

South West Peatland Partnership

Engaging different groups with peatland restoration across the UK's South West

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Overview

Whilst restoring peatlands, the South West Peatland Partnership (SWPP) is often out and about on land used by members of the public. This affords us a level of visibility that working on private land doesn't necessarily generate which can lead to lots of questions from members of the public about what we're doing and why. The SWPP proactively engages with and educates the public in the interest of:

- involving the local community in our work,
- making moor users aware of changes happening to the landscape and why,
- championing the importance of peatland ecosystems and tackling misinformation
- showcasing our partners and why they're involved
- conveying key messaging e.g. safety around machinery and benefits of machinery over working by hand at scale

Because peatlands are often difficult to access and undervalued in the role they play in our daily lives, they can be overlooked as an ecosystem, and a lack of knowledge of them is prevalent. We face challenges from misinformation about the impact of the work we're doing and by educating moor users about the history of peatland degradation and why restoration efforts are necessary, we can help tackle this. This poster details some examples of the ways we've engaged with groups recently.

Work experience, summer 2024

Over the summer the SWPP hosted 6 work experience students. They took part in a range of tasks alongside the SWPP team. On Exmoor they were able to assist Project Officers with their work, learning about peatland restoration techniques, surveying sites before restoration and planning where restoration interventions might be most effective. The students were able to learn about bog vegetation on our sites, and what these species indicate about the state of the peat below. They were also able to join SWPP and South West Water volunteers on a peatland restoration work party doing hands on work on site. After closer inspection several peat bunds on an area of shallow peat weren't holding as much water as was hoped. Volunteers and SWPP staff worked by hand to remove vegetation from the peat bunds, add more peat from shallow borrow pits nearby, then replace the vegetation leaving them holding more water even as we left site that day.

Volunteer archaeological excavation

In July 2024 SWPP staff and volunteers undertook a community excavation of a possible prehistoric burnt mound on Exmoor which was found in advance of peatland restoration work next to a stream at the base of a valley mire. The mound was made up of burnt stone and charcoal, probably discarded after stones had been heated over a fire and used to boil water or produce steam.

Burnt mounds are found across the British Isles and NW Europe, dating mainly to the Bronze Age. Lots of theories for their function have been suggested, including that they were used for cooking, bathing, tanning, dyeing of fabric or even brewing beer.

During the dig, volunteers took samples from the mound which have been sent for radiocarbon dating and charcoal analysis. Assessment of the samples will tell us what types of trees were being used for fuel and help us to reconstruct what the site would have looked like thousands of years ago.



Figure 1: Exmoor burnt mound community dig



Figure 2: Work experience students on Exmoor hand bunding

Other volunteer projects

Since first advertising for volunteer opportunities with the SWPP in August 2023, we are now up to nearly 70 registered volunteers. As well as maintaining and repairing peat bunds on Exmoor sites, volunteers and local school groups have been involved in willow planting along river edges, helping to slow the flow and starting to provide a more diverse habitat.

Volunteers are busy completing fixed point photography and monitoring Eyes on the Bog as well as assisting the monitoring team with vegetation surveys, putting the skills they gained from our vegetation training days earlier in the year to the test.



Figure 3: Vegetation training, Exmoor, April 2024

Summary

By engaging with the local community, young people, volunteers, and members of the wider public we are able to inform and educate them about peatlands and the important role they play in carbon sequestration and storage, wildlife diversity, flood management and water resilience. Through our education and engagement initiatives SWPP aims to ensure that the local community feels updated on our work, expand the resources of a small team and raise the profile of often overlooked peatlands.

