meeting. Bill asked whether members agreed with holding the AGM on a Saturday afternoon in April. This was agreed, but there was a request to avoid Grand National Day!

Bill then asked the meeting for its views on the numerous signs erected by the National Trust around the Castle Drogo estate – mainly about what dogs could and couldn't do there. The meeting was ambivalent about these. There was a comment that the dog spray against ticks was possibly a source of contamination, which led to a discussion about tick and heather

beetle proliferation on the moor due to the reduction in swaling and changes to grazing patterns. Bill commented that this was covered in the Fursdon Report on which the Government has just published its response, which the society would be addressing at their Farming Forum meeting to be held on 22 May at Postbridge.

The meeting was closed at 4.30pm.

Honorary Treasurer's Report

Background

2023 was a year of progress in terms of administration.

The new website is now successfully up-and-running and all users I believe are enjoying the benefits of it. Its use for booking events is now proven and it has enabled the older Nohex and Paypal methods to be mothballed. The setup of the new site is now completely paid for (see the line in the accounts entitled 'Web Site and IT Costs'), and we can confidently expect these costs to be much lower in 2024.

Income

The new subscription rate is beginning to show in the income line. Many thanks to all members who have changed their standing orders and made 'top up' payments if an old standing order took place. Also, I would repeat the thanks I expressed last year to all members who use an electronic payment method such as BACs, Standing Order, Stripe or Go Cardless. The reduction in time spent banking cash and cheques has been much appreciated.

Giftaid amounted to £1,113, which was much better than in previous years. I need to thank all members who have now signed a Giftaid consent form. I would encourage anyone who is able to do so but has not yet signed a Giftaid consent to consider doing so please.

Book sales at events continue to be strong, and are similar to 2022 at £485.

Events themselves (8 in number plus the AGM) were well supported and yielded an overall surplus of £498.

Expenses

As ever, the single largest expense is newsletters. The production of two per annum is now established, as is the higher standard of production. Costs in the current year should reduce somewhat as Steve Mason has kindly undertaken the job of arranging the content and the printing. A big thank you also to Gill Povey for her work in arranging for articles to be written and editing the results. The new team is now well established.

Grants were made to Wren Music and Jim Causley.

General

Despite the outlay on the new website, the total funds are only marginally less than at the end of 2022 at £39,587.

It will be noted that at the end of the accounts there are two new items, namely Deferred Income and Accruals. The Deferred Income is income due to the society for the Ashburton Event. It was received long after the event, in fact in early 2024. But by this method it has been included both as income for the event in the year in which the event took place (2023), and as an amount due to the society.

The Accrual is a term used for the inclusion of a known cost incurred in 2023 when it has not been paid until a future period (2024). In this case it was the cost from our printer (Brightsea) for the autumn newsletter which, due to various circumstances, was not paid until early 2024.

Our auditor (Simon Murray) has once again been kind enough to audit the accounts for us, and his certificate (now in the prescribed Charities Commission Format) is attached to the Accounts. He is retiring from his main Practice at the end of April 2024. He has audited the society's 2023 accounts in a personal capacity, and has kindly said that he will continue to do so for us, an offer for which I am most grateful.

Image © Julie Endacott



The Dartmoor Society Annual Award 2024

by Steve Mason

To commence proceedings Vice Chairman Nick Fennemore read out the following citation.

Alan Endacott is a Dartmoor man through and through. He was born at Clannaborough Farm, a longhouse in Throwleigh Parish where his family had farmed for generations. From an early age, Alan was fascinated by the history of Dartmoor and the remains left by its people. When he was seven, he found a half buried Civil War canon ball on the common which in his words, 'fired his imagination'. He found old tools and bits and pieces from around the farm and neighbours gave him all kinds of fascinating items which he stored in the ancient farm cottage behind the house.

In 1981, Alan moved his collection to Okehampton where he founded and

became the first curator of the Museum of Dartmoor Life. He oversaw the renovation and development of the newly acquired premises in West Street and the expansion of the collection. In Alan's words 'with the help of an enthusiastic local committee and volunteers, we built the museum from nothing, and it is very rewarding to see it still thriving and encouraging young people to take an interest in their heritage'.

Alan also managed the Finch Foundry Museum in Sticklepath from 1989 until 1994 when it was handed over to the National Trust for its long-term preservation. He undertook a part time Museums

Curators Diploma Course with the University of Leicester and went on to attain an MA at the same University.

From 1996 until 2004 Alan was the Area Manager for English Heritage Properties in Care in Devon and then he set up his own company, Angel Stained Glass.

In a break from tradition, you will see that the more usual Dartmoor scene that forms the centre of Penny Simpson's beautiful Dartmoor Society Award plate, has been replaced by the stained glass logo which Alan designed and crafted for the Museum of Dartmoor Life.

Alan has published several books and papers on local history and archaeology including Tales of Old Okeington (2002), Okehampton Castle Guide Book (2005), All Saints Parish Church & St. James Chapel, Okehampton – A History & Tour (2006), and Okehampton Town Trail.

He has always retained an active interest in Dartmoor, in particular the exploration and research of the prehistoric ritual or ceremonial landscapes of the northern moor, conducting extensive fieldwork and discovering many previously unrecorded features. In 2007, after much thought and investigation Alan discovered the previously unrecorded Sittaford stone circle.

During his fieldwork, Alan has put his theories to the test carrying out geophysical surveys on several key sites including the Scorhill stone circle in Gidleigh, and two other previously unrecorded stone circles, a potential Neolithic long cairn, a collapsed dolmen and various cairns, stone rows and other settings, along with potential geoglyphs, or hill figures, and some unique examples of rock art.

In 2019, Alan moved back to live in Throwleigh and from 2019 until 2022, he was Vice-Chair of The Dartmoor Society.

There can be no doubt in anyone's mind that Alan Endacott is a thoroughly deserving recipient of this honour.

Society President Peter Beacham OBE then presented the award to Alan. The plate, hand crafted by Penny Simpson and Michael Edwards of Moretonhampstead, depicted the stained glass logo that Alan had designed for the Museum Of Dartmoor Life in Okehampton which he founded.

In his acceptance speech Alan said that he felt very honoured to receive the award when considering the calibre of previous recipients and that his seven-year-old self would be pretty chuffed! He noted how

important the work of The Dartmoor Society is and wished us well in our endeavours.

Alan reflected that he was very fortunate to have been able to record a changing way of life and had the privilege of meeting many interesting people down the years, some with memories stretching back to the Victorian era. Meeting so many wonderful characters, who had made Dartmoor's landscapes and way of life unique, was the reason he was so passionate about recording it and trying to help ensure that it was carried on to future generations, and that their knowledge and experience was listened to.

He dedicated the award to his parents, Tom and Pat

Endacott, who were a great influence on his life. His dad came from a long line of traditional hill farmers and was always curious about people and keen on recording their changing way of life. His mum, a teacher, came down from London during the World War Two and threw herself into the role of a farmer's wife with a steely determination.

Other childhood influences included Bob Barron and his sister, Marjorie Pyne, who founded Finch Foundry Museum at around the same time as Alan started collecting in 1966.

Finally, Alan thanked his wife Julie for her patience and support.



Alan and Bill displaying the award plate

Curlews on Dartmoor

by Anthea Hoey

The AGM's proceedings were concluded with a most interesting presentation by Jon Avon about curlews on Dartmoor. Jon is the Project Manager of the Dartmoor Curlew Recovery Project, under the auspices of the Duchy of Cornwall.

The Dartmoor Curlew Recovery Project has its origins back in 2004 when Charles, the then Prince of Wales, was aware that breeding waders on Dartmoor were declining. An initiative called Operation Wader was set up to investigate the factors causing decline and to review and assess the data of wader breeding populations and their distribution across Dartmoor. Operation Wader was overseen by a steering group made up of the Duchy of Cornwall, Natural England, RSPB, DNPA and the Ministry of Defence.

The results have revealed an alarming decline in the numbers of waders, particularly lapwings and curlews. In Devon, breeding curlew have declined from about 250 pairs in the 1980s to just two pairs, which nest on Dartmoor. Records show that Dartmoor historically had up to 34 breeding pairs. More detailed monitoring since 2005 revealed that these remaining pairs return and lay eggs annually, but their nesting attempts fail due to loss of eggs and chicks to predation.

Only 5 curlew chicks had grown to adulthood in 18 years. At this rate the bird was heading to extinction.

In 2018, a Curlew Summit was hosted by HRH the Duke of Cornwall at Two Bridges Hotel, which led to the Dartmoor Curlew Recovery Project as a proactive response to this decline. The project aims to improve breeding success of any wild curlew pairs that return to breed and, in addition, to rear and release curlews to try to boost the future breeding population returning to Dartmoor.



Fledged curlew at Emsworthy Gate

Analysis of the data from 15 years of monitoring curlew numbers and nesting sites was essential to identify the reasons for the decline. The analysis points to a number of factors including habitat change due to reduced grazing, predation, human disturbance and weather.

Curlews like short turf, heather and mires, and return to the same areas annually. These areas have a long history of livestock grazing and swaling and any changes to this regime will affect curlew territories. However, Jon said that in his experience the main threat to the survival of eggs and chicks was from carrion crows. These have been breeding successfully in numbers on Dartmoor, encouraged, he suggests, by additional food supply eg roadkill and litter. Jon showed some distressing video footage of pairs of crows working in concert to raid a



Curlews hatching

nest, with the parent curlew running from one crow to the other trying in vain to ward them off, whilst the crows took it in turns to snatch the eggs one by one.

Both male and female curlews incubate the eggs and tend the chicks, and it seems that the first two or three days after hatching is the most vulnerable time as foxes are attracted to the newly hatched chicks by their calling. After that they are ready to forage for food by themselves until they fly at 5-6 weeks old. The parent birds remain close and on high alert for potential danger.

Jon has experimented with trapping crows and found that this results in improved survival rates in not just curlews but other ground nesting birds as well.

The Dartmoor Curlew Recovery Project is designed to address the loss of chicks in recent years by 'headstarting', which involves raising curlew chicks in a protected environment until they are old enough to fly and fend for themselves.

Curlew eggs are collected from RAF bases, where curlews pose a risk to aircraft, and taken to Slimbridge for their 28 day incubation period. When the eggs start to hatch they are transported to Dartmoor, where young curlew chicks hatch indoors before being



Headstarted curlews, 4 weeks old

moved into outdoor rearing pens and raised for about 6-7 weeks. During this time the birds are ringed, and some are tagged with radio trackers for subsequent monitoring. The young curlews are then released onto the moor. Similar headstarting projects take place in Norfolk, Sussex and Shropshire. Dartmoor is the only upland host area.

In the first year, 2021, 33 young birds were released on Dartmoor and the following year a further 27 birds were introduced. Releases are focussed in areas where curlews have nested in past years.

Ringed and tagged birds have since been spotted on estuaries elsewhere in Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, and one bird headed north to South Wales. Each released curlew has an individual yellow colour ring and a yellow leg flag with a letter or number which will enable future identification. Any sightings can be reported via Slimbridge using curlew@wwt.org.uk

Meanwhile, the project also undertakes specific landscape

scale management of the receptor areas in cooperation with farmers and landowners, for example by flailing or increased grazing rates within newtakes to produce shorter vegetation, and creating small ponds to provide feeding opportunities, as well as ongoing predator control. In parallel, walkers are discouraged from areas where curlews nest by signs or path diversions.

The hope is that this year the 'headstarted' birds will be ready to start breeding themselves when they reach 3-5 years old. Although to date the numbers are small, Jon is hopeful that the headstarting technique will assist in addressing the decline in curlews, as well as other waders like lapwing.

Jon started his presentation by playing a recording of the call of the curlew and the rest of his presentation was illustrated by wonderful photographs of curlews and other birds. Afterwards members congratulated him on a riveting description about this vital conservation project.

Image © Mike Rego



The Dartmoor Society Farming Forum

by Caya Edwards

Chaired by Dartmoor Farmer Layland Branfield, with panellists Janet Dwyer (Professor of Rural Policy at the University of Gloucester) and Adrian Colston (conservationist and rural social scientist), our Farming Forum was held at Postbridge village hall on 22 May 2024. Many people from across Dartmoor gathered to hear the panel discuss some of the challenges that farmers face in the context of the Independent Review of Protected Site Management on Dartmoor (Fursdon Review) and the implications of the Government's response to it.

Announced in May 2023, by December 2023 the Fursdon Review had convened, consulted and published its findings. The Government response came in April 2024 and now Defra has begun to release details of its Sustainable Farming Incentive: Expanded Offer for 2024 that will form the basis of future farm payment schemes.

Swaling and the Control of Ticks and other Parasites

Ticks are on the increase and are dangerous to farm animals, wildlife and people. Janet Dwyer said she works with Roy Bown, a national expert on ticks, and his work suggests that ticks have increased with the lack of really cold winters. Another contributing factor is the tall vegetation, particularly bracken

and *Molinia*, which now grows at a height where ticks can easily climb onto host species. This is because there are fewer grazing animals on Dartmoor and swaling (burning vegetation to encourage new growth) has been discouraged.

Adrian Colston agreed and said that swaling has traditionally been carried out to produce a



A tick

mosaic of habitats, whereas now long grass, gorse and bracken predominate. Due to recent restrictions on burning and weather conditions, swaling has not been carried out and this could also explain the increase in ticks. There are vaccines, but these are expensive to commercially bring to the market.

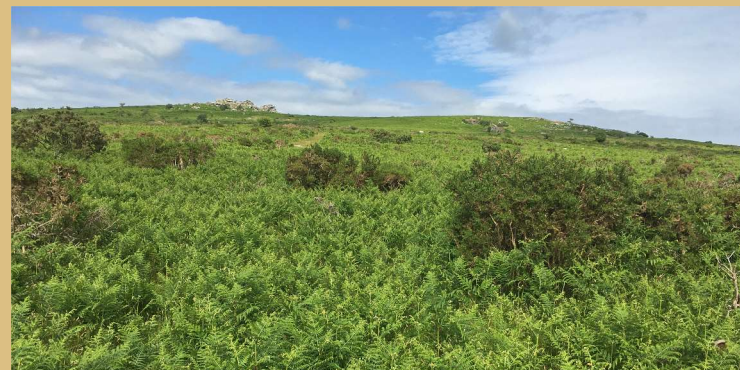
Philip French emphasised that swaling had been carried out over millennia and created the landscapes that people value, and burning is the most effective control of ticks.

Helen Radmore confirmed that ticks are now a year round threat to farmers, wildlife and people who enjoy walking on Dartmoor.

Molinia and Gorse

The need to control *Molinia* and gorse has become one of the biggest challenges on Dartmoor. Vast tracts of this tough grass cover much of the upland, with an ever dwindling number of stock in place to graze it, yet the myth that Dartmoor is overgrazed still exists.

Janet Dwyer pointed out that payments and production were decoupled many years ago and since then it has been in no one's interest to graze additional stock. With current stocking levels Dartmoor is under managed, and under stocked in some areas, but reversal is difficult. Rebuilding a healthy mix of cattle, ponies and sheep is not easy when the farming methods and infrastructure have changed.



Dense gorse and bracken cover on the SW flank of Pew Tor

Image © Steve Mason

The Fursdon Review acknowledges a lack of management on Dartmoor and promotes more flexibility for farmers to experiment and to apply their own experience to deliver the best results. This could be a valuable direction for the new schemes and initiatives on Dartmoor.

Adrian Colston has analysed data from a recent and very accurate satellite survey where the *Molinia* showed clearly in the images and every Common on Dartmoor was surveyed. He was able to give us the following results indicating the percentage of ungrazed *Molinia* cover for different areas of the moor:

Forest of Dartmoor 71%
South Dartmoor SSSI 51.7%



Image © Mike Rego

Adrian Colston

North Dartmoor SSSI 53%
Hentor Willings Walls 50.7%

Until now we have not been able to quantify the extent of the *Molinia* and the above statistics prove the extent of the problem. The Foundation for Common Land is trialling methods of cutting *Molinia* in selected areas and placing animals in these spaces. *Molinia* will be



Image © Steve Mason

View from Two Bridges across the Swincombe valley towards Ryder's and Naker's Hills – *Molinia*, *Molinia* and yet more *Molinia*!

discouraged by wetter conditions in some areas and the rewetting projects will contribute to this. Adrian said that in the coming years we must work out how *Molinia* can be controlled with the limited amount of animals that can be placed on the moor under the various schemes.

Layland Branfield said that given the extent of the *Molinia* and low stocking numbers, even though a cow will eat 2% of her body weight per day, it will not make a dent in the problem and manually removing *Molinia* is complex and expensive.



Image © Mike Rego

Layland Branfield

Janet Dwyer concurred and said that Dartmoor farmers are trying different ways of controlling *Molinia* and that, in her view, keeping limited numbers of cattle grazing over winter – hardy stock which are confident in their use of the moor – is key. Cows unused to overwintering out on the moor are more likely to congregate by gateways which does not deliver the same benefits.

Adrian Colston pointed to good examples of out wintering cattle where their presence is not even noticeable in the landscape. Layland Branfield said he keeps an eye on his stocking placements and is able to maintain healthy and improved vegetation by trialling different approaches, but this is labour intensive.

Chris Chapman's impression was that Molland Moor on Exmoor, where swaling continues, looked very impressive. Janet Dwyer agreed, saying that this is due to a lot of effort and learning over more than a decade. Chris's personal observation was that cattle were eating *Molinia* on Dartmoor well into August, by which time most commentators argue that *Molinia* becomes unpalatable, but there were few animals present so they were overwhelmed. He also pointed to Alan Endacott's observations, mentioned by Bill Murray in his introduction, that heather came back after burning. This was also Geoff Eyres' experience in the Peak District where he saw that heather growth was stimulated by smoke.

Chris finished by saying that grazing and swaling were two traditional methods of vegetation control on Dartmoor that were not being used effectively due to

the constraints posed by the current incentive schemes.

Adrian Colston emphasised that swaling is not a banned activity but it requires permission and the right weather conditions.

Tony Whitehead suggested that as *Molinia* thrives on degraded peat, and where peat is in a poor condition hydrologically, more emphasis should be placed on restoring the peat to create conditions where *Molinia* can no longer dominate.

Layland Branfield said that this approach would not work on his dryer land where there is no degraded peat. Adrian Colston added that certainly *Molinia* does not like growing in wet conditions and in the rewetted areas *Molinia* will grow with less

vigour. The water table has only risen a small amount as a result of peat restoration and, whilst this is very good for wildlife, we do need to manage our expectations of what can effectively be achieved in terms of reducing *Molinia*.

Janet Dwyer said that in drier areas there are other ways to control *Molinia* and if farmers are given the flexibility to try different approaches, whether it be swaling, cutting, crushing, grazing with a mix of stock, using no-fence collars and/or whatever is the most appropriate for each local situation, this will achieve the quickest and best results.

Layland Branfield stressed the importance of translating the results of interventions that work



Swaling bracken and scrub on Marden Down

Image © Liz Miall

into scientific evidence. Adrian Colston said that *Molinia* is a fire adapted species and burning should not be an annual occurrence.

There followed a discussion about the difficulties that had been experienced by farmers working in an upland setting, restricted by SSSIs and farm payments that took away their freedoms. Working in a high risk and low return environment much of what happens on Dartmoor has been tied to payment schemes that have not adequately rewarded farmers for the work they put in or the changes they were being asked to make.

Janet Dwyer and Adrian Colston have been looking at the new offering from Defra as information about new schemes is beginning to filter through. Whilst some of the signs are promising, the stocking densities which offer the highest payments are much lower than they are now and this is a problem that needs to be overcome.

Another big question is about economics. The current system has not promoted viability and it has been difficult to achieve a premium for Dartmoor's farm products. Government policies need to take this into account and enable longer-term investment to achieve a positive

future for Dartmoor's farms and the environment.

The Central Landscape Recovery Project by Mark Owen

There are three landscape recovery schemes operating on Dartmoor at the moment: East Dartmoor led by East Devon Wildlife Trust, Walkham Valley led by DNPA and Central Dartmoor Scheme which is led by the Central Dartmoor Farm Cluster working in partnership with the Duchy of Cornwall.



Mark Owen

Mark Owen, Secretary of the Central Dartmoor Farm Cluster, explained that Landscape Recovery is the most ambitious and potentially highest paying of three tiers in the new Environmental Land Management Schemes being developed by Defra. It requires a high degree of planning from participants to design projects that will deliver a wide range of

Image © Mike Rego

'public goods' alongside food production. Over 30% of Dartmoor is in a Landscape Recovery Scheme, a much higher proportion than any other National Park. Overall, only 3% of agricultural land in England is currently in such a scheme.

The Central Dartmoor Farm Cluster stretches from Postbridge to Dartmeet and across to Chacombe so it covers a very significant area. The farms have already been working together

for a number of years and these schemes will be ambitious. Working with natural processes and delivering the agreed outcomes at a higher level will be challenging, but there are higher levels of payments and 20 years of guaranteed funding. The overarching aim is to be environmentally sustainable and financially viable.

In creating this farmer-led proposal the aim is to bring together farmers, landowners, conservationists and people with

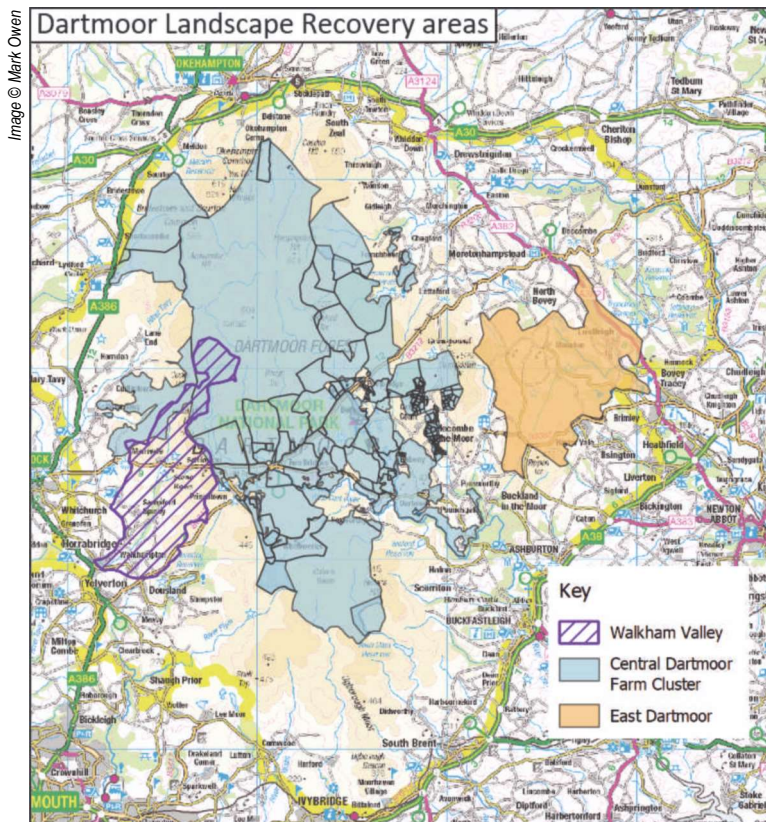


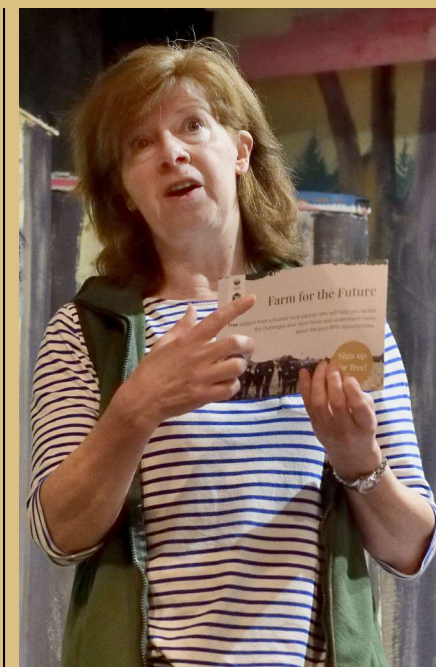
Image © Mark Owen

an interest and love for Dartmoor, to make the moor better for nature and people, and more resilient to climate change, whilst still producing high quality food. Together they aim to create a clear long-term vision and then work out how to make it happen. For more information visit <https://www.dartmoorfarmcluster.org/landscape-recovery>

The Dartmoor Hill Farm Project (DHFP) by Hazel Kendall

The DHFP now employs three people and for 20 years has been giving free advice and offering help to farmers.

Hazel Kendall explained that more information about Environmental Land Management Schemes has been emerging over recent months, some became available yesterday and it contains 102 actions as well as the existing separate section for capital grants. When these actions become available the important point is to understand the detail around each action. Some items can be undertaken in parallel with others and these could make the choices more financially viable. DHFP provides information online, in hard copy, in their newsletter and at their events, and she emphasised that free help was just a phone call away.



Hazel Kendall

DHFP hope to help farmers navigate the new offering to enable them to make landscape improvements tailored to the natural capital that exists on their holding, as part of a profitable and practical farming future.

Naomi Oakley said how much she appreciated DHFP as an impartial body. It might be useful to put together a 'model' of what a Dartmoor farm could be doing to take the maximum advantage of the actions available. Hazel Kendall agreed and explained that one of their previous events did just this, and future programmes of work will

explore this further under the new options becoming available.

Test and Trial

Janet Dwyer explained that her work on Dartmoor with funding from Defra started with a feasibility study into a 'payment by results' approach to future schemes aimed at delivering desired 'public benefits'. She found that farmers were keen to get involved with a scheme that put them at the forefront of decision making. The approach involved surveys in which farmers walked the land recording such things as the quality of the vegetation and the condition of the archaeology, using a scoring system that was devised to show results across a whole Common. It would link to a payment based on an average condition score, which was appreciated by farmers because it was not based on rigid stocking densities.

The other part of the scheme would involve capital grants that were available for identified beneficial activities and these payments would go direct to those people who actually did the work including graziers or anyone else who got involved, eg in managing swales, unlike some previous schemes.

Steve Alford explained that the surveys proved that the Dartmoor Commons can be



Image © Mike Rego

Janet Dwyer

improved and the subsequent work can result in the mosaic of habitats that are now required. The report on the findings of this feasibility study is now with Defra.

Tom Greeves said he liked the diversity of approaches and tapping into local knowledge that Janet Dwyer mentioned as a new way forward. He said that the Fursdon Review was an extraordinary thing to have happened on Dartmoor. He questioned what role Natural England now has. The date of the creation of the North and South Dartmoor SSSIs was in the early 1950s, not the 1980s as erroneously given in the Fursdon Review, and were entirely for biological and geological criteria. If we were designating Dartmoor today

the approach would be very different as we now know what an extraordinary cultural landscape Dartmoor represents.

Tom also questioned how we can counter all the misinformation in the national media about sheep grazing on Dartmoor, its ecological health and the state of its peat, as promulgated by George Monbiot, Ben Goldsmith and others.

Layland Branfield responded by saying that we need to start by giving farmers hope and focus on the positive aspects of the Fursdon Review. Janet said that the Fursdon Review picked up on this lack of trust between the agencies and the local population, and that there seems to be a will on all sides now for consensus and a respect for local

knowledge and not just one approach.

Electronic Collars

Adrian Colston said that 100 collars have been fitted to cattle on Fur Tor. He will be doing the monitoring for this project. Elsewhere in the country, collars have been used with success.

Helen Radmore has fitted collars to cows and is pleased with the results.

Chairman's Concluding

Remarks by Layland Branfield 'The Fursdon review is a landmark for Dartmoor. It has been broadly welcomed and will be influential and have national implications. Dartmoor farmers are first and foremost pastoralists and I hope that the new ways of working will allow us to continue and to pass what we value most on to future generations.'

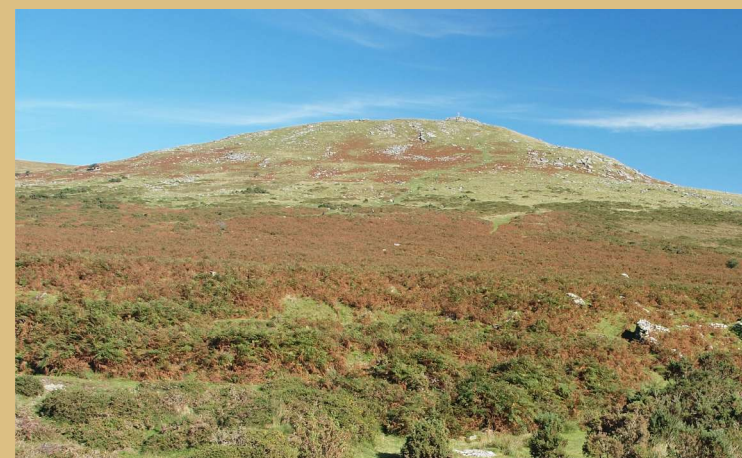


Image © Steve Mason

Bracken and gorse inundating the Lyd valley below Brat Tor

Image © Bill Murray



Visit to Bowden Farm, Buckfastleigh

by Bill Murray

On Saturday 15 June, twenty four members spent a very interesting and enjoyable afternoon learning about the working life of Russell Ashford at his Dartmoor farm which is situated two miles from the village of Scoriton on the southern slopes of the moor. It was a day that threatened rain but to everyone's relief that disappointment did not materialize and we were able to explore the farmland from field to field by tractor and trailer.

One of the fascinations of Dartmoor is the way that the landscape and nature of the

Image © Bill Murray



Our host Russell Ashford

area differs depending on the viewpoint. The difference between farming on the north of the moor to that on the south is appreciable. The hedges grow higher and the fodder crops grow quicker having less shade and more sun.

Russell told us that Bowden Farm, which runs up to 1000 feet above sea level, means 'dwelling on the brow of the hill' and so it is not surprising that there are a few with the same name on Dartmoor.

Image © Bill Murray



Members enjoying the trailer ride

He is the third generation of his family to farm at Bowden and he keeps dairy and beef cattle and sheep. They have been farming organically since 1997 and Russell sees licensed organic food production as the ultimate sustainable farming system.

Unfortunately, over the last two years the Ashford's have

lost more than half of their cows through tuberculosis and for the time being he is unable to sell his store cattle, suckling and baby calves. This situation is very hard to bear. At present they are milking just thirty cows instead of the usual eighty.



Image © Bill Murray

A mixed native species hedge

It has now been confirmed that TB has been found in the deer population which is adding further complications to the disease eradication on the farm.

We all managed comfortably to get into the open trailer and with



Image © Bill Murray

Pedigree Ayrshire Dairy cows with a British blue beef heifer in their midst

childish excitement away we went on our tour of the farm.

The first field that we looked at sloped gently southwards with well maintained, high and very full hedges to provide shelter but also to encourage wildlife. Russell considers the best interests of birds, animals and wildflowers in his planning and subsequent hedgerow maintenance. The hedges are of mixed native species, trees with ash dieback have been removed.

This field has recently been reseeded with grass, clover and herbs to provide diversity for silage. With a slurry feed it is possible to take three cuts in a year. Spraying is not carried out, the field is occasionally ploughed and a lime dressing applied before seeding. Other fields on the farm remain as unploughed pastures.



Image © Bill Murray

A no fence collar

We all then climbed off the trailer to go into an adjacent field to look at the Ayrshire dairy cows contentedly grazing. Do they appreciate the wonderful views across to Widecombe and over the South Hams to the sea?

The Ashford's have grazing rights on Buckfastleigh Common and the Forest of



Image © Bill Murray

Russell addressing members in front of one of his barns

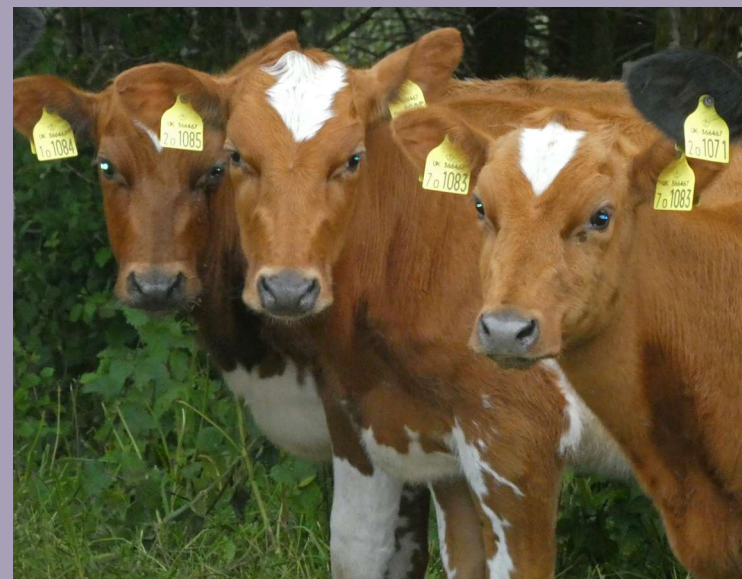


Image © Bill Murray

Pedigree Ayrshire heifer calves

Dartmoor and our next journey on the trailer was to a field close to the Common where Russell has planted a new hedge within one of the newtake enclosures. Here we took a close look at Bowden Farm's beef herd comprising Aberdeen Angus and Belgian Blue crosses.

On the Common Russell has been experimenting using Nofence collars on his cattle to keep a check on where they are grazing and to encourage them to establish lears which they would graze in the future. By using this system he has been able to target the *Molinia* (purple moor grass) on the Common, thereby increasing the conservation value of

grazed livestock on the Common.

The farm also supports a flock of Scotch Blackface ewes and their lambs are finished on the farm. The Nofence collars have been used by the cattle for the last three years and Russell confirms that the sheep are now following the cattle into areas that were once dense and ungrazed *Molinia*.

We returned to the farm for some welcome refreshments and a good chat. This was an excellent farm visit. A great opportunity for members to share their knowledge and to ask questions that explain more about the positives and the negatives of Dartmoor farming.

Celebrating Dartmoor Day

On Saturday 13 July the society held a very enjoyable and informative day in Gidleigh celebrating various aspects of Dartmoor. During the morning a wool workshop was conducted in the village hall and after lunch at Gidleigh Castle the spiritual side of the moor was celebrated in the church during the afternoon.

For the Love of Wool

by Bridget Cole and Barbara John

The morning started in the exquisitely situated village hall with a talk from Bridget Cole about sheep wool.

Bridget explained how, after passing management of the family livestock farm on to the next generation, she was free to return to education. These studies through Plymouth University specialized in wool, an under utilized natural fibre,

which has culminated into a vision to recreate a Dartmoor wool processing mill that would provide income for the wool growers and skilled employment for local people.

Financially, in 1974 the value of the wool cheque was enough for her young family to live on for the summer months, but now and especially since the turn of the century, the wool crop



Bridget addressing the workshop participants



Barbara (left) conducting her wool embroidery workshop

income does not even cover the cost of shearing the sheep.

Bridget had brought with her wool samples from various breeds of sheep for us to see and feel. She explained their different characteristics and uses, and explained clearly how the strands, or staple, are measured. By viewing and feeling the samples the differences were easy to understand.

Bridget feels that the annual crop of wool is wasted in this era of creating products. The traditional usages of wool for the manufacture of clothing and carpets have declined since the mid 20th century, while new markets such as insulation, packaging, sound proofing and,

more recently, wool rope and fishing nets have been created.

Wool logs have been trialed in an experiment to create dams to hold back water in the peatland restoration works currently being carried out by the South West Peatland Partnership on



Examples of completed embroidery

Image © Bill Murray

Image © Bill Murray



Lunchtime picnic on the lawn in the grounds of Gidleigh Castle

Dartmoor, and wool ropes implanted with seeds have been laid on the seabed to encourage the growth of seaweed.

Bridget had brought along beautiful examples of products that had been crafted from wool by herself and other skilled friends to show to the audience.

After Bridget's inspiring and very interesting talk with so many wonderful exhibits, the group then engaged in a wool embroidery workshop which was led by Barbara John. The theme was Dartmoor landscapes.

Working onto dry needle felt bases of Dartmoor scenes, the participants took great pleasure

in stitching in heather, stone walls, sheep, gorse and tors, if desired, in the appropriate colours using crewel wools to create a unique piece of pure wool embroidery.

At the end of the session we all left the village hall and walked the short distance to Holy Trinity Church and Gidleigh Castle which the owners had kindly opened so that members could view. We then spread ourselves out on the castle lawn for our lunchtime picnic. Full details of the castle can be seen at:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1308353?section=official-list-entry>

Celebrating Spirituality at Gidleigh

by Nick Fennemore

In the afternoon, about 40 members of The Dartmoor Society gathered at Holy Trinity Church, Gidleigh, to celebrate the spirituality of Dartmoor with a particular focus on how humans have influenced its landscape.

Dartmoor is an amazing place in which we all experience a sense of awe and wonder. Its majesty and beauty evoke many and varied feelings in us, and so we came together for a

second celebration using poetry, literature, music, history, song and personal reflections to help in our celebration.

The proceedings began with a brief introduction to the village of Gidleigh and we heard that King Alfred the Great owned the village and left it to his eldest son Ethelward. The place stayed in royal ownership when Gytha retreated to Gidleigh



Organiser Nick Fennemore leading the afternoon's proceedings

Image © Bill Murray



Image © Bill Murray
Alan Endacott

after the death of her son Harold II at the Battle of Hastings. Gidleigh Church, probably built about 1400, is rather cave-like, an ideal building for hunkering down against the Dartmoor weather and it is a very special place.

Alan Endacott gave a very full and informative talk entitled 'A Brief History of Dartmoor' which included an excellent section on ritual landscapes.

The priest and poet, R S Thomas said, 'I have looked long on this land, trying to understand my place in it.' This theme continued throughout the afternoon through a variety of poetry written by local poets and people's own reflections and stories. Music was provided by

Bill Murray and some beautiful reflective pieces were played by society member Hesther Somerville on flute and recorder.

Readings included passages written by William Crossing about Sabine Baring Gould and Eden Phillpotts.

The afternoon ended with people wishing for more!

Our grateful thanks go to the Church Wardens of Gidleigh for allowing the beautiful church for this event and to all who took part. We certainly hope to have a similar event next year.



Image © Bill Murray
Hesther Somerville playing the recorder



Fundraising

The Dartmoor Society is a charity that depends wholly on income from subscriptions, events, donations and merchandise to fund its activities. It has no premises or paid staff, so every pound it raises goes towards the work it does.

The Society is registered with the UK's biggest charity shopping site.



Easyfundraising generates free donations from your online shopping to your chosen charity.

We are inviting all members to consider using easyfundraising when shopping online as a way to claim valuable funds that are waiting to be donated from a wide range of food, clothing, home and garden

retailers, restaurants, entertainment and utilities companies. More than 4,000 businesses have elected to help their customers' chosen charities in this way.

At the moment, some 15 of our members are registered with the scheme and have raised over £450 for the Society through their online shopping. If more members were to register, they could generate more funds at no cost to themselves.

How?

After registering, just start each online shop at easyfundraising. When prompted, choose The Dartmoor Society as your charity, then shop as normal. The retailer will automatically donate between 1% and 5% of what is spent to charities chosen by their customers.

It's simple to register, easy to use and it's free.

Please register as a shopper at:

www.easyfundraising.org.uk/cause/dartmoorsociety

Calendar of Forthcoming Events

For more information and to book any of these events please visit our website or contact Bill Murray on 01647 231297 or chair@dartmoorsociety.com

Guided walk to Birch Tor and Vitifer Mine with Inga Page • Meet at Bennett's Cross on the B3212, PL20 6TA • Saturday 14 September • 10am

A guided walk of 3-4 miles to see the Birch Tor and Vitifer Mine workings. Just a few steps from the Warren House Inn is a wonderfully varied landscape containing relics of the tin mines that once dominated this valley. Please bring your own drink and a packed lunch and come dressed for the weather forecast on the day. Tickets are £8 and can be booked via our website.

Image © Inga Page



Inga Page

Glaciation on Dartmoor: A talk by Richard Horsham • Moretonhampstead Parish Hall, Fore Street TQ13 8LL • Wednesday 23 October • 6pm

What is the landscape legacy of the severe cold climate that

Dartmoor experienced as a result of the Ice Age? Richard Horsham will discuss the effects of frost and ice processes on Dartmoor and the physical features that are left in the landscape.

The tickets available through our website are £8 and include light refreshments.

A talk by John Walters, recipient of The Dartmoor Society Award 2023 • Bovey Tracey Methodist Hall, Fore Street, TQ13 9AD • Tuesday 27 November • 7.30pm

John was presented with the society's award for his outstanding work as an ecologist, artist, public speaker, writer and filmmaker, and for the way that he makes his findings available for others to study and enjoy.

We are especially pleased that John has offered to talk to us about his current work.

The ticket price is £8 and includes tea, coffee and cake.



John Walters

Image © Charlie Elder



Image © John Walters

Sketch of a roe deer doe in Hembury Woods

An Evening of Music, Songs and Stories • East Dart Inn, Postbridge PL20 6TJ • Friday 21 February 2025 • 8pm

Bill Murray is organising an informal musical entertainment evening at the East Dart Inn.

The Dartmoor Society has never held an event at this venue before and we are looking forward to hearing what Bill has in store for us.

Entry is free.

If you are interested in performing please call Bill on 01647 231297.

The Morphology of Peat • Venue TBA • March 2025 • Time TBA

We are intending to organise an event that will examine how peat develops over historic timescales and adapts to climatic fluctuations.

Since 2005 we have been trying to understand more about the science that underpins peat restoration on Dartmoor and this is one of a series of events that we hope will help to keep us all informed.

2025 Events

We are currently working on our events for 2025. Please check our website in January for full details.

We will also send the 2025 events calendar by email to our members.

Information on our April AGM and events for the rest of the year will be in our spring 2025 Newsletter.

In October Emma Stockley will give a research lecture about the Mesolithic on Dartmoor.

Our November event will focus on Dartmoor rivers.

Membership Matters

New Members

Katherine Blockley
Ben Campbell
Bella Evershed
Daniel Stokes
Caron Gainsford
Frank last
Max Piper

Honorary Secretary

The Dartmoor Society is looking for a new Secretary and we would be delighted to hear from you if you think you could take on this role. One of the main requirements is to be good at communicating by email as most of our business is carried out this way.

We hope that the Secretary will also be able to help write some of the reports on our events that go in our Newsletter, and to take the minutes of committee meetings, although this latter task is shared.

We keep ourselves up to date with many issues that arise in the management of Dartmoor's complex landscape and through our events we disseminate this information to our members.

The society has broadly educational aims and our website gives a flavour of the issues that we have been involved with

www.dartmoorsociety.com.

We are all volunteers and as committee members we play a part in shaping the way the society is organised and developed.

Please get in touch if you would like to talk about joining us.

Volunteer Opportunities

The committee would like to establish a group of members who are willing to help at the society's events, but without the need to attend committee meetings or read society papers etc.

We would be pleased of help with:

- Setting up the room for society events, serving tea and refreshments during events, and helping to clear the room afterwards (separate tasks).
- Setting up the society gazebo at Widecombe Fair and Chagford Show, doing a stint selling Dartmoor books and talking to members of the public, and taking the gazebo down afterwards (separate tasks).
- Help with preparation, serving, and clearing up at the annual barbeque (separate tasks).

If you would be interested in helping us, please send your contact details to the Secretary at secretary@dartmoorsociety.com. We will be very grateful for any help you can offer.

Subscriptions

Current subscription rates are:

- Single £17.00
- Family £25.00
- Life £340.00
- Student Membership is free

Details can be found on the society's website on the 'Join Us' page. If you pay by standing order, please check you have updated the amount you pay which can be done via online banking.



The Dartmoor Society

***Contributing to the well-being of Dartmoor and
its communities***

President: Peter Beacham OBE | 01392 435074

Executive Committee

Chair: Bill Murray | 01647 231297 | chair@dartmoorsociety.com

Vice Chair: Nick Fennemore | 01647 433749 |
canonfennemore@btinternet.com

Honorary Secretary: Position vacant

Honorary Treasurer: Tom Orchard | 01822 853826 | tlorchard7@gmail.com

Membership Secretary: Andrew John | 07472 662250 |
membership@dartmoorsociety.com

Newsletter Editor: Steve Mason | manavalins@gmail.com

Website Editor: Caya Edwards | 07971 916662 |
secretary@dartmoorsociety.com

Events: Bill Murray | 01647 231297 | chair@dartmoorsociety.com

Publicity: Anthea Hoey | 01626 362003 | anthea_hoey@fastmail.fm

Ordinary Member: Layland Branfield | laylandbranfield@gmail.com

Ordinary Member: Steve Alford | dartmooralfie@outlook.com

Ordinary Member: Rachel Van der Steen | ensworthy@gmail.com

Ordinary Member: Bridget Cole | bridgetcole200@gmail.com

Ordinary Member: Mike Rego | 07771 968844 | mike.rego@gmail.com

www.dartmoorsociety.com

info@dartmoorsociety.com

Established 1998 • Registered Charity No. 1111066

