

= Exmoor =

Exmoor is loosely defined as an area of hilly open moorland in west Somerset and north Devon in South West England . It is named after the River Exe , the source of which is situated in the centre of the area , two miles north @-@ west of Simonsbath . Exmoor is more precisely defined as the area of the former ancient royal hunting forest , also called Exmoor , which was officially surveyed 1815 ? 1818 as 18 @,@ 810 acres ( 7 @,@ 610 ha ) in extent . The moor has given its name to a National Park , which includes the Brendon Hills , the East Lyn Valley , the Vale of Porlock and 55 kilometres ( 34 mi ) of the Bristol Channel coast . The total area of the Exmoor National Park is 692 @.@ 8 square kilometres ( 267 @.@ 5 sq mi ) , of which 71 % is in Somerset and 29 % in Devon .

The upland area is underlain by sedimentary rocks dating from the Devonian and early Carboniferous periods with Triassic and Jurassic age rocks on lower slopes . Where these reach the coast cliffs are formed which are cut with ravines and waterfalls . It was recognised as a heritage coast in 1991 . The highest point on Exmoor is Dunkery Beacon ; at 519 metres ( 1 @,@ 703 ft ) it is also the highest point in Somerset . The terrain supports lowland heath communities , Ancient woodland and blanket mire which provide a habitat for some scarce flora and fauna . There have also been reports of The Beast of Exmoor , a cryptozoological cat roaming Exmoor . Several areas have been designated as Nature Conservation Review and Geological Conservation Review sites .

There is evidence of human occupation from the Mesolithic . This developed for agriculture and extraction of mineral ores into the bronze and Iron Ages . The remains of standing stones , cairns and bridges can still be identified . The royal forest was granted a charter in the 13th century , however foresters who managed the area were identified in the Domesday Book . In the Middle Ages sheep farming was common with a system of agistment licensing the grazing of livestock as the Inclosure Acts divided up the land . The area is now used for a range of recreational purposes .

= = National Character Area = =

Exmoor has been designated as a national character area ( No. 145 ) by Natural England , the public body responsible for England 's natural environment . Neighbouring natural regions include The Culm to the southwest , the Devon Redlands to the south and the Vale of Taunton and Quantock Fringes to the east .

= = Exmoor National Park = =

Exmoor was designated a National Park in 1954 , under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act . The Exmoor National Park is primarily an upland area with a dispersed population living mainly in small villages and hamlets . The largest settlements are Porlock , Dulverton , Lynton , and Lynmouth , which together contain almost 40 % of the park 's population . Lynton and Lynmouth are combined into one parish and are connected by the Lynton and Lynmouth Cliff Railway . Exmoor was once a Royal forest and hunting ground , covering 18 @,@ 810 acres ( 7 @,@ 610 ha ) , which was sold off in 1818 . Several areas within the Exmoor National Park have been declared Sites of Special Scientific Interest due to their flora and fauna . This title earns the site some legal protection from development , damage and neglect . In 1993 an environmentally sensitive area was established within Exmoor .

= = Geology = =

Exmoor is an upland area formed almost exclusively from sedimentary rocks dating from the Devonian and early Carboniferous periods . The name of the geological period and system , ' Devonian ' , comes from Devon , as rocks of that age were first studied and described here . With the exception of a suite of Triassic and Jurassic age rocks forming the lower ground between Porlock and Timberscombe and from Minehead to Yarde ( within Exmoor National Park but peripheral to the moor itself ) , all of the solid rocks of Exmoor are assigned to the Exmoor Group ,

which comprises a mix of gritstones , sandstones , slates , shales , limestone , siltstones and mudstones . Quartz and iron mineralisation can be detected in outcrops and subsoil . The Glenthorne area demonstrates the Trentishoe Member ( formerly ' Formation ' ) of the Hangman Sandstone Formation ( formerly ' Group ' ) . The Hangman Sandstone represents the Middle Devonian sequence of North Devon and Somerset . These unusual freshwater deposits in the Hangman Grits were mainly formed in desert conditions . As this area of Britain was not subject to glaciation , the plateau remains as a remarkably old landform . The bedrock and more recent superficial deposits are covered in part by moorland which is supported by wet , acid soil .

= = = Coastline = = =

Exmoor has 55 kilometres ( 34 mi ) of coastline . The highest sea cliff on mainland Britain ( if a cliff is defined as having a slope greater than 60 degrees ) is Great Hangman near Combe Martin at 318 metres ( 1 @, @ 043 ft ) high , with a cliff face of 250 metres ( 820 ft ) . Its sister cliff is the 250 metres ( 820 ft ) Little Hangman , which marks the edge of Exmoor . The coastal hills reach a maximum height of 314 metres ( 1 @, @ 030 ft ) at Culbone Hill .

Exmoor 's woodlands sometimes reach the shoreline , especially between Porlock and The Foreland , where they form the single longest stretch of coastal woodland in England and Wales . The Exmoor Coastal Heaths have been recognised as a Site of Special Scientific Interest due to the diversity of plant species present .

The scenery of rocky headlands , ravines , waterfalls and towering cliffs gained the Exmoor coast recognition as a heritage coast in 1991 . With its huge waterfalls and caves , this dramatic coastline has become an adventure playground for both climbers and explorers . The cliffs provide one of the longest and most isolated seacliff traverses in the UK . The South West Coast Path , at 1 @, @ 014 kilometres ( 630 mi ) the longest National Trail in England and Wales , starts at Minehead and runs along all of Exmoor 's coast . There are small harbours at Lynmouth , Porlock Weir and Combe Martin . Once crucial to coastal trade , the harbours are now primarily used for pleasure ; individually owned sailing boats and non @-@ commercial fishing boats are often found in the harbours . The Valley of the Rocks beyond Lynton is a deep dry valley that runs parallel to the nearby sea and is capped on the seaward side by large rocks , and Sexton 's Burrows forms a natural breakwater to the harbour of Watermouth Bay on the coast .

= = = Rivers = = =

The high ground forms the catchment area for numerous rivers and streams . There are about 483 kilometres ( 300 mi ) of named rivers on Exmoor . The River Exe , for which Exmoor is named , rises at Exe Head near the village of Simonsbath , close to the Bristol Channel coast , but flows more or less directly due south , so that most of its length lies in Devon . It reaches the sea at a substantial ria ( estuary ) on the south ( English Channel ) coast of Devon . Historically , its lowest bridging point was at Exeter , though there is now a viaduct for the M5 motorway about 3 kilometres ( 2 mi ) south of the city centre . It has several tributaries which arise on Exmoor . The River Barle runs from northern Exmoor to join the River Exe at Exebridge , Devon . The river and the Barle Valley are both designated as biological Sites of Special Scientific Interest . Another tributary , the River Haddeo , flows from the Wimbleball Lake .

Most other rivers arising on Exmoor flow north to the Bristol Channel . These include the River Heddon , which runs along the western edges of Exmoor , reaching the North Devon coast at Heddon 's Mouth , and the East and West Lyn rivers , which meet at Lynmouth . Hoar Oak Water is a moorland tributary of the East Lyn River , the confluence being at Watersmeet . The River Horner , which is also known as Horner Water , rises near Luccombe and flows into Porlock Bay near Hurlstone Point . The main exception to northward @-@ draining rivers is the River Mole , which arises on the south @-@ western flanks of Exmoor . It is the major tributary of the River Taw , which itself flows northward from Dartmoor . Badgworthy Water is one of the small rivers running north to the coast and is associated with the Lorna Doone legends .

## == Climate ==

Along with the rest of South West England , Exmoor has a temperate climate which is generally wetter and milder than the rest of England . The mean annual temperature at Simonsbath is 8 @. @ 3 ° C ( 46 @. @ 9 ° F ) with a seasonal and diurnal variation , but due to the modifying effect of the sea the range is less than in most other parts of the UK . January is the coldest month , with mean minimum temperatures between 1 and 2 ° C ( 34 and 36 ° F ) . July and August are the warmest months in the region , with mean daily maxima around 21 ° C ( 70 ° F ) . In general , December is the month with the least sunshine and June the month with the most sun . The south west of England has a favoured location with regard to the Azores high pressure when it extends its influence north @-@ eastwards towards the UK , particularly in summer .

Cloud often forms inland , especially near hills , and reduce the amount of sunshine that reaches the park . The average annual sunshine is about 1 @, @ 600 hours . Rainfall tends to be associated with Atlantic depressions or with convection . In summer , convection , caused by the sun heating the land surface more than the sea , sometimes forms rain clouds and at that time of year a large proportion of the rainfall comes from showers and thunderstorms . Annual precipitation varies from 800 mm ( 31 in ) in the east of the park to over 2 @, @ 000 mm ( 79 in ) at The Chains . However , in the 24 hours of 16 August 1952 , more than 225 mm ( 8 @. @ 9 in ) of rain fell at The Chains . This rainfall , which followed an exceptionally wet summer , led to disastrous flooding in Lynmouth with 34 dead and extensive damage to the small town .

Snowfall is very variable from year to year and ranges from 23 days on the high moors to about 6 on coastal areas . November to March have the highest mean wind speeds , with June to August having the lightest winds . The wind comes mostly from the south west .

There are two Met Office Weather stations recording climate data within Exmoor : Liscombe and Nettlecombe .

## == History ==

There is evidence of occupation of the area by people from Mesolithic times onward . In the Neolithic period , people started to manage animals and grow crops on farms cleared from the woodland , rather than act purely as hunters and as gatherers . It is also likely that extraction and smelting of mineral ores to make metal tools , weapons , containers and ornaments started in the late Neolithic , and continued into the bronze and Iron Ages . An earthen ring at Parracombe is believed to be a Neolithic henge dating from 5000 ? 4000 BC , and Cow Castle , which is where White Water meets the River Barle , is an Iron Age fort at the top of a conical hill .

Tarr Steps are a prehistoric ( circa 1000 BC ) clapper bridge across the River Barle , about 4 km ( 2 @. @ 5 mi ) south east of Withypool and 6 km ( 3 @. @ 7 mi ) north west of Dulverton . The stone slabs weigh up to 5 tonnes apiece and the bridge has been designated by English Heritage as a grade I listed building , to recognise its special architectural , historical or cultural significance . There is little evidence of Roman occupation apart from two fortlets on the coast . Lanacombe is the site of several standing stones and cairns which have been scheduled as ancient monuments . The stone settings are between 0 @. @ 3 metres ( 1 ft 0 in ) and 0 @. @ 65 metres ( 2 ft 2 in ) high . A series of Bronze Age stone cairns are closely associated with the standing stones .

Holwell Castle , at Parracombe , was a Norman motte @-@ and @-@ bailey castle built to guard the junction of the east ? west and north ? south trade routes , enabling movement of people and goods and the growth of the population . Alternative explanations for its construction suggest it may have been constructed to obtain taxes at the River Heddon bridging place , or to protect and supervise silver mining in the area around Combe Martin . It was 40 metres ( 131 ft ) in diameter and 6 @. @ 2 metres ( 20 ft ) high above the bottom of a rock cut ditch which is 2 @. @ 7 metres ( 9 ft ) deep . It was built , in the late 11th or early 12th century of earth with timber palisades for defence and a one or two storey wooden dwelling . It was probably built by either Martin de Tours , the first lord of the manor of Parracombe , William de Falaise ( who married Martin 's widow ) or Robert fitz

Martin , although there are no written records to validate this . The earthworks of the castle are still clearly visible from a nearby footpath , but there is no public access to them .

= = = Establishment of royal forest = = =

According to the late 13th century Hundred Rolls , King Henry II of England ( d . 1189 ) gave William of Wrotham the office of steward of Exmoor . The terms steward , warden and forester appear to be synonymous for the king 's chief officer of the royal forest .

= = = Wardens = = =

The first recorded wardens were Dodo , Almer & Godric who were named in the Domesday Book ( 1087 ) as " foresters of Widepolla " , Withypool having been the ancient capital of the forest . The family of Denys were associated with Ilchester and " Petherton " . William of Wrotham , who died in 1217 , was steward of the forests of Exmoor and North Petherton , Somerset . Walter and Robert were named as foresters of Exmoor when they witnessed an early 13th century grant to Forde Abbey . In 1276 the jurors of Brushford manor made a complaint about John de Camera in the Court of Exchequer in which he was described as forester of Exmoor .

William Lucar of " Wythecomb " , the brother of Elizabeth Lucar , was forester temp. under Henry VI , between 1422 and 1461 . William de Botreaux , 3rd Baron Botreaux was appointed in 1435 warden of the forests of Exmoor and Neroche for life by Richard Duke of York . The Botreaux family had long held the manor of Molland at the southern edge of Exmoor , but were probably resident mainly at North Cadbury in Somerset . On 10 May 1461 William Bourchier , 9th Baron FitzWarin ( 1407 @-@ 1470 ) , feudal baron of Bampton was appointed by King Edward IV as Master Forester of the Forests of Exmoor and Neroche for life . Sir John Poyntz of Iron Acton , Gloucestershire , was warden or chief forester of Exmoor in 1568 when he brought an action in the Court of Exchequer against Henry Rolle ( of Heanton Satchville , Petrockstowe ) , the powerful lord of the manors of Exton , Hawkridge and Withypool .

In 1608 Sir Hugh Pollard was named as chief forester in a suit brought before the Court of Exchequer by his deputy William Pincombe . James Butler , 1st Duke of Ormonde , was named as Keeper of Exmoor Forest in 1660 and 1661 . James Boevey was a forester in the 17th century . Sir Richard Acland ( or possibly Sir Thomas Dyke Acland ) was the last forester up to 1818 . One of the roles of the Warden was Master of Staghounds and this role continued to be exercised by the Master of the Devon and Somerset Staghounds , a position extant today . By 1820 the royal forest had been divided up . A quarter of the forest , 10 @,@ 262 acres ( 4 @,@ 153 ha ) , was sold to John Knight ( 1765 ? 1850 ) in 1818 . This section comprises the present Exmoor Parish , whose parish church is situated in Simonsbath .

= = Wool trade = =

The parish of Exmoor Forest was part of the Hundred of Williton and Freemanners .

During the Middle Ages , sheep farming for the wool trade came to dominate the economy . The wool was spun into thread on isolated farms and collected by merchants to be woven , fullled , dyed and finished in thriving towns such as Dunster . The land started to be enclosed and from the 17th century onwards larger estates developed , leading to establishment of areas of large regular shaped fields . During the 16th and 17th centuries the commons were overstocked with agisted livestock , from farmers outside the immediate area who were charged for the privilege . This led to disputes about the number of animals allowed and the enclosure of land . In the mid @-@ 17th century James Boevey was the warden . The house that he built at Simonsbath was the only one in the forest for 150 years . When the royal forest was sold off in 1818 , John Knight bought the Simonsbath House and the accompanying farm for £ 50 @,@ 000 . He set about converting the royal forest into agricultural land . He and his family also built most of the large farms in the central section of the moor as well as 35 @.@ 4 km ( 22 @.@ 0 mi ) of metalled access roads to

Simonsbath and a 46 @. @ 7 km ( 29 @. @ 0 mi ) wall around his estate , much of which still survives .

In the mid @-@ 19th century a mine was developed alongside the River Barle . The mine was originally called Wheal Maria , then changed to Wheal Eliza . It was a copper mine from 1845 ? 54 and then an iron mine until 1857 , although the first mining activity on the site may be from 1552 . At Simonsbath , a restored Victorian water @-@ powered sawmill , which was damaged in the floods of 1992 , has now been purchased by the National Park and returned to working order ; it is now used to make the footpath signs , gates , stiles and bridges for various sites in the park .

### = = Ecology = =

In addition to the Exmoor Coastal Heaths Site of Special Scientific Interest ( SSSI ) , two other areas are specifically designated . North Exmoor covers 12 @, @ 005 @. @ 3 hectares ( 29 @, @ 666 acres ) and includes the Dunkery Beacon and the Holnicote and Horner Water Nature Conservation Review sites , and the Chains Geological Conservation Review site . The Chains site is nationally important for its south @-@ western lowland heath communities and for transitions from Ancient woodland through upland heath to blanket mire . The site is also of importance for its breeding bird communities , its large population of the nationally rare heath fritillary butterfly ( *Meliticta athalia* ) , an exceptional woodland lichen flora and its palynological interest of deep peat on the Chains .

The South Exmoor SSSI is smaller , covering 3 @, @ 132 @. @ 7 hectares ( 7 @, @ 741 acres ) and including the River Barle and its tributaries with submerged plants such as alternate water @-@ milfoil ( *Myriophyllum alterniflorum* ) . There are small areas of semi @-@ natural woodland within the site , including some which are ancient . The most abundant tree species is sessile oak ( *Quercus petraea* ) , the shrub layer is very sparse and the ground flora includes bracken , bilberry and a variety of mosses . The heaths have strong breeding populations of birds , including whinchat ( *Saxicola rubetra* ) and European stonechat ( *Saxicola rubicola* ) . Wheatear ( *Oenanthe oenanthe* ) are common near stone boundary walls and other stony places . Grass warbler ( *Locustella naevia* ) breed in scrub and tall heath . Trees on the moorland edges provide nesting sites for redpoll ( *Acanthis flammea* ) , common buzzard ( *Buteo buteo* ) and raven ( *Corvus corax* ) .

### = = = Flora = = =

Uncultivated heath and moorland cover about a quarter of Exmoor landscape . Some moors are covered by a variety of grasses and sedges , while others are dominated by heather . There are also cultivated areas including the Brendon Hills , which lie in the east of the National Park . There are also 3 @, @ 000 hectares ( 7 @, @ 413 acres ) of forestry commission woodland , comprising a mixture of broad @-@ leaved ( oak , ash and hazel ) and conifer trees . Horner Woodlands and Tarr Steps woodlands are prime examples . The country 's highest beech tree , 350 metres ( 1 @, @ 148 ft ) above sea level , is at Birch Cleave at Simonsbath but beech in hedgebanks grow up to 490 metres ( 1 @, @ 608 ft ) . At least two species of whitebeam tree : *Sorbus subcuneata* and *Sorbus ' Taxon D '*  are unique to Exmoor . These woodlands are home to lichens , mosses and ferns . Exmoor is the only national location for the lichens *Biatridium delitescens* , *Rinodina fimbriata* and *Rinodina flavosoralifera* , the latter having been found only on one individual tree .

### = = = Fauna = = =

Sheep have grazed on the moors for more than 3 @, @ 000 years , shaping much of the Exmoor landscape by feeding on moorland grasses and heather . Traditional breeds include Exmoor Horn , Cheviot and Whiteface Dartmoor and Greyface Dartmoor sheep . North Devon cattle are also farmed in the area . Exmoor ponies can be seen roaming freely on the moors . They are a landrace rather than a breed of pony , and may be the closest breed to wild horses remaining in Europe ; they are also one of the oldest breeds of pony in the world . The ponies are rounded up once a year to be

marked and checked over . In 1818 Sir Thomas Acland , the last warden of Exmoor , took thirty ponies and established the Acland Herd , now known as the Anchor Herd , whose direct descendants still roam the moor . In the Second World War the moor became a training ground , and the breed was nearly killed off , with only 50 ponies surviving the war . The ponies are classified as endangered by the Rare Breeds Survival Trust , with only 390 breeding females left in the UK . In 2006 a Rural Enterprise Grant , administered locally by the South West Rural Development Service , was obtained to create a new Exmoor Pony Centre at Ashwick , at a disused farm with 7 hectares ( 17 acres ) of land with a further 56 hectares ( 140 acres ) of moorland .

Red deer have a stronghold on the moor and can be seen on quiet hillsides in remote areas , particularly in the early morning . The Emperor of Exmoor , a red stag ( *Cervus elaphus* ) , was Britain 's largest known wild land animal , until it was killed in October 2010 . The moorland habitat is also home to hundreds of species of birds and insects . Birds seen on the moor include merlin , peregrine falcon , Eurasian curlew , European stonechat , dipper , Dartford warbler and ring ouzel . Black grouse and red grouse are now extinct on Exmoor , probably as a result of a reduction in habitat management , and for the former species , an increase in visitor pressure .

= = = Beast = = =

The Beast of Exmoor is a cryptozoological cat ( see phantom cat ) that is reported to roam Exmoor . There have been numerous reports of eyewitness sightings . The BBC calls it " the famous @-@ yet @-@ elusive beast of Exmoor " . Sightings were first reported in the 1970s although it became notorious in 1983 , when a South Molton farmer claimed to have lost over 100 sheep in the space of three months , all of them apparently killed by violent throat injuries . Descriptions of its colouration range from black to tan or dark grey . It is possibly a cougar or black leopard which was released after a law was passed in 1976 making it illegal for them to be kept in captivity outside zoos . In 2006 , the British Big Cats Society reported that a skull found by a Devon farmer was that of a puma ; however , the Department for Environment , Food and Rural Affairs ( Defra ) states , " Based on the evidence , Defra does not believe that there are big cats living in the wild in England . "

= = Government and politics = =

The National Park , 71 % of which is in Somerset and 29 % in Devon , has a resident population of 10 @,@ 600 . It was designated a National Park in 1954 , under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act . About three quarters of the park is privately owned , made up of numerous private estates . The largest landowners are the National Trust , which owns over 10 % of the land , and the National Park Authority , which owns about 7 % . Other areas are owned by the Forestry Commission , Crown Estate and Water Companies . The largest private landowner is the Badgworthy Land Company , which represents hunting interests .

From 1954 on , local government was the responsibility of the district and county councils , which remain responsible for the social and economic well @-@ being of the local community . Since 1997 the Exmoor National Park Authority , which is known as a ' single purpose ' authority , has taken over some functions to meet its aims to " conserve and enhance the natural beauty , wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Parks " and " promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the parks by the public " , including responsibility for the conservation of the historic environment .

The Park Authority receives 80 % of its funding as a direct grant from the government . The Park Authority Committee consists of members from parish and county councils , and six appointed by the Secretary of State . The work is carried out by 80 staff including rangers , volunteers and a team of estate workers who carry out a wide range of tasks including maintaining the many miles of rights of way , hedge laying , fencing , swaling , walling , invasive weed control and habitat management on National Park Authority land . There are ongoing debates between the authority and farmers over the biological monitoring of SSSIs , showing the need for a controlled regime of grazing and burning ; farmers claim that these regimes are not practical or effective in the long term .

## = = Sport and recreation = =

Sightseeing , walking , cycling and mountain biking taking in Exmoor 's dramatic heritage coastline and moorland countryside scenery are the main attractions . The South West Coast Path which starts at Minehead and follows all along the Exmoor coast before continuing to Poole . The Coleridge Way is a 82 km ( 51 mi ) footpath which follows the walks taken by poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Lynmouth , starting from Coleridge Cottage at Nether Stowey in the Quantocks where he once lived . The Two Moors Way runs from Ivybridge in South Devon to Lynmouth on the coast of North Devon , crossing parts of both Dartmoor and Exmoor . Both of these walks intersect with the South West Coast Path , Britain 's longest National Trail . Other Exmoor walking trails include the Tarka Trail , Samaritans Way South West , Macmillan Way West , Exe Valley Way and Celtic Way Exmoor Option .

For others , although the hunting of animal with hounds was made illegal by the Hunting Act 2004 , the Exmoor hunts still meet in full regalia and there is a campaign to resurrect this rural sport . Nine hunts cover the area ? the Devon and Somerset Staghounds and the Quantock Staghounds , the Exmoor , Dulverton West , Dulverton Farmers and West Somerset Foxhounds , the Minehead Harriers , the West Somerset Beagles and the North Devon Beagles . During the spring , amateur steeplechase meetings ( point @-@ to @-@ points ) are run by hunts at temporary courses such as Bratton Down and Holnicote . These , along with thoroughbred racing and pony racing , are an opportunity for farmers , hunt staff and the public to witness a day of traditional country entertainment .

## = = Places of interest = =

The attractions of Exmoor include 208 Scheduled monuments , 16 conservation areas , and other open access land as designated by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 . Exmoor receives approximately 1 @.@ 4 million visitor days per year which include single day visits and those for longer periods .

Attractions on the coast include the Lynton and Lynmouth Cliff Railway , which connects Lynton to neighbouring picturesque Lynmouth at the confluence of the East Lyn & West Lyn rivers , nearby Valley of Rocks and Watersmeet .

Woody Bay , a few miles west of Lynton , is home to the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway , a narrow @-@ gauge railway which once connected the twin towns of Lynton and Lynmouth to Barnstaple , about 31 km ( just over 19 miles ) away .

Further along the coast , Porlock is a quiet coastal town with an adjacent salt marsh nature reserve and a harbour at nearby Porlock Weir . Watchet is a historic harbour town with a marina and is home to a carnival , which is held annually in July .

Inland , many of the attractions are small towns and villages or linked to the river valleys , such as the ancient clapper bridge at Tarr Steps and the Snowdrop Valley near Wheddon Cross , which is carpeted in snowdrops in February and , later , displays bluebells . Withypool is also in the Barle Valley , the Two Moors Way passes through the village . As well as Dunster Castle , Dunster 's other attractions include a priory , dovecote , yarn market , inn , packhorse bridge , mill and a stop on the West Somerset Railway . Exford lies on the River Exe .

Exmoor has been the setting for several novels including the 19th century Lorna Doone : A Romance of Exmoor by R. D. Blackmore , and Margaret Drabble 's 1998 novel The Witch of Exmoor . The park was featured on the television programme Seven Natural Wonders twice , as one of the wonders of the West Country .

Wheal Eliza Mine on the River Barle near Simonsbath was an unsuccessful copper and iron mine .