

PRESS RELEASE : Spring Conference 2015

Tourism was the subject of the Exmoor Society annual Spring Conference, held recently. In opening the conference, Lyndsey Swift from Visit England stated that the visitor economy is big business, currently worth £106 billion providing 6 million jobs and benefitting every part of England. Countryside trips represented a large part of the visits at 35 per cent and worth £6.7 billion. She highlighted the change in population structure with many more older people of a different mind-set to previous generations, who have greater wealth and money to spend. The trend was for shorter holidays, good deals but greater experiences that could be shared with others. Although many people have mixed reactions about the countryside, poor weather and public transport, these can be overcome by concentrating on experiences such as escapism, exercise and enlightenment. People were looking for local distinctiveness of the place and its activities and to enjoy local produce and food.

The importance to the local economy of Exmoor was emphasised by Dan James, Exmoor National Park Authority, who said that it was worth £105.2 million and employed 2,166 full-time equivalent jobs in 2014. It is the main employer and has the biggest economic impact on the moor. He argued that 2.04 million visitor days could be increased as long as tourism welcomes, involves and satisfies the visitor; protects, reflects and enhances the local environment; engages and benefits residents; and achieves high quality business. Delegates warned against the danger of too many visitors changing the nature of the place, as in the New Forest.

Rachel Thomas, Chairman of the Exmoor Society, said that there was a close synergy between promotion of enjoyment and the tourist industry but the Society, as a conservation charity, would always emphasise the National Park status. She said "This important landscape designation signals that here is an outstanding assemblage of environmental assets, scenery, wildlife and heritage and a deeply rural community closely connected with the land that is rare compared with many other parts of the countryside." This point was supported by Malcolm Bell from Visit Cornwall, who argued that rather than branding the place there should be "an honesty about promoting the spirit of the place, emphasising its values and the emotions it raises in people as being different and special".

Helen Blackman, the outreach Archivist for the Exmoor Society, used material from the archives to show the development of waymarked walks and how they allowed for negotiation between the interests of farmers and tourists. She talked about tourist experiences in the 1960s and how Exmoor had ignited a love for the moorland and its wildlife. Debates from the 1960s raised themes about the impact of tourism that remain applicable today.

Nigel Stone, Chief Executive of Exmoor National Park, concluded that protection and prosperity can go hand-in-hand and sustainable tourism is achieved by promoting the special experiences offered by the unique landscape of Exmoor.

Date: 27 April 2015

Press Contact:

Rachel Thomas - 01271 375686 or
Exmoor Society offices 01398 323335

Note to Editors:

The Exmoor Society exists to promote and organise action for the conservation and enjoyment of the landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage of Exmoor national park. It was established in 1958 and successfully fought proposals to afforest the Chains, the central moorland of Exmoor. It has

continued to campaign against adverse changes and encourages people's understanding of the park's special qualities. It acts as an independent watchdog and champion for Exmoor's status as a national park.



Speakers (clockwise from top left): Sean Beer, Nigel Stone, Helen Blackman, Dan James, Malcolm Bell, Rachel Thomas, Lyndsey Swift and Evelyn Stacey



Dr Helen Blackman speaking in Dulverton Town Hall