Socio-economic Use: East Dartmoor Woods and Heaths National Nature Reserve, Devon, UK

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Landscape Character

East Dartmoor Woods and Heaths NNR is situated within the western edge of the Dartmoor Joint Character area. The Character Area profile describes strong contrasts between open, windswept moors with wide views and sheltered landscapes of valleys and fringes and valleys with steep-sided, fast flowing streams and a network of sunken lanes. These contrasts are reflected in the reserve, from the wide and open expanse of Trendlebere Down on the moorland edge to the oak covered steeper slopes of Yarner Wood and Bovey Valley. The stunning views enjoyed from Trendlebere Down are a draw for visitors, while the prehistoric and medieval interest provides a sense of antiquity. Descending to the wooded valleys and combes, the views narrow, and the character becomes more intimate. The River Bovey flows through the reserve before meandering through a wider valley bottom through improved pasture.

Archaeological and Historical Features

Many archaeological sites can be clearly seen on Trendlebere Down in particular, and the reserve has good representation of the archaeology typical of Dartmoor.

The oldest monuments, dating from the late Neolithic to early Bronze Age (2500-2000BC), are a stone row aligned roughly north-south down Black Hill and remains of a cairn at its upper end. These are Scheduled Ancient Monuments (DV 453a and b), located just outside the NNR but within the Yarner Wood and Trendlebere Down SSSI. Seventeen of the stones survive in what was once a double stone row, although only three stones are still upright. Following a fire in 1997

several other cairns were identified within the immediate area of the stone row suggesting that this was once an important area. Later prehistoric settlements, three middle Bronze Age hut circles, are situated along the lower contours of Trendlebere Down, along with what might be a prehistoric enclosure. A number of field banks cross the Down, their form suggesting medieval origin.

The exploitation of tin can be seen from deep open works along a tin lode south from the Becka Brook dating from between the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. An early nineteenth century Bovey Pottery leat crosses Trendlebere Down. This supplied water for potteries in Bovey Tracey which closed in the 1960s. The Becca Brook was the source of water for the leat, the take off point is now part of a path to Becky Falls. Further dry leat beds can also be found on the Down, although their purpose is unclear.

An iron age encampment can be found at Hound Tor Camp (SAM 456), whilst Yarner Wood contains important but unscheduled sites such as a granite tramway which was built to transport granite, the remains of a copper mine and two pillow mounds. Both Yarner Wood and the Bovey Valley Woodlands contain medieval and post medieval boundary banks and charcoal hearths.

Land Use History

Trendlebere is an area of registered common land and has been grazed by livestock for several centuries.

In 1820 a tramway with granite rails was built by the Templer family to transport quarried granite from Haytor to Teigngrace, where it was transferred to boat and then on to Teignmouth. Sections of the granite rails remain with the best preserved stretch, and a mile stine, in Yarner Wood.

The Yarner copper mine opened in 1856 and was worked for about ten years. The remains of the engine house and waste heap can still be seen.

Bovey Pottery leat was constructed during the early 19th Century, crossing the site following the contour below the Manaton road and running down through Yarner Wood. It supplied water from Becka Falls to the Bovey Tracey potteries and was operational until the 1960s.

Coppicing and tanbark production took place in Yarner Wood during the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, evidenced by numerous charcoal hearths and the abandoned coppice structure of much of the wood. Other activities operating in the reserve included pheasant rearing and the cutting of firewood, and during the second world war timber was cut and removed.

There is a paucity of past records of land use and woodland management prior to 1952, when Yarner Wood became a National Nature Reserve. Since then, good records of management have been maintained by staff connected with the reserve, details of which can be found in past Management Plans.

Socio-economic Use

1) Economic use

The Trendlebere Down Commoners Association have grazing rights on Trendlebere Down. The site has traditionally been managed by grazing under common rights, and by burning, although in recent years there has been a significant decline in the take-up of common rights and grazing is currently only light and patchy.

2) Local Community use

East Dartmoor Woods and Heaths is a Destination NNR, and in recent years much effort has been put into developing public use of the site. Links have been forged with local groups, resulting in greater awareness, appreciation and use of the reserve by the local community. Involvement varies from groups visiting the site for its historical or ecological interest, to individuals assisting in a voluntary capacity with practical site management, surveying and monitoring. Some groups offer advice and guidance, for example on archaeological interpretation or the accessibility of the 'easy access' nature trail. Youth groups regularly use the site for navigation practice, orienteering or nature study.

There is an active and committed team of longstanding volunteer wardens who assist in a variety of ways acting as the 'eyes and ears' of the reserve, carrying out survey work, assisting with practical tasks or on community events.

A guided walks and events programme continues and is increasingly well attended. Improved publicity has resulted in increased visitor numbers.

Recreation

Trendlebere Down is a popular site for recreation, picnics and quiet contemplation, especially in the summer when the heather and gorse are in full flower (though most people don't stray far from the car parks due to the nature of the topography and vegetative cover). Ponies drawn to the car parks are popular with visitors.

Visitors interested in archaeology or natural history are the most intrepid explorers of the site. There is a well-used walking route along the old Bovey-Manton Road, giving access to the Bovey Valley Woodlands. Horse riders use the bridleway along the boundary with Yarner Wood. A nature trail and easy-access trail offer visitors guided walking routes around the reserve which can be followed with the aid of a leaflet.

Bird watching in Yarner Wood is very popular, particularly in the spring when a wide variety of nesting birds (such as the Pied flycatcher) can be observed at close quarters. Feeding of birds takes place near the bird hide between mid-November and March, and nest boxes are provided in the viewing area.

Education

The reserve offers excellent educational opportunities for pupils and students at all levels of study. Closer links are being made with local primary and secondary schools, as well as with pre-school groups and Forest Schools initiatives. A new full-time member of staff has recently been employed to further this. The wealth of data acquired from the long-term monitoring of the site's flora and fauna, and recording of climatological and atmospheric conditions, means that the reserve is also conducive to higher level research studies. There is considerable scope to work more closely with education providers, improving education provision on the reserve and facilitating research initiatives.

The reserve provides opportunities for learning practical countryside skills, such as chainsaw training, which is carried out on site in association with Kensey Training.

Interpretation is low level throughout the reserve, particularly away from Yarner Wood. There is a significant opportunity to increase interpretation in the reserve and increase visitors understanding of the site. A 'field museum' exists but has become outdated.

Demonstration

A charcoal burning demonstration is held biannually on the reserve and has become a popular summertime event, attracting visitors of all ages. Other demonstrations are occasionally held, such as apple pressing events in the orchard adjacent to Yarner Wood.

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