

= Dunkery Hill =

Dunkery Beacon at the summit of Dunkery Hill is the highest point on Exmoor and in Somerset , England . It is also the highest point in southern England outside of Dartmoor .

The sandstone hill rises to 1 @, @ 705 feet (520 m) and provides views over the surrounding moorland , the Bristol Channel and hills up to 86 miles (138 km) away . The site has been visited by humans since the Bronze Age , and contains several burial mounds in the form of cairns and bowl barrows . Sweetworthy on the lower slopes is the site of two Iron Age hill forts or enclosures and a deserted medieval settlement . The hill is part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest and National nature reserve . It was in private ownership until the 20th century , when it was donated to the National Trust by Sir Thomas Acland , Colonel Wiggin and Allan Hughes ; a stone cairn was erected at the summit to commemorate the event .

= = Location = =

Dunkery is composed of Middle Devonian sedimentary rock , (393 @. @ 3 ± 2 @. @ 7 million years ago) known as the Hangman Sandstone Formation . This supports acidic soils . The ridge along the top of the hill is 4 @. @ 5 kilometres (2 @. @ 8 mi) long .

At 1 @, @ 705 feet (520 m) ordnance datum (OD) , the mean height above sea level , Dunkery Beacon is the highest natural point in Somerset , although the tip of the Mendip TV Mast is higher at 1 @, @ 915 feet (584 m) OD . Dunkery is ranked 23rd in the UK in terms of dominance and is a Marilyn , meaning that it is a peak with 150 metres (490 ft) or more of relative height . The nearest higher hill is Yes Tor , 37 miles (60 km) away . John Fry , a character in R. D. Blackmore 's 1869 novel Lorna Doone , calls it the " haighest place of Hexmoor " .

Dunkery lies just four miles (6 @. @ 4 km) from the Bristol Channel at Porlock . The shortest route of ascent goes from the car park at Dunkery Gate , and is just 0 @. @ 75 miles (1 @. @ 2 km) long . There are extensive views from the summit , from where the Bristol and English Channel coasts , the Brecon Beacons including Pen Y Fan , Bodmin Moor , Dartmoor , the Severn Bridges and Cleeve Hill 86 miles (138 km) away in Gloucestershire are visible .

= = History = =

Dunkery Hill was part of the " Royal Forest of Exmoor " , established by Henry II according to the late 13th @-@ century Hundred Rolls . There has been some debate about the origin of the name " Dunkery " and its predecessors " Duncrey " and " Dunnecray " . Eilert Ekwall suggests that it comes from the Welsh din meaning hillfort and creic or creag meaning rock .

There are several Bronze Age burial mounds at or near the summit . Two of the largest are Joaney How and Robin How , which have been damaged over many years , although plans have been made to restore and protect them . " How " comes from the Norse for burial mound . Joaney How on the northern slope , is more than 22 metres (72 ft) in diameter . On the southeastern slopes are four more cairns , and there are a further two round cairns 390 metres (1 @, @ 280 ft) and 420 metres (1 @, @ 380 ft) southeast of Rex Stile Head . In addition to the cairns are barrows , which also date from the Bronze Age . One bowl barrow on the southeastern spur of the Chains is 12 @. @ 3 metres (40 ft) in diameter . A circular funerary stone mound 850 metres (2 @, @ 790 ft) north of Dunkery Bridge , which is a 1 @. @ 5 @-@ mile (2 @. @ 4 km) walk from the summit , dates from the Neolithic or Bronze Age . It is approximately 1 @. @ 5 metres (4 ft 11 in) high and 14 metres (46 ft) in diameter .

Sweetworthy , on Dunkery Hill 's north @-@ facing slope , is the site of two Iron Age hill forts or enclosures ; one has a single rampart and external ditch , enclosing 0 @. @ 25 hectares (0 @. @ 62 acres) . The rampart is still visible , and the ditch on the east side is used as a trackway . There was a defended settlement above the main site . It is also the site of a deserted medieval settlement , which has been designated an ancient monument . It has been added to the Heritage at Risk register because of the vulnerability to plant growth .

In 1918 Sir Thomas Acland leased part of the land along with a large part of the Holnicote Estate , for 500 years . Dunkery Hill was put up for sale in 1928 . Labour Party activist and Member of Parliament Margaret Bondfield asked in the House of Commons if the government was willing to have it designated an ancient monument , to preserve it for future generations . She received the reply that although the government was agreeable to having the hill listed there were no funds available for its purchase ; the beacon and surrounding mounds were subsequently designated an ancient monument . The beacon itself , and 960 acres (390 ha) of surrounding land , was donated in 1932 by Colonel W.W. Wiggin . A further 945 acres (382 ha) of nearby land was donated in 1934 by Mrs Hughes in memory of her husband Alan Hughes of Lynch Allerford , Minehead . The donations were commemorated in 1935 with an event when a plaque was attached to the summit memorial cairn . Further parts of the Holnicote Estate , which includes other land donated by the Acland family and others , was given in subsequent years .

= = Ecology = =

The site is part of the North Exmoor Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) , part of the Dunkery & Horner Woods National Nature Reserve and part of the Exmoor Coastal Heaths Special Area of Conservation .

The hill is blanketed in heather , which gives it a deep purple colour during the summer . Ling and bell heather , gorse , sessile oak , ash , rowan , hazel , bracken , mosses , liverworts , lichens and ferns all grow on the hill or in surrounding woodland , as well as some unique whitebeam species . Exmoor ponies , red deer , pied flycatchers , wood warblers , lesser spotted woodpeckers , redstarts , dippers , snipe , skylarks and kestrels are some of the fauna to be found on or around the hill and in nearby Horner Woods , home to 14 of the 16 UK bat species and including barbastelle and Bechstein 's bats .