Land Use Issues

Dartmoor Factsheet

Two of Britain's most popular holiday routes pass close by to Dartmoor, and this adds to the heavy recreational and tourist pressure from Devon's residents and visitors. Conservation of landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage is a priority for the National Park Authority. The area has long been occupied by people, it has a rich archaeological heritage, and is still farmed, with much of the open moor being held under common rights. Its small size and proximity to three urban areas puts pressures on the National Park. Uses of land for military training, water supply and mineral extraction are particularly acute.

Military

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has control (either as owner, or the holder of a lease or licence) of some 13,340 hectares (32,951 acres) of the National Park, including half its highest moorland. Most activity is concentrated between Okehampton and Two Bridges. Land is used for a combination of live firing training (using live ammunition) and 'dry' (ie no live ammunition) training. Live firing has caused damage to ancient monuments, can disturb wildlife, and when taking place excludes the public from large areas of moorland.

Military use of Dartmoor began early in the 19th century and was soon followed by the then War Department leasing a small amount of land from the Duchy of Cornwall. The area increased and by the end of the Second World War 29,000 hectares (72,000 acres) - most of the northern moor - was occupied, with the public excluded from two-thirds of it. Public concern about the area of land used, and the incompatibility of military use with conservation, led to public inquiries in 1947, 1952 and 1956, after which the area of land used was reduced to about its present extent. Baroness Sharpe's inquiry into the *Military Use of Dartmoor for Training Purposes* in 1975-6 concluded that the harmful effects of firing should be reduced, without affecting the efficiency of training: some sites were identified for release if alternatives could be found.

Following the inquiry, a Dartmoor Steering Group was set up by the Government, including representatives from the Dartmoor National Park Authority, MoD and the Duchy of Cornwall to provide a liaison mechanism to solve potential conflicts.

In 1981 the National Park Authority and the then Countryside Commission agreed a joint policy statement to reflect their views that military training is incompatible with National Park objectives. They agreed to resist the extension of activity and training with a view to the eventual cessation of military training on the moor. Since then the Government has permitted an extension of the MoD's activities at Willsworthy Camp, including the modernisation of a small arms firing range and the building of new barracks.

Farming

Farming on high Dartmoor is confined to hardy cattle and sheep breeding, but the lower land on the fringes and to the east support traditional mixed farming. This produces an attractive landscape of small, uneven fields, divided by steep banks, hedges or walls. Farming employs about 2,000 people in the National Park.

A major landowner is the Duchy of Cornwall, which owns 28,300 hectares (70,000 acres), mostly high moorland. The Duchy works with the National Park Authority to produce management plans for the Estate. Occupying Dartmoor's heartland is about 34,878 hectares (86,186 acres) of common land, including the ancient Forest of Dartmoor, the Commons of Devon and several detached manorial commons.

Common rights on Dartmoor date from at least the 13th century. These are held by those who occupy the land or buildings to which the rights are attached, provided the rights have been registered under the 1965 *Commons Registration Act*. About 1,500 people currently hold common rights, including grazing rights for sheep, cattle and horses, some peat digging, fuel and stone gathering.

Until the late 19th century the commons were run by manorial courts, which decided such matters as stocking rates and burning programmes. Most ceased to function years ago and more recently commoners have joined in local associations federated under a single Dartmoor Commoners' Association.

The *Dartmoor Commons Act*, 1985, was promoted by the National Park Authority with the Dartmoor Commoners' Association. It legalises public access on foot and horseback to all common land within the National Park and seeks, through a Dartmoor Commoners' Council, to achieve the proper management of livestock and vegetation.

In 1994, the Ministry of Agriculture (now Defra) introduced the **Environmentally Sensitive Area** scheme on Dartmoor. This offers new financial incentives to secure the recognition of the valuable role that farmers continue to play in creating and maintaining the Dartmoor landscape.

Water Supply

All the large areas of water on Dartmoor are artificially made. There are no natural lakes: Dartmoor was never glaciated, and no natural basins exist in the river valleys.

The need for water supplies is created by the urban populations around the National Park - particularly Plymouth, Exeter, Torbay and South Devon, and the summer influx of visitors to Devon.

There are now eight reservoirs in the National Park: six (Burrator, Venford, Fernworthy, Trenchford, Tottiford and Kennick) were built before 1940. The two newer reservoirs (Avon Dam and Meldon), bring the total area covered by water to nearly 200 hectares (500 acres).

The National Park Authority is opposed to further reservoirs on open country. In 1970 Parliament refused permission for a proposed Swincombe Reservoir high on the moor. A large site outside the National Park, at Roadford, was chosen and is now used to supply Plymouth and North Devon.

Minerals

The vein minerals in the metamorphic rocks and the granite have produced rich rewards for speculators. In the 12th century there was a 'tin rush' to the south-west, which opened up many Dartmoor valleys and brought prosperity to the towns of Tavistock, Plympton, Chagford and Ashburton. Tin, copper, lead, silver and iron were all mined through the Middle Ages, and prosperity boomed as new techniques were developed in the 18th and 19th centuries. Some workings continued operating up to the 1920s.

Kaolin, or china clay, is the basis of the main extractive industry on Dartmoor today. Kaolin is extracted by open cast working and used in the manufacture of porcelain and paper. It was first extracted in 1830 and is exported throughout the world. There are vast reserves in southern Dartmoor, concentrated around Lee Moor, which has one of the largest china clay pits in the world: over 90 m (300 ft) deep and covering over 40 hectares (100 acres). Extraction generates vast quantities of waste which is currently disposed of in large heaps. Work is being done on landscaping them, but it takes many years for them to take on a natural appearance. Land valuable for recreation, wildlife or archaeological interest has been threatened by the dumping of china clay waste. Shaugh Moor, an important area in the south-west of the National Park, was protected, in the short term, following a public inquiry at which the clay company was persuaded to alter its tipping plans.

Other extractive activity on Dartmoor is mainly for the supply of building stone - particularly limestone. There are workable deposits of the rare mineral tungsten at Hemerdon, just outside the National Park, and a public inquiry was held in 1982 to examine new proposals (including provisions for dumping the waste) for extracting it.

Recreation

Many millions of visits to Dartmoor are made each year. Some 40% of visitors come from the surrounding towns, especially Plymouth and Torbay. Nearly all of Dartmoor's visitors arrive by car, and coping with traffic problems is a major task for the National Park Authority.

The fringes of the National Park are particularly under pressure as major holiday routes skirt it to the north and south.

After a public inquiry, the Secretary of State for the Environment decided to allow the Okehampton bypass to go through the northern edge of the National Park, even though it is Government policy that new trunk roads should avoid National Parks. In 1996 a 40mph speed limit was introduced on most moorland roads, mainly in an attempt to reduce the number of accidents involving vehicles and livestock.

Within the National Park, there exists a `functional route network', where roads are signposted according to their most appropriate use. Heavy traffic is encouraged to keep to the edges of the National Park and to those roads most suitable for them. The majority of visitors come to walk, picnic or to tour the National Park and careful management of popular sites (eg the Dart Valley, Postbridge, Princetown, Widecombe-in-the-Moor) is necessary. In 1994 the National Park Authority, working with the Highways Department of Devon County Council, adopted a *Traffic Management Strategy* - the first of its kind in our National Parks.

There are 452 miles (723 km) of footpaths and bridleways, mainly on enclosed farmland but also giving access to the moors. A number of access agreements have been negotiated and, under the *Dartmoor Commons Act*, 1985, there is legal public access to all Dartmoor common land. As well as riding and walking, fishing and pony trekking are also popular activities. In 1998 the Dartmoor Commons Byelaws were amended to control off road mountain biking. Cycling is limited to bridleways, byways and routes agreed by the landowners.

Illustration © Marcus Byron

Conservation

High, wet blanket bog dominates the Dartmoor plateaux, two large areas of which have been designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), dominated by rushes, cotton grass and mosses. Fringing the blanket bog are heather and grass moors, providing better grazing for farm and wild animals. The deep, wooded valleys, river and stream-side habitats are also represented in the combined total of about 28,000 hectares (69,187 acres) of nature reserves and SSSIs in the National Park.

The high moorland provides a hunting ground for birds of prey, whilst the Dartmoor pony (the 'true' pony is a descendant of ponies turned out on the moor in Saxon times) grazes the more accessible heather moorland.

In 1977 the National Park Authority began monitoring landscape change, occurring through improvement or neglect, which is indicated in part by the spread of bracken. The National Park Authority has bought land at Haytor and Holne Moor to protect it and to carry out research into moorland management.

Dartmoor's attractive villages and low, stone-built farmhouses are an important part of its heritage. The National Park Authority has designated 22 Conservation Areas and there is a considerable number of listed buildings. The Authority publishes design guides to encourage high standards of design which blend in with traditional styles and to promote the use of local materials.

Woodland

The main areas of broadleaved woodlands existing today are in the deep valleys of the moorland edge: including the Dart, Teign and Bovey. But there is evidence to show that all but the highest moorland was once covered in oak/birch forest: a few remains of that ancient woodland survive at Black Tor Beare, above Meldon Reservoir, Piles Copse on the River Erme and Wistman's Wood on the West Dart. The valley woodlands are mainly of oak, and many were managed as coppice woodland, in previous centuries, producing bark tanning and wood for building and fuel.

Tree Preservation Orders cover nearly 1,061 hectares (2,622 acres), but cannot ensure positive management.

The Forestry Commission owns or leases 1,740 hectares (4,299 acres) in the National Park, mainly in three large conifer plantations - Fernworthy, Bellever and Soussons Down (near Postbridge) - high on the moorland (conifers were extensively planted in the UK after the first World War to replace the timber stocks).

In the National Park's eastern hills is a fourth block, around Kennick Reservoir, which is in private ownership. There are other conifer plantations around Burrator Reservoir and in the north-east.

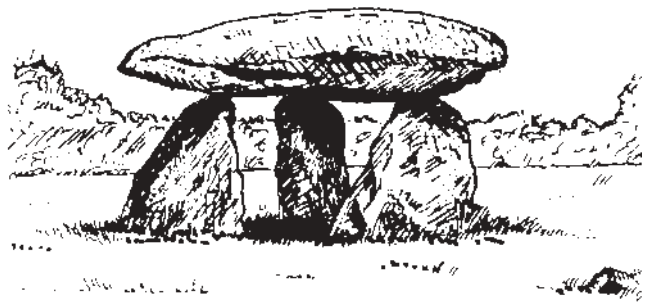
Many valley woodlands are in steep difficult to work locations which has led to some neglect following the cessation of coppice management. There is an ongoing challenge to develop and implement appropriate management plans to maximise biodiversity and ensure the region's wooded valley landscapes are to be enjoyed by further generations.

A local accord has been signed with the Forestry Commission which aims to promote contemporary woodland management practice and the establishment of woods in appropriate locations.

Archaeology

Dartmoor is an archaeological landscape of European importance. It has over 1,200 Scheduled Ancient Monuments, but there are many known sites without protection, and more are continually being discovered. The moor was probably covered by woodland up to a height of about 490 m (1,600 ft) above sea level when the first farmers arrived in about 3,000BC. The earliest human structures surviving today are a few chambered tombs, but the greatest human influence was in clearing the woodland.

This activity expanded greatly in the second millennium BC, from which time survive extensive territorial boundaries (reaves), field systems, villages and ritual monuments such as stone circles and rows (that at Stall Moor is especially well preserved). Later prehistoric hill forts are found on the moorland edge.



Spinsters' Rock, Drewsteignton – Neolithic burial chamber.

There are also extensive medieval remains (much of the moor was a Royal Forest in medieval times) of abandoned settlements and fields, and tin workings of great importance. Medieval clapper bridges (there is a famous one at Postbridge), stone crosses erected on the high moors as waymarks, and long-houses (a few in virtually unchanged condition since the Middle Ages) provide important evidence of developing culture and building techniques.

Since 1977 the National Park Authority has conducted many surveys, including joint studies with the Forestry Commission and the Duchy of Cornwall, to identify important archaeological features, and to agree priorities for management. Some sites are still being damaged by military action, agricultural improvement, forestry and recreation pressure.

The National Park Authority uses a variety of statutory powers and partnership working arrangements to manage some of these issues. More information about the work of the Authority can be found in the *Local Plan Adopted Version 1995-2011*, the *Dartmoor National Park Management Plan* and the *Action for Wildlife: The Biodiversity Action Plan*.

Useful web links for further information:

Other factsheets:

- General
- Recreation and Tourism
- Prehistoric Archaeology
- Farming
- Commons
- Dartmoor's Tin Industry
- Okehampton Bypass - A case study in decision making
  http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/dnp/factfile/homepage.html

Other publications:

- *Dartmoor National Park Local Plan First Review 1995 – 2011 (Adopted vesrsion)*
  http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/dnp/planning/lplan/localplan2.html
- *Dartmoor National Park Management Plan 2001*
  http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/dnp/planning/mplan.html
- *Action for Wildlife: The Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan*
  http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk/dnp/pubs/bap.html

For further information, and a list of other Fact Sheets available, contact the:
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