

**TURF CUTTING ON EXMOOR: AN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL STUDY**
Exmoor Mires Project
PROJECT REPORT

By Hazel Riley



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My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to it right away
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

From 'Digging' by Seamus Heaney (1966)

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OASIS PROJECT NO: I57445

ABBREVIATIONS

DRO North Devon Record Office, Barnstaple

EH English Heritage

NMP National Mapping Programme

NMR National Monuments Record, English Heritage, Swindon

SANHS Somerset Archaeology and Natural History Society

SRO Somerset Record Office, Taunton

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ABSTRACT

A study of the archaeology and history of peat exploitation on Exmoor's moorlands has examined the documentary evidence for turbarry on Exmoor Forest and the commons; looked at turf cutting implements from Exmoor in several museums, researched oral histories and collections of historic photographs, and carried out field investigation and large scale survey of several disused turf pits and associated features.

Turf cutting and the right of turbarry is recorded in documents relating to Exmoor Forest and the implementation of Forest Law from the 13th century onwards. The free suitors of Withypool and Hawkridge had the rights of turbarry on Exmoor Forest for each suit attached to their respective tenements in the 17th century, but courts and customs had probably existed with little change from the 12th and 13th centuries. Turbarry was often part of a 'package' of common rights, given with properties from at least as early as the 15th century on the commons.

The turf cutting implements, historic photographs of turf cutting and oral histories from moorland edge farmers and Exmoor Estate workers combine to give a vivid picture of how important turf was a fuel for many of Exmoor's farms and villages in the early 20th century. The archaeological remains of turf cutting on Exmoor range from large areas of disused turf pits, which can contain details of the last season of cutting in the form of spade marks, to small mounds which are the remains of turf stacks. Some of the moorland edge farms had dedicated stores for turf in the farm yard, known as turf houses and several of these have been identified.

Fig 1 Cutting turf on Brendon Common 1920s -1930s (Alfred Vowles D37) (SRO county neg no 10730; A\BMS) (Somerset Heritage Service)



INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

The principal aim of this study is to define and characterise historic peat cutting on Exmoor's moorlands, in order to provide a firm foundation upon which future research can be built (ENPA 2012, 1.2). Previous assessments of the archaeology of Exmoor's moorlands did not include peat cutting as part of Exmoor's cultural history (for example, Grinsell 1970; Riley and Wilson-North 2001). The NMP project for Exmoor did, however, consider peat cutting and the extent of peat cutting on Exmoor's moorlands has now been mapped from air photographs (Hegarty and Toms 2009; EH NMR records).

Terminology

On Exmoor the process of cutting peat for fuel is called turf cutting and a cut peat block is a turf. The upper layers of peat or peaty soils were sometimes cut and burnt as fuel, this is known as 'skin turf' on Exmoor. Turf from deep, blanket peat is called 'pit turf,' and an area where peat was dug is called a 'turf pit.'

Methodology

The following museum collections were examined in September and October 2012:

The Tiverton Museum of Mid Devon Life, Tiverton, Devon

The museum was visited to see the collection of agricultural implements, carts and wagons, including carts from Dulverton; no definite examples of turf cutting tools or wooden sleds or barrows from Exmoor were found.

The West Somerset Rural Life Museum, Allerford, Somerset

Several turf cutting tools were identified, recorded and photographed.

Lyn and Exmoor Museum, Lynton, Devon

Several turf cutting tools were identified and photographed.

Cooking utensils from an Exmoor farmhouse kitchen hearth with a turf fire were identified and photographed.

Doverhay Manor Museum, Porlock, Somerset

Correspondence with Curator who could not identify any turf cutting tools or other relevant material in the collection.

Exmoor Forest Inn, Simonsbath

Collection of agricultural implements displayed in the hotel, including turf cutting spade and a hay knife.

Photograph collections

Exmoor National Park Authority, Dulverton

Exmoor Photographic Archive, Heritage Centre, Dulverton

Nightingale Collection, Lyn and Exmoor Museum, Lynton

SANHS collections, Somerset Heritage Centre, Taunton

West Somerset Photographic Archive, West Somerset Rural Life Museum, Allerford

Documents, maps and major published sources

SRO: searched online catalogue for 'turbary'; 'peat cutting'; 'peat'

DRO: searched A2A online catalogue for 'turbary'; 'peat cutting'; 'peat'

The Exmoor Oral History Archive

A History of the Forest of Exmoor (MacDermot 1973)

The Heritage of Exmoor (Burton 1989)

Unforgotten Exmoor (Ramsay 2009; 2010; 2011)

Analysis of NMR data

The EH NMR was searched online in July 2012. Each parish on Exmoor was searched for the following monument type:

PEAT CUTTING

PEAT EXTRACTION SITE

PEAT STAND

PEAT STORE

A total of 103 records were found (83 PEAT CUTTING, 18 PEAT STAND 2 other), these are summarised in the Appendix and this analysis was used, in conjunction with the other sources, to inform the fieldwork carried out for this study.

Fieldwork

A rapid assessment and walkover survey of representative turf cutting areas and sites was carried out in February 2013. The sites visited were recorded and photographed. A CD of the photographs forms part of this project archive. Several areas and monuments were selected for large scale record and survey, this was carried out in April 2013.

CONTEXT: TURF CUTTING IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Summary of research

The importance of peat and turf as a domestic fuel across both upland and lowland Britain and Ireland has been recognised only relatively recently (Rotherham et al 2004). The study of the remains of peat extraction as archaeological and cultural artefacts is in its infancy (Rotherham 1999a). In Ireland, the natural history and the cultural and industrial heritage of the Irish peatlands has been the subject of an extensive research project (Feehan and O'Donovan 1996). The artefacts associated with traditional peat cutting have been studied as part of a study of the tools associated with the early history of agriculture in northern Europe (Gailey and Fenton 1970). Specialised structures, such as the peat storage huts of the Lake District, have been the subject of detailed study (Winchester 1984).

Ian Rotherham has mapped regions in the British Isles where traditional peat cutting is widely recognised and only the Somerset Levels appears in South West England; his map of target areas for research includes the 'Devon/Cornwall Moors (Rotherham 1999b, maps 2 and 3). The peat cutting industry on the Somerset Levels and Moors is well documented, with displays of artefacts, photographs and a video at the Somerset Rural Life Museum. The Peat Heritage Project, begun in 2001, aimed to record, document and celebrate the social and landscape heritage of the Somerset peat industry (on the Somerset Levels and Moors) through oral history recordings

(Somerset Heritage Annual Report 2002, 19; Rogers 2006; Somerset Peat Heritage Project archive). The landscapes associated with peat extraction in the Cornish peatlands have been the subject of detailed recording and research, including the survey and excavation of peat stands in west and north Cornwall (Smith 1984; Christie and Rose 1987) and accounts and photographs of peat cutting, stacking and drying in the 20th century on Bodmin Moor (Herring *et al* 2008). The peat extraction industry of northwest Dartmoor has recently been researched (Newman 2010).

Documentary evidence for peat extraction has been studied as part of the Victoria County for Somerset and the volume which covers the Somerset Levels and Moors records the importance of peat as a domestic fuel from as early as the 13th century AD and the development of the peat extraction industry in the late 19th and 20th centuries (Dunning *et al* 2006, 133-135).

Research on Exmoor

The history and archaeology of turf cutting on Exmoor has not been studied as a topic before this study. A photograph by Alfred Vowles, probably taken in the 1920s-30s, of a man cutting turf on Brendon Common, surrounded by his turf cutting tools, a flat wooden barrow and bottles of beer, is a well-known image (Fig 1). Little, however, was known of the social history of turf cutting, the importance of turf as fuel for the moorland edge farms, how turf cutting fitted into the agricultural year, how turf pits were chosen and worked, how the turf was dried, stacked, carted and stored back at the farm or cottage.

Fig 2 Blanket bog with drainage channel and turf pit, SW of Chains Barrow (Hazel Riley)



The extent of disused turf pits on Exmoor's moorlands was not known until very recently. The Exmoor National Park National Mapping Programme transcribed the remains of peat extraction from aerial photographs for the whole of the National Park (Hegarty and Toms 2009, 14, 62-63). A draft of part of the forthcoming book resulting from this work has also been made available to the author (Hegarty forthcoming).

David Ramsay recognised the need to document the memories of people who lived and worked on Exmoor farms in the earlier part of the 20th century and these included much valuable information about the process of turf cutting and its use in the home as the primary fuel (Ramsay 2009, 2010, 2011).

THE PEATLANDS OF EXMOOR

Definitions

The Ramsar Convention (1971) proposed a definition of peatlands as: 'ecosystems with a peat deposit that may currently support a vegetation that is peat-forming, may not, or may lack vegetation entirely. Peat is dead and partially decomposed plant remains that have accumulated in situ under waterlogged conditions' (Joint Nature Conservation Committee 2011, 3). The Convention defines active peatlands as areas where peat is currently forming and accumulating but also recognises inactive peatlands lacking current peat formation.

Peat is defined as the 'partially decomposed remains of plants and soil organisms which have accumulated at the surface of the soil profile' (Joint Nature Conservation Committee 2011, 3). Peat forms where the rate of input of organic matter from the surface is greater than the rate of decomposition of this material. The waterlogging that encourages peat formation can come from high rainfall and poor drainage or from a constant supply of ground water and/or surface drainage.

Peatlands which get all of their water from rainfall are bog peatlands and where peat forms across an upland landscape it is known as blanket bog (Joint Nature Conservation Committee 2011, 4).

Exmoor's peatlands

Most of Exmoor's peatlands are blanket bogs (Fig 2) and these have been mapped and analysed in detail (Merryfield 1977; Merryfield and Moore 1974). More recent work has demonstrated that Exmoor also contains small, discrete peatlands, associated with valley floors, spring lines and the heads of coombes (Fyfe 2000; 2005). Palaeoecological study has been undertaken on both Exmoor's blanket bog peatlands and the small, discrete peatlands (Merryfield 1977; Merryfield and Moore 1974; Francis and Slater 1990; 1992; Straker and Crabtree 1995; Fyfe 2000; 2005; Fyfe *et al* 2003).

The total area of Exmoor's peatlands, as mapped by Merryfield and shown in Figure 3, is some 65.28km². The majority of this is 10-30cm deep, with the thicker peat deposits, over 60cm deep, on Brendon Common, Lanacombe, Exe Head, the Warren and Exe Plain. Recent work has shown that there are also deeper deposits of blanket peat on parts of the Chains, Luccott and Dunkery, around Kinsford Gate and on Deer Park (Smith 2006, fig 1) (Figs 4 and 5).

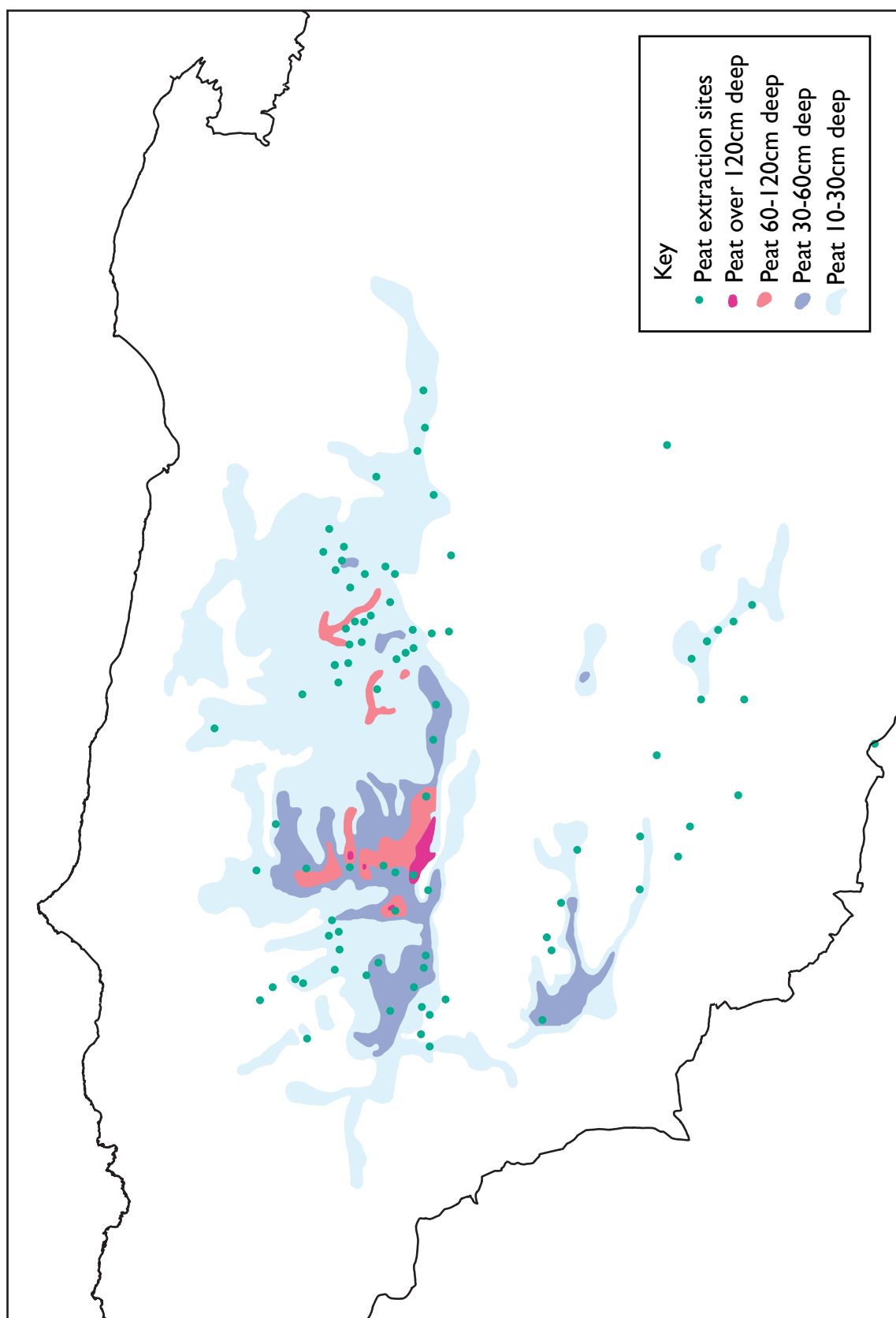


Fig 3 Blanket peat & turbaries on Exmoor (after Merryfield 1977, Fyfe et al 2008, figure 1, EH NMR)

Recent work has shown that peat accumulation began on parts of Exmoor as early as 6400 BC, in the later Mesolithic period (Comerslade, Larkbarrow, Swap Hill) and continued throughout the Neolithic and into the Bronze Age (Molland Common, Long Holcombe, Hoar Moor, Codsand Moors, The Chains). At Comerslade peat formation continued to within the past 200 years; at Long Holcombe peat is still accumulating (Fyfe *et al* 2008; Fyfe 2005; Fyfe *et al* 2003; Francis and Slater 1990; 1992; Straker and Crabtree 1995; Moore *et al* 1984).

There are references to 'bog oaks' being found in turf pits (Burton 1989, 16), and in the 1990s a large tree trunk was located eroding out of blanket peat on Halscombe Allotment which was radiocarbon dated to c 3635-3360 BC (Fig 6) (Riley and Wilson-North 2001, 182).



Fig 4 (above)
Blanket peat
30-50cm deep
Porlock Allotment
(Hazel Riley)

Fig 5 (above
right) Deep
blanket peat,
50cm+ deep
on Brendon
Common (Rob
Wilson-North)

Fig 6 (right)
Tree engulfed in
blanket peat c
5500 years ago
on Halscombe
Allotment (Rob
Wilson-North)



THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE FOR TURF CUTTING ON EXMOOR

Turf cutting on Exmoor Forest c 1200-1900

Turf cutting and the right of turbary is recorded in documents relating to Exmoor Forest and the implementation of Forest Law from the 13th century onwards. The free suitors of Withypool and Hawkridge had the following rights of common on Exmoor Forest for each suit attached to their respective tenements in the 17th century, but courts and customs had probably existed with little change from the 12th and 13th centuries:

1 Common of pasture for

Sheep: 140 in the day time only

Horses: Five horses or mares and colts; no colt under one year old being counted

Cattle: As many as they could winter on the tenement for which the suit was due

Pigs: One sow and her pigs till one year old, two pigs under two years' old, and one pig under three years old. All pigs over six weeks old to be properly ringed in the nose

2 A right to cut and carry away as much turf, heath and fern as they could consume on their tenements

3 A right to fish in the rivers in the forest and in the precincts of the 52 free suit tenements

(MacDermot 1973, 181, 184)

On the 23rd May 1270 seven men of were fined a shilling each for digging new turf pits in the king's demesne. They were: Adam Grey of Newland, Hameline Brungere of Blackland, Herbert of Hill, Almsworthy, Henry of Foxtwitchen, Robert Russel of Withypool, Walter Godefray of Newland and John Blund of Newland. An inquisition into the state of the forest and trespasses on it in 1338 found that: 'William de Holeweye the lord of Ar [Oare] and his tenants of the same township dig on their land of Or [Oare] in the same forest turves for their own fuel, by what warrant they know not' (MacDermot 1973, 73, 90, 99).

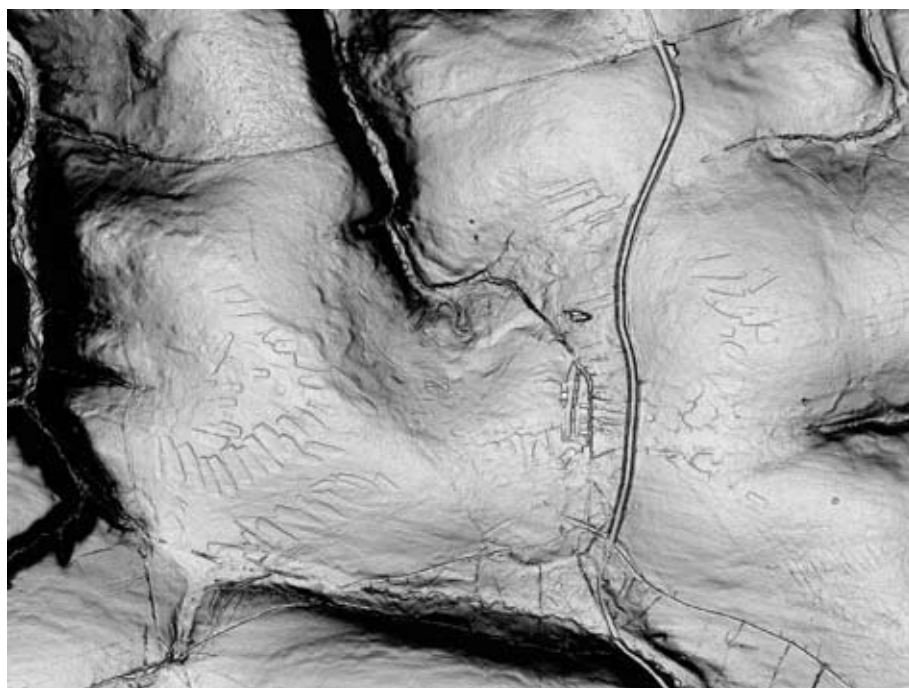


Fig 7 Large, regular turf pits on Exe Plain, Blackpits and Buscombe were dug by Exmoor Estate workers in the 19th and 20th centuries (based on data supplied by South West Water) (© Geomatics)

From an early period the king's officer's made a profit by agisting live stock of all kinds and, from 1570, by selling turf or the right to cut it on the forest. Before 1629 the rate was 4d a day for one man's 'delphth'; in that year it was raised to 6d and in 1655 to 1s 6d. A Bray turf cutter reports in 1635 that he was in the habit of cutting turf in the forest and could cut 1600 a day, which when dry were worth 6d a 100 (MacDermot 1973, 210, 215, 265).

The income from 'Turf and Quarry' is recorded in the Forest Books in the 18th century. Between 1718 and 1750 the income from turf and quarry rose from £10 to £12 to £14; between 1751 and 1758 it was £35 each year, and reduced to £30 in 1759. There is no record of income from turf and quarry in the Forest Books or in Acland's accounts for the Forest between 1767 and 1790 (Burton 1989, 53), but 'cutting heath and turf for sale' are mentioned in the Surveyor General's report of 1783 (MacDermot 1973, 215).

John Knight's accounts for his Exmoor estates show how important turf was as a fuel for his tenants. By September 1836 52500 turfs had been cut at Ashcombe; at Blackpits a total of 129500 turfs were cut. Richard Wilkey cut 117500 of these turfs and was paid £23 10s (Burton 1989, 72) (Fig 7).

Turf cutting on the commons 1400-1900

There are references to turf cutting and rights of turbary on most of the commons on Exmoor during the medieval and post medieval periods. A lease of lands in East Anstey dated 20th December 1400 from Robert Cruwys to Richard Kyng and wife Gonilde is 'of overhille and Nitherhille in manor of East Ansty, Devon, with housebote etc in wood of Brunelegh and turbary in Northmore for 9s 9d rent' (SRO DD\SF/2/78/2) (Fig 8). Another early reference to turf cutting on the Exmoor commons is a copyhold from a Court Roll of Cutcombe Mohum, dated 18th September 1583: 'Cottage there and delve for turves on hill called Duncre common' (SRO DD\BW/2/108).

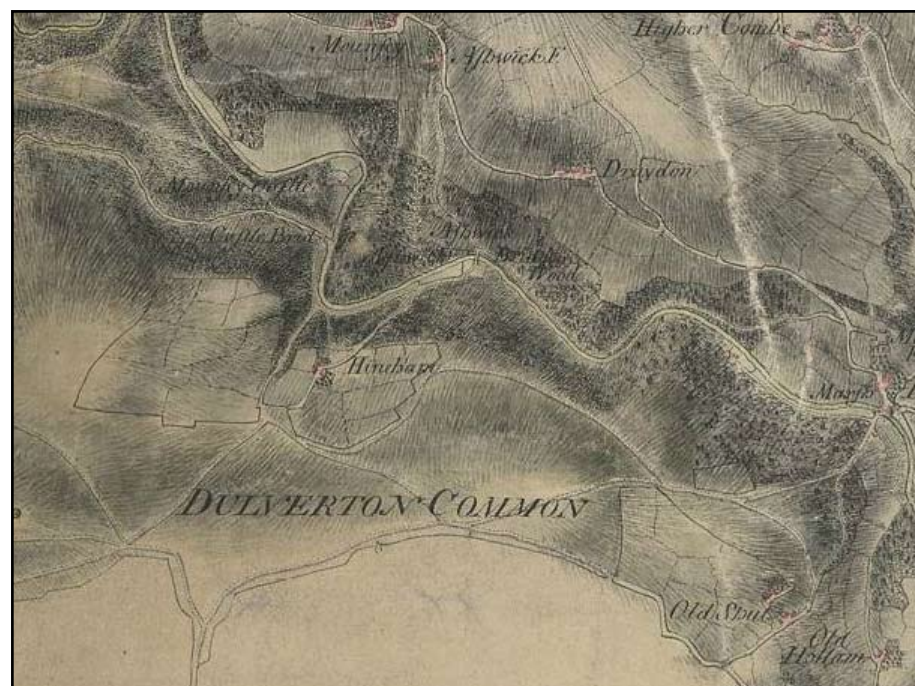


Fig 8 Northmoor (Dulverton)
Common in 1802. The common was enclosed at the end of the 19th century and is now a coniferous plantation (bl.ac.uk)

In the 17th century a series of leases for property and land in Cutcombe contain the right to cut turf on Brendon Common, Dunkery and Codsand Moors. A lease from 12th December 1612 for premises in Deane in Cutcombe has turbary on 'the hill called Duncrey' (SRO DD\BW/2/137). The right of turbary came with other common rights: Christopher Lobb, husbandman of Cutcombe, leased a tenement in Codsand containing dwelling, orchard, land etc and two acres of share wood in Blagdon Wood, and one tenement called Bawden, containing 80 acres of land and pasture, two acres of meadow, common of pasture and for 'heath and turves upon Brendon, Duncrey and Codisend Moor' (SRO DD\BW/2/328 29th November 1675). A cottage and one acre at Cutcombe included common of pasture for six sheep and one day's delve on Brendon Common annually; Robert Nurcombe, yeoman of Cutcombe, had common of pasture for 50 sheep and liberty once a year to cut and take as many turves as one man can delve in a day on the common of Duncrey (SRO DD\BW/2/363 27th November 1688).

In the 1650s James Boevey tried to claim the adjacent commons as part of the Forest, as he would be able to double or treble the amount he received from his freehold tithes; as a result of this claim there are several references to the rights of turbary and turf cutting on the commons in the mid-17th century. James Boevey filed a bill in 1654 against 'two poor men named Muxworthy' who had been cutting turf on one of the commons adjacent the forest (MacDermot 1973, 323-324). Depositions about the commons were given in 1678 as the result of Boevey's claims. Thomas Pearse of Withypool stated that: 'The Commoners of Withypoole and Hawkridge Commons have, as of right, cut and taken turf and pulled heath upon these commons, but he knows not if any stranger or foreigner was ever allowed to do the same; poor inhabitants within the said parishes were privileged' (MacDermot 1973, 351).

In the early part of the 18th century turbary is well documented on Molland Common (Fig 9). Property is described as: '2 messuages in, or called, Gourte and Combeshead,



Fig 9 Peat from Molland Common was an important source of fuel for the moorland edge farms in the 18th century (© Copyright Martin Bodman Creative Common licence)

and parcel of land called Lancombe; also common of pasture and turbary in Molland Moor, and as much tillage there as belongs to the said premises, paying 6d for every acre tilled' (NDRO MOLLAND 50/11/26/12 9th February 1712). A counterpart of a lease records: 'Messuages called Pullworthy, with common of pasture and turbary in Molland Moor, and as much tillage in the same moor as belongs to said messuages, paying to John Courtenay of West Molland, lord of the manor of Molland, 6d for every acre tilled' (NDRO MOLLAND 50/11/25/15 28th April 1728).

Leases with turbary rights on Brendon Common, Dunkery and Codsand Moors are also preserved from the first half of the 18th century. These show how both farmers and craftsmen cut turf for fuel. Bawdens in Codsand was leased to John Grinslade, yeoman of Cutcombe, with 80 acres, three acres of sharewood in Blagdon wood and common of pasture and of heath and turves on Brendon, Duncrey and Codisend in Cutcombe (SRO DD\BW/2/516 2nd July 1719). George Hensly, yeoman of Porlock, leased two tenements at Codisend with 5½ acres of meadow, 45 acres of pasture or arable, 30 acres of furzey heath and eight acres of coppice or share wood, with turbary and common of pasture on Brendon, Duncrey and Codisend Moors (SRO DD\BW/2/537 29th September 1724). John Passmore, a tailor of Cutcombe, leased 'a piece of waste 30 by 20 feet on the south side of River Quarme near Luckwell Bridge in Cutcombe for erecting a cottage, with three days delve of heath and turves on Brendon and Duncrey' and William Bennett, mason of Cutcombe, leased a cottage and one acre at Summer Way in Cutcombe Mohun with common of pasture for six sheep and turbary on Brendon (SRO DD\BW/2/543 13th October 1725; SRO DD\BW/2/598 10th June 1733).

Records of the courts of Lynton Manor in the 18th century describe how: 'at the Court Leet a jury were sworn, who made their presentments, which were very numerous, the main subjects being trespass, enclosures, throwing dirt near pot-water, nuisances, roads, cutting seaweed without licence, and leaving turfs on the common to rot' (Chanter 1906, 149). A deed dated 14th and 15th June 1791 describes the property of Mary Knight as '16 messuages, 1 mill, 13 gardens, 550 acres of land, 40 meadow, 400 pasture, 100 wood, 10 furze and heath and common of pasture for all manner of cattle and turbary in West Lyn, Mettecombe, Lynham, North Stock, Barbrook' (Chanter 1906, 250). In the 19th century or earlier, an enclosure on Lyn Down was assigned for turbary allotments which were marked by bond stones. These could be still be seen scattered over the ground at the beginning of the 20th century just before the area was brought into cultivation (Chanter and Worth 1906, 539).

During the 19th century, as the process of enclosure becomes more formalised, there are references to 'turbary allotments' and 'turbary roads' on parish enclosure maps and awards. In 1872 there are turbary allotments on North Hill Common in Wootton Courtenay and the 19th-century enclosure map for Upton shows turbary allocated to Upton, Skilgate and Brompton Regis (SRO DD\X\PL\10; Q/RDE/158; D\PUpt/20/1/1). Turbary roads are named as distinct from the parish roads on a 19th-century map of Exford (DD\SAS/C212/map/54 c 1846) and there are disputed rights of common and turbary on Croydon Hill during the sale of the Luttrell Luxborough estate (1858-1864) (DD\L2/10/53).

TURF CUTTING ON EXMOOR IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Finding and draining the turf pits

Victor Lock, who was born in 1928 and lived at Cranscombe, helped his father cut turf on Brendon Common when he was a schoolboy: 'with the turf, or peat, you'd go up to the common and search for the right place. Father knew how to find the places to cut. Of course it would have to be near a track for the horse and cart' (Ramsay 2009, 14-15). Memories of turf cutting in the 1920s and 1930s show how farmers and tenants had favoured areas and individual turf pits. They would 'go to their usual pit but might find it full of water (Fig 10), in which case they'd start at another one nearby and return to the first later. Farmers could go and cut where they liked but most had their favourite spots to which they returned' (Ramsay 2011, 110-112).

In the 20th century, Exmoor Estate tenants and workers had their own turf pits. For example: Cornham Farm's turf pits were west of Exe Head; Larkbarrow Farm, Tomshill, Larkbarrow Cottage and Simonsbath Lodge got their turf from Kittuck; and the tenants of Rose Cottage, Blackpits, 2 Jubilee Villas, Winstitchen Farm, Cloven Farm, Honeymead Farm and Eliza Mines Cottage all got turf from the extensive area of blanket peat on Exe Plain (Front cover) (information from R Burton).

Cutting turf: the toppings and skin turf

John Pile, who was born at Hallslake Farm in 1921, used to help his father cut turf on Brendon Common. They cut off the top layer of vegetation and poor quality peat with a hay knife to the width of the spade plus enough space to stand on (sometimes called a bench) (Fig 11). This material was known as the toppings and was placed in the pit where it would continue growing. At the end of the season the toppings were returned to the ground when the pit was tidied up and levelled off (Ramsay 2011, 110-112).



*Fig 10
Waterlogged turf
pits on Brendon
Common (Hazel
Riley)*

Fig 11 (left) Sante Lafuente demonstrating the craft of turf cutting to Ernest Mold, c 1980, probably on Brendon Common. He is standing on the cleared area ('bench') which is exactly the right width for working the peat face (Lyn and Exmoor Museum)



Fig 12 (below left) Hay knife and turf cutting spade on display at the Exmoor Forest Inn, Simonsbath (Hazel Riley)

Everyday hand tools such as hay knives, digging spades and forks were used for turf cutting as well as more specialised tools. Hay knives were designed to cut hay out of ricks but were equally useful for marking out and cutting turf. The hay knife on display with a collection of agricultural implements at the Exmoor Forest Inn, Simonsbath, may have been used for this purpose (Fig 12).



At Cheriton, in the 1920s, the top layer of vegetation and peat was cut and used as fuel. This was called skin turf and was cut using either a breast plough or a turf spade with right-angled flange, similar to the Irish slane (Feehan and O'Donovan 1996, 16-18; fig 1.3). The men at Cheriton used a breast plough to cut the skin turf. A photograph taken before 1930 shows Bob and Bert Richards using a breast plough, probably on Cheriton Ridge (Ramsay 2011, photograph page 25). The implement has a substantial shaft, made from a single piece of wood which is forked at the top. These forks are used to attach a wide handle, which is padded with cloth. The blade is crescent shaped with distinctive winged tips; the blade is reinforced by an iron frame which ties it into the shaft of the plough.

The breast plough in use on Cheriton Ridge in the 1920s is very similar to the remains of an implement on display at the Lyn and Exmoor Museum (LYNEX 702). The handle is made from a single piece of ash which has been roughly squared off to form a square shaft c 7cm in cross section. The ash pole was carefully chosen with a fork which is used to attach the substantial handle. The shaft is 1.6m long, the handle is 84cm wide. Attached to the bottom of the shaft is an iron frame which is 17cm high and 33cm wide (Figs 13 and 14). The blade (LYNEX 700) is now separated from the shaft of the breast plough. It is made from a single piece crescent-shaped of iron which has been cut at the top to form a scarf joint. The blade is curved to form a slightly concave cutting side and is very worn on the bottom (Figs 15 and 16).



*Figs 13 & 14 (left)
Frame and handle of
breast plough in Lyn
and Exmoor Museum
(LYNEX 702) (Hazel
Riley)*

*Figs 15 & 16 (below)
Details of the front
and back of the
breast plough blade
in Lyn and Exmoor
Museum (LYNEX
700) (Hazel Riley)*



It is very difficult to date this sort of implement which looks like it has been made by the local blacksmith and used on a family farm for many years. The breast plough photographed in use at Cheriton in the 1920s is very likely to be the one on display at the Lyn and Exmoor Museum and was probably made sometime in the 19th century. A breast plough on display in the Museum of Mid Devon Life, Tiverton, is said to date from the 18th century and was used at Bolventor on the edge of Bodmin Moor. Breast ploughs were pushed along the ground using the stomach or thighs; they were used for removing the top layer of grass and soil in the process of taking into cultivation newly enclosed land ('beat burning'), as well as for cutting turf (Fig 17).

Victor Lock describes the way the breast plough was used to cut skin turf on Brendon Common in the 1930s and 1940s:

'The skin turf was taken off level with the surface with a blade like a shovel. You'd push it through, you'd shove it through with your stomach leaning on it. You'd cut it about three inches thick, and a foot wide, and when it was about three feet long you'd tip it over and leave it standing there on its side to dry. Then you'd lift them up into stooks, just in twos to start with, lying side by side to dry out. We'd use these ones at the back of the fire.'
(Ramsay 2009, 14-15)

Ernest Mold described the way Dick Rawle, who lived at Driver in the 1940s, prepared the ground before cutting turf:

'First the heather was sliced off with a spine plough. This was essentially a long handled spade with the left hand edge of its blade upturned at right angles; this edge was known as the 'ear'; it was sharpened, from time to time, with a stone. The 'spine' – heather and roots a few inches thick – was not discarded; it burnt well when dry and the ashes served as fertiliser for the turnips.'
(Mold 1991, 15)

A spine plough or flanged spade like that described above is on display at the Lyn and Exmoor Museum (LYNEX 703); it was donated to the museum by Sante Lafuente. The spade is, overall, 1.62m long. The shaft is made from a roughly squared ash pole, 1.24m

Fig 17 Detail of blade of 18th-century breast plough from Bolventor, Cornwall, Museum of Mid Devon Life, Tiverton (Hazel Riley)



long, 8cm wide and forked at the top. The handle, 0.76m long, is formed from a split ash pole, drilled on the flat side to take the forked top of the shaft which is held in place with small wooden wedges. The blade is formed from a single piece of iron 3mm thick and is 27cm wide and 28cm high. The left hand side of the blade is bent out to form a right angle 9cm deep. This flange and the bottom of the blade have been sharpened many times and are now only 1mm thick. The blade is joined to the shaft by a scarf joint (Figs 18, 19, 20).

Cutting turf: pit turf

After the top layer of vegetation and peat has been removed the section to be cut is marked out. John Pile and his father used 'a length of wood with a nail hammered right through near one end. Your thumb was placed on the wood the width of the spade away from the nail; then, standing in the pit, you'd scratch a mark parallel to the edge, which became your cutting line.' (Ramsay 2011, 110-112). A short triangular spade was sometimes used to mark the cutting line (Mold 1991, 15), like the spade driven into the pit behind John Watts as he cuts pit turf on Exmoor Forest in the 1970s (Exmoor Photographic Archive Brendon 21). James Welch, the Exmoor Estate carpenter from 1892-1911, was kept busy in July 190 'sawing pegs for turf ground' (Welch 1892-1911), suggesting that marking out the lines for turf cutting was carried out methodically.

Fig 18 (below) Spine plough, a long handled spade with flanged blade for removing top layer of turf, Lyn and Exmoor Museum (LYNEX 703) (Hazel Riley)



Figs 19 & 20 (below) Details of spine plough handle and flanged blade, Lyn and Exmoor Museum (LYNEX 703) (Hazel Riley)



Victor Lock describes how pit turf was cut on Brendon Common in the 1930s and 40s:

'The second sort we cut was the pit-turf, and this was the best sort for burning. This was more out on the boggy ground and you'd find it by the cotton flowers, the cotton grass growing there. The pit-turf we'd spine off, going straight down vertically about three foot into the bog, and at the bottom it would be really black. They would be about nine inches wide and about two inches thick, and the length would all depend on the depth of the bog. Of course you'd have a different sort of turfing spade from the one for the skin-turf.'
(Ramsay 2009, 14-15)

The most common sort of turf cutting spade used on Exmoor had a heart-shaped blade. There are two on display in the Lyn and Exmoor Museum and two in the West Somerset Rural Life Museum. The two turfing spades in the West Somerset Rural Life Museum are the most recent tools studied during this research (Figs 21 and 22). The spade on the left of the photographs is a total of 1.48m long, with a wooden shaft and D-shaped handle. The blade is heart-shaped, 23cm wide and 26cm high, with a long, angled socket 59cm long. It is stamped with: 'A & E PARKES & CO BIRMINGHAM'; they were trading in 1951 (www.birminghamstories.co.uk). The spade on the right of the photograph is very similar. It is 1.35m long with a wooden shaft and T-shaped handle. The heart-shaped blade is 22cm wide and 26cm high; it has a long, angled socket 54cm long. These spades probably date to c 1930-1950s.

Fig 21 (left) Two turf cutting spades in the West Somerset Rural Life Museum (Hazel Riley)



Fig 22 (below) Detail of the heart shaped blades of the turf cutting spades in the West Somerset Rural Life Museum (Hazel Riley)



Two examples of turf cutting spades were donated to the Lyn and Exmoor Museum by Sante Lafuente. One is 1.02m long, with a roughly squared wooden shaft some 5cm in section (LYNEX 704). The top of the shaft is shaped to take the T-shaped handle which is 64cm long. The blade is heart-shaped, 27cm long, 26cm wide with a socket which is fixed to the shaft by nails. The blade is up to 6mm thick by the socket, but barely 1mm thick at the base where it has been sharpened (Figs 23 and 24). A similar item is a heart-shaped blade (LYNEX no. illegible), 29cm long, 29cm wide with a broken tip. The socket is made from two separate pieces of iron, riveted to the blade with holes for nails to fix it to the shaft (Fig 25). The roughly finished nature of the shaft and handle and the appearance of the blades suggest that these implements were made locally probably by the village blacksmith. An important collection of 19th- and 20th-century agricultural tools are on display at the Exmoor Forest Inn, Simonsbath. These include an unusual turf cutting spade with a metal shaft, 65cm long, a wooden handle, 35cm long, at right angles to the shaft, a thin, triangular blade, 22cm wide and long, with a deep (7cm) flange (Fig 12).

Two photographs of the 1930s-1940s show these distinctive turf cutting spades in use (Figs 1 and 26). The photographs show the more modern spades in use with shorter handles. The turf cutting spade (Fig 23) in the Lyn and Exmoor Museum looks much older than these sort of spades. It was donated by Sante Lafuente; he began cutting turf on Exmoor in the 1930s and this spade could well have been given to him, and was probably made locally, perhaps in the 19th or early 20th century.



Fig 23 (left) Turf cutting spade, Lyn & Exmoor Museum (LYNEX 704) (Hazel Riley)

Fig 24 (below left) Detail of turfing spade, Lyn and Exmoor Museum (LYNEX 704) (Hazel Riley)

Fig 25 (below right) Blade of turf cutting spade, Lyn and Exmoor Museum (Hazel Riley)



Drying and stacking the turf

The turfs cut from the Exmoor blanket bogs were 9" wide, 2½-3" thick and 2-2½feet long (Dick Rawle Exmoor Oral History Archive) (Figs 27 and 28). The turfs had to be dried on the common before they could be carted and stored at the farm house. The Exmoor wind and sun did the drying. The cut turfs were moved away from the damp or wet ground of the turf pit to drier ground where they were turned, like hay, with a stick or a fork. Once peat has dried out it is difficult to re-wet, so stacking the dry turf outside on the common before it is brought down to the farm was the usual practice for some farmers and tenants on parts of Exmoor.

Victor Lock, working on Brendon Common in the 1930s and 1940s, describes the process:

'Each one you cut [each pit turf] you'd place straight on a barrow until you had about ten to a load. Then you'd wheel them away till you were on dry land. You'd spread them around and you'd have to go back to turn them. When they were dry, the bottoms, which were jet black, would be just like a lump of coal, and it would last a long time. It was dirty, dirty fire-stuff, but it did the job.'
(Ramsay 2009, 14-15)

The turfs were often built into piles, known as stooks or burrows, as part of the drying process. This seems to have been the norm on Brendon Common in the first half of the 20th century. Blanche Pile remembers putting turf into burrows out on Brendon Common to dry in the 1940s-1950s and Victor Lock describes 'stooks of turf drying all over [Brendon Common]' at the same time (Ramsay 2009, 53, 14-15). The burrows were circular, about 6-10 feet in diameter and in height. The stooks were not thatched or covered and were often knocked over by bullocks who rubbed against them, and they were often rebuilt (Ramsay 2011, 110-112).

Fig 26 Cutting turf on Exmoor c 1940 with heart shaped turfing spade. The turfs are loaded onto a wooden barrow and stacks of drying turf can be seen in the background (West Somerset Photographic Archive)



Jim Sanders was born in 1921 at Thornworthy Farm and moved to South Stock Farm in 1945 when he married. He remembers how the family 'used to take a horse and sleigh onto the common and cut the turf. We'd put it away from the wet parts to dry and then pack it into heaps (Ramsay 2009, 123). Dennis Corner, who was born in 1926, remembers seeing turf stacked on Exmoor when he was a boy (pers comm 2012). Ernest Mold remembered seeing turf being cut on Brendon Common before 1991. He describes the drying and stacking process:

'As they were lifted they were laid out, six or seven in a row, to dry. Later they were turned like hay, with a two-pronged fork. When quite dry – then reduced to half their original size - they were either stacked on the spot or hauled away in barrows, or three-wheeled butts drawn by a horse, or sometimes on a sledge, the tracks can still be seen, wandering over the moor to avoid 'damp' ground or thickets, ending abruptly at a pit.'
(Mold 1991)



Figs 27 & 28
(above) Cut turfs
drying on edge
of turf pits on
Brendon Common
in the 1990s (Rob
Wilson-North)

Fig 29 (left) Large
cut turfs on the
edge of a turf
pit on Acmead
(Larkbarrow) in
the 1930s-40s
(West Somerset
Photographic
Archive)

Several photographs record this process. The man and woman cutting turf 'on Exmoor' in the 1940s are loading the cut turfs onto a barrow. Behind are numerous turf stooks which are smaller than those described on Brendon Common (above) (Fig 26). The workers at Acmead in the 1930s-40s (Mrs V Lloyd, Miss Hutton, Westcott men, Miss Henly, Miss Heblins) spread cut turfs on the edge of the pit and were also photographed loading neatly cut turfs onto a horse drawn sledge or dray, to take them away from the very wet turf pit for drying (Figs 29 and 30). Four large turf stooks on Countisbury Common – now enclosed – were photographed in 1939 (Fig 31). In the late 19th century, R D Blackmore was familiar enough with turf stacks on the commons of Exmoor to mention 'peat-ricks here and there, and the furze-hucks of the summer-time' in Lorna Doone (Chapter 13).

Sante Lafuente, who was the stockman for Cornham Farm from the 1930s until 1988s, cut turf on Exmoor Forest near Exe Head. He never built an interim rick and cannot remember anyone else do so (Ramsay 2011, 17). Stan Curtis, another Fortescue Estate worker and turf cutter, said that peat was never dried on mounds or platforms

Fig 30 Loading cut turf onto a horse drawn sled to take it to higher ground for drying, Acmead (Larkbarrow) in the 1930s-40s (West Somerset Photographic Archive)



Fig 31 Turf stacks on Countisbury Common in 1939 (Nightingale Collection, Lyn and exmoor Museum)



within memory (NMR SS 73 NE 5, source 7). This seems to be a distinction between the practice of Exmoor Estate workers and farmers on the moorland edge farms. It could be that the pattern of agricultural work and the availability of men, horses, carts, tractors and trailers, allowed the estate workers to bring cut turf back to the farms and cottages as soon as it was dry enough to cart and store. For the moorland edge farmers, however, it was expedient to leave turf stacked out on the common after it was cut and dried, then concentrate on haymaking and even the harvest before bringing the turf home.

Carting the turf

A horse-drawn cart or sledge was the most common way of carrying the cut and dried turfs off the common down to the farm or cottage. At Thornworthy Farm a horse and sleigh was used for turf cutting in the 1930s and Victor Lock recalls bringing the turfs back to Cranscombe Arm from Brendon Common on a horse and cart in the 1930s-40s (Ramsay 2009, 14-15, 123). A horse and sled were needed on the wet ground at Acmead in the 1930s-1940s (Fig 30). The Fortescues had peat cut on Kittuck and brought by lorry to their Castle Hill estate until the 1940s (Ramsay 2010, 12).

Abel Antell, who lived at Barbrook and worked as a labourer, used to cut and carry turf for some of the Exmoor Shepherds before he took over the Hoar Oak herding in 1938 from Bill and Dorothy Little (hoaroakcottage.org.uk).

Photographs taken by Rob Wilson–North in the early 1990s show turf cutting on Brendon Common: here a tractor and trailer is used to take the turf off the common (Fig 32). This was some of the very last turf cutting to take place on Exmoor and was probably done by Sante Lafuente who cut turf for Dick French at Brendon Barton after he retired as an Exmoor Estate worker in 1988.



*Fig 32 (left)
Tractor and trailer
hauling turf on
Brendon Common
in the 1990s
(Rob Wilson-
North)*

*Fig 33 (opposite)
A large rick
of pit turfs,
Pound Cottages,
Simonsbath, c
1920. The light
wooden barrow
was used for
moving cut turf
out at the turf
pits (John Watts)*

Storing the turf

There were two ways of storing the cut turf back at the farm or cottage: outside in a rick or in an outbuilding, known as the turf house or turf store. At Cheriton and Cranscombe ricks were built in the farm yard. Victor Lock remembers that, in the 1920s and 1930s,

'When all the turfs were dry we'd bring them down on the horse and cart and build them into a giant rick near the back door of the house [Cranscombe Farm], ready for the winter. The middle of the rick was hollow to let the air through and the dog would always go there automatically because he could see the door to the house from there. He used the turf-rick as his kennel'.

(Ramsay 2009, 14-15)

A photograph from the 1920s shows a turf rick built up against a thatched hay rick in the yard at Cheriton. The rick is about 6 feet high and is of skin turf (Ramsay 2011, page 25). A large stack of pit turf by the estate workers' cottages at Simonsbath takes pride of place in a photograph of 1920 (Fig 33). The top of the rick has been carefully assembled with angled turfs to help shed water. The photograph is clearly staged, with boy holding a light wooden barrow by the turf rick and women in white aprons at their cottage doors. The smoking cottage fires corroborate J C Cooke, who recalls that most of the villagers in Simonsbath in the 1940s kept their fires permanently alight with peat (Cooke 1969, 9).

A postcard of Challacombe, c 1930 (SRO A\BAZ/4/13/20.35) shows a large rectangular stack of turf in a yard opposite the Ring o'Bells Inn, with a stack of cord wood to the left (Fig 34). These are probably fuel supplies for the pub. Marion Graham, who grew up at the Rockford Inn on the edge of Brendon Common, remembers her father cutting turf on the common for the pub fires (Ramsay 2011, 70). Similar stacks can be seen



in a drawing of the six cottages built for miners at Cornham Ford in 1858. Here, two neat circular and one rectangular turf stacks lie very close to the cottages (Fig 35). At Knighton Farm, Withypool, the turf was stacked in a temporary linhay in the farm yard, built with wooden posts and thatched with rushes (Farm Diaries 1913-1940).



Fig 34 A large turf rick in yard opposite the pub at Challacombe c 1930 (SRO A\BAZ/4/13/20.35)



Fig 35 Miners' cottages at Cornham Ford c 1890 with turf ricks close by (SRO A\BAZ/4/16/11)

Two moorland edge farms on the south edge of Exmoor have good examples of turf houses. These are Lyshwell Farm and Cloggs Farm, in the Dane's Brook Valley. Cloggs Farm had access to turf on Hawkridge and Withypool Commons, Lyshwell adjoins Molland and Anstey Commons. At Lyshwell Farm, a lean-to building which uses the full height of the gable end on the west side of the farmhouse is the turf house; a hatch through from the kitchen is said to be for reaching through to the store without having to brave the Exmoor weather (information from R Wilson-North) (Fig 36). At Cloggs Farm, in the mid-19th century, a shippon was built to the west of the farmhouse and an open fronted linhay linked the shippon and the house; it was later infilled and the ground floor used as a turf store (Jones 2000, 3) (Fig 37). The turf houses at both Cloggs and Lyshwell Farms were built by the late 19th century (OS 1st edition map) and are in convenient locations, close to the farmhouse kitchen.



Fig 36 The turf house at Lyshwell Farm on the edge of Molland Common is a lean-to on the end of the house, next to the kitchen (left of house) (Hazel Riley)

The turf house at North Furzehill Farm, which has turbary rights on Furzehill Common, was built between 1889 and 1904 (information from Richard Robinson; 1st and 2nd edition OS maps). Here, the turf house is a lean-to against the threshing barn (Fig 38). It measures 3.2m by 3.2m and has a staircase connecting the top floor of the barn with the lean-to in the yard. It is located just across the yard from the entrance to the farm house (Fig 39). Anecdotal evidence suggests that a pig was always kept here (information from Richard Robinson); a photograph of the owners standing in front of the turf house shows that a small coal store was in use in the angle of the lean-to turf house and the threshing barn in c 1950 (Fig 40). Its location and its similarity with the lean-to turf house at Lyshwell suggest that this was built to store turf in the early part of the 20th century.

There are several references to turf houses in use in the 1920s. Lillian Moffatt who grew up at Birchanger on the edge of Porlock Common in the 1920s, where the turf house was a small detached stone building across the yard from the back-kitchen. At Hallslake Farm the turf house was an outbuilding about 100m across the yard from the kitchen; at Higher Tippacott the turf store was at the end of the farmhouse, next to the kitchen (Ramsay 2011, 100-101; 110-112).

Sante Lafuente, who was cutting turf on Exmoor Forest and on Brendon Common in the 1980s and 1990s, never built ricks on the common but took the dry turfs back to his cottage to a shed where they were 'ditched,' that is, stacked into six foot square mounds with 18" gaps between each mound to allow air to circulate (Ramsay 2011, 17).

The importance of storing turf in outbuildings at farmhouses, cottages and Simonsbath Lodge is shown by the work of the Exmoor Estate carpenter, James Welch. He worked for both the Knight and the Fortescue Estates (1892-1911) and recorded his work in a Daybook (Welch 1892-1911).

Fig 37 At Cloggs Farm the turf house was on the left of the farmhouse, between it and the shippon. The farm's gutter system is below the farm yard (Hazel Riley)





Fig 38 (left) The turf house at North Furzehill Farm is still used to store fuel for the house (Hazel Riley)

Fig 40 (below) The turf house c 1950 (Richard Robinson)



Fig 39 (left) North Furzehill Farm: the turf house is the tall, lean-to building on the end of the threshing barn, across the yard from the house (Hazel Riley)

Extracts from James Welch's Daybook

1906 making and hanging a gate at the Estate Bailiff's turf house

January 1907 sawing board for Driver Cottage's turf shed

March 1907 working on Rev Barrow's turf house

July 1907 stacking turf at Simonsbath Lodge

August 1907 stacking turf

August – October 1907 sawing roof timbers and board and fixing same for J Elworthy Senior's turf shed

October 1907 sawing for Mrs Steer's turf and wash house

February 1909 making frames for, and roofing, the Driver Cottage turf house

November 2010 sawing board and rails for Exmoor Forest Hotel turf shed

June 1910 putting up turf in piles

July 1910 sawing pegs for turf ground

July 1910 putting away turf for self

April 1911 working on Simonsbath Lodge turf house roof
(Welch 1892-1911)

The turf cutting year

An important source of information about the daily life of an Exmoor farmer in the early 20th century is contained in a set of farm diaries written for the years between 1913-1940, by Mr Land who worked at Hillway and Knighton Farms in Withypool. He records when the turf cutting started, when the turf was brought back to the farm and how it was stored:

1913

29th May 1913 I stopped home to help in house, started putting cabbages in King's Field in evening. Bob started cutting turf.

15 July 1913 'Carrying hay Kings. I made rick. Bob went Brightworthy carrying hay, we carried two meadows at Kings.

31st July 1913 Started hauling in turf to rick. Bob with our horse to W Dean with one of Mr Rawle's horses. King's Farm had in 8 loads.

1st August 1913 Hauling in turf, 1 load by W Dean, Bob went twice, one for mother. We fetched a small load of rushes in evening from Knighton Bottom for thatching turf rick.

1915

25th May 1915 I started to cut turf on Knighton Down.

1st June 1915 Bob hauling in turf. Me and Mr W putting in posts for linhay to put turf in.

25th June 1915 Bob hauled in 2 loads of turf for mother. I was hoeing in forenoon, it was very wet in afternoon.

3rd July 1915 Bob hauled in 2 loads of turf for mother and fetched 1 load of turf for Mr Baker (Garlicombe). I put in some turnip seeds in garden in corners etc. Stoked the pit turf in evening.

20th September 1915 We took in two loads of bedding from Dedicombe and ricked it on the end of turf linhay.

1916

22nd May 1916 Turf cutting started.

2nd June 1916 Went up to go on with the watercart, could not catch the old mare, washed the sheep and caught mare in the afternoon, fetched 2 load of turf.

15th June 1916 We and J R was burying turf after we turned them [this refers to stacking the cut and dried turfs in burrows or stacks on the common].
 17th June 1916 I went and had the mare shod at Exford and fetched a load of turf and cut and took home load clats [clods of earth] by Waterhouse for shear sheep on.
 9th July 1916 Fine day. Storm in evening. Looking forward to some fine hay weather.
 12th July 1916 We was to hay. Pucking until dinnertime. Came on to rain afternoon.
 15th July 1916 Spreaded the hay and carried it and Mr Rawle came up with his cart and the roller men helped.
 29th July 1916 I was hauling in turf 3 loads from Knighton Down. J Reed was cutting ½ thousand turf for me and some for himself. G pulling away. Paid J Reed tonight.
 12th August 1916 Afternoon cut and took home 36 bundles of rushes from top Knighton Combe for thatch the turf linhay with'
 (Farm Diaries 1913-1940)

These entries show how the turf was cut when the weather was fine in late May, when the ground had dried enough to work, before hay making started, and to give the turf as long as possible out on the common to dry. The turfs were turned when time and weather allowed; this was often done by the children who were expected to help with the farm work before and after school and during the holidays (Ramsay 2009, 14-15). The stooks or burrows of dried turfs out on the common were made as soon as the turf was dry enough and the turf was brought down to the farm as the weather and other farm work allowed. Some turf was brought back in June before hay making started, some was stacked in burrows out on the common and was brought back to the farm in late July/August after the hay was in.

Burning turf in the home

Ivy Archer, (Victor Lock's sister) who was born at Cranscombe Farm in 1915, remembers how important turf was at home:

'The big room downstairs at the back of the cottage [Cranscombe farmhouse] we called the 'back-house', and this was where we spent all our time. It was our living room, it was where we ate and it was the kitchen; it was the centre of everything. It was also where the all the clothes and sheets were boiled, and hung up to air after they'd been dried outside....The main fireplace had a hearth-oven set into it and this did everything in those early days; it heated the room and all the cooking was done on it with iron pots hanging on chimney hooks above. Sitting in front of it, as we did every evening, it was hot on your front, freezing on your back. We burned turf, or peat, which we cut on the common [Brendon Common] and brought down and stacked outside the back door in a huge rick....There was another fire, or furnace, in a corner of the back-house, with a big round bottomed copper on top, and this is where all the water was heated – the hot water that we used for washing and for laundry and for baths. We had a hip bath which would go between these two fires.'
 (Ramsay 2010, 77)

Examples of cooking utensils which were suspended over the hearth can be seen in a display of an Exmoor farm house kitchen at the Lyn and Exmoor Museum, which has a

cloam oven (Ivy Archer's hearth-oven or bread oven), iron pots, skillets and kettles with handles for hanging over the fire (Fig 41).

Blanche Pile moved to Hallslake Farm when she married John Pile in 1947:

'I did all the cooking for John and two of his brothers who were with us most of the time. We had a solid fuel stove put into the fireplace for me to cook on. We continued to cut turfs out on the common [Brendon Common] every May which we put into burrows out there to dry. We burnt a combination of these with sticks in the Rayburn (Ramsay 2009, 53). Marion Graham's father ran the Rockford Inn in the 1930s and 1940s where they burned turf her father cut on Brendon Common. She remembers the turf fires being so hot that the Rayburn stove in the kitchen got so hot that the register plate cracked (Ramsay 2011, 70). Ernest Mold remembered turfs burning well on open farmhouse fires or in the Bodley iron stoves when the ironwork would glow white hot (Mold 1991, 15); the villagers of Simonsbath burnt turf on open fires or in Bodley stoves in the first half of the 20th century, and most kept their fires permanently alight with turf (Burton 1994, 82; Cooke 1969, 9). Simonsbath House was heated by turf fires in the 1930s and 1940s, although Lady Margaret Fortescue, who spent some of her childhood there, remembers the house as being 'quite cold' (SRO A/BJS/3/41).

Sante Lafuente needed between 6000 and 7000 turfs a year for all the heating and cooking at his cottage; he could easily cut 1000 turfs in one day. He always cut from the same pit, which was up at Exe Head, beyond a field called Top Hill on the perimeter of Cornham Farm. A year's supply would take the equivalent of four or five full day's work and digging was started at the end of April/beginning of May to give the turfs as much time as possible to dry. A diary of 1910 kept by Helen Ridd from Yenworthy Farm, north of Oare, records that John Sage, a farm labourer, was paid 15 shillings for cutting 6000 turfs in late May and early June. He was then paid for two more days in early August, probably for carting the turf back to the farm (Ramsay 2011, 17, 101).

Fig 41 Iron pots, skillet and kettle with handles for cooking over open fire, a cloam oven is built into the side of the hearth on the right (Lyn and Exmoor Museum) (Hazel Riley)



The end of turf cutting on Exmoor

Turf cutting ended for most of the moorland edge farms in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The use of parts of Exmoor Forest and the commons for military training during the Second World War must have had an impact on turf cutting for domestic fuel, although there is no record of this as a problem or a disruption in the oral histories consulted. It may be that turf cutting continued to a certain extent during the war as it is clear that the commons were still used for grazing and alternative fuel such as coal was in short supply. John Pile and his father at Hallslake Farm were employed by the army to clear the stock from Cheriton Ridge and part of Brendon Common before the rocket firing started. Jack Edwards visited farms warning people not to go up onto the common when firing was taking place, and warning notices were posted (Ramsay 2009, 50).

As the number of people working or employed on the moorland edge farms in the post war years declined, and road transport became easier, the use of coal, wood and oil gradually took the place of turf as a domestic fuel. At Hallslake Farm the use of turf declined in the 1970s: 'in the end we stopped cutting turf because it was very hard work; it was a lot easier to cut and split firewood and gradually that's what happened' (Ramsay 2009, 53).

When the Fortescue Estates sold the last of their moorlands on Exmoor to the ENPA in 1991, it was agreed that the villagers should continue to have the rights to cut turf; in 1994 only three men still dug peat on the Exmoor Estate: Sante Lafuente, John Watts and Peter Charman, working turf pits on Buscombe (Burton 1994, 134, 136). Turf was cut on Brendon Common in the early 1990s, when Rob Wilson-North photographed newly cut turfs and a tractor and trailer being loaded with turf. When Sante Lafuente retired from the Exmoor Estate in 1988 he continued to cut turf for his own use and he was also employed by Dick French at Brendon Barton to cut turf on Brendon Common for the farmhouse. The photographs taken in the early 1990s are probably from this work and are the most recent records of turf cutting found during this study (Figs 4, 27, 28, 32).

OTHER USES OF PEAT ON EXMOOR

From at least as early as the 13th century, the process of 'beat burning' or 'paring and burning', that is, removing the turf, heaping it up and setting fire to the turf heaps, was used across the south west both for rotational grass and for the taking in of rough grazing or moorland for cultivation. The ash from burning peaty soils in anaerobic conditions – produced in the centre of these heaps of turf – was then used as a fertiliser for the newly broken ground (Stanes 2008, 12-13). The ash from burning turf in the home was also used as a fertiliser on some of Exmoor's farms, sometimes in conjunction with the field gutter systems (Ramsay 2009, 11) (Fig 38). At Hallslake Farm, ash from all the fires was saved and kept dry in the ash house, which was about ten feet square. It was mixed with the root seed (mangolds and turnips) and used in a horsedrawn drill which sowed both the ashes and the seed together (Ramsay 2011, 110-112).

Peat was also cut on Exmoor to use to cover the barn floor during sheep shearing, and as animal bedding. This is probably what Mr Land referred to as 'clats....to shear sheep

on' (Farm Diaries 1913-40). In the 1940s and 1950s Tony Richards was growing up at Yearnor on the edge of Porlock Common:

'before shearing started the barn floor had to be prepared and I can remember going up to Stenthill when it was still common and cutting turfs from up there. They were full of whort and heather roots, which made it tough going getting through all the root structure. We'd spread them on the floor of the barn to soak up all sheep urine and droppings. It was quite a laborious job cutting the turfs and we gave it up as soon as we were able to get hold of sawdust to use instead' (Ramsay 2011, 25).

In the last years of the 19th century several avenues were explored to maximise the income from Frederic Knight's Exmoor Estates. A letter from a nurseryman, Thomas Rockford of Turnford Hall, Broxbourne, Herts, shows that he had received a quantity of sphagnum moss from Exmoor Forest but had not received a quote and wished to know the price. The outcome is not recorded (Burton 1989, 171).

In 1910 an agreement was drawn up, but never completed, between Lord Fortescue and the International Carbonising Company Ltd. Lord Fortescue gave the company three months to determine if his Exmoor peat deposits were suitable for them to use a wet carbonising process to manufacture peat coal and other products. Then £10 an acre was to be paid for every acre used, and Lord Fortescue was to provide a site or sites near the deposits for treating the peat. After three years of negotiations, a meeting was held on 26th September 1913 to finalise the agreement, but the rent asked and the methods of digging the peat could not be agreed on. Despite this, a route for a railway for taking peat products off the moor was surveyed from the Chains to Westland, by the Lynton-Barnstaple railway. Talks continued until 1914 but no agreement was ever signed (Burton 1989, 171-172).

Peat moss or moss litter is made from the upper layers in a peat bog. In Ireland this had traditionally been used by farmers as winter bedding for cattle and horses and in some countries farmers made their own peat moss litter by ploughing and harrowing the peat bog surface (Feehan and O'Donovan 1996, 89). Although raw peat was widely used as bedding material by farmers, wider usage began in the late 19th and early 20th century when it was processed and packaged as a commercial product and was used extensively as horse bedding for the military. The English Moss Litter Company extracted peat moss from Thorne Moors in South Yorkshire until the 1960s and the Midland Litter Company took moss from Fenn's Moss near Wrexham (Rotherham 2009, 50).

There was a peat moss merchant in Porlock in the early 20th century: Fred Cape, who advertised in Kelly's Directory for 1914 and 1919, as 'corn, hay, straw and peat moss merchant; hunters and hacks for hire' (Kelly 1914, 389; 1919, 371). These were probably peat moss bales brought from elsewhere in England. Although small hand-powered moss litter machines were available (Rotherham 2009, 50), there are no records of peat moss litter manufacture on Exmoor where blanket bog peat was less suitable for such commercial production of peat products than deeper peat from raised bogs.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR TURF CUTTING ON EXMOOR

Air photographs and LiDAR

The NMP project recorded the extent of peat cutting across the whole of Exmoor National Park from aerial photographs (Hegarty and Toms 2009). Each area was given an EH NMR entry and, in virtually all cases, an area for the peat cutting was given in hectares. The total recorded was 1050.1 ha. This is an under representation as not all of the records had an area given, and the older turf pits have been enclosed or are now not visible due to peat regeneration and/or vegetation regrowth. It does, however, give an approximation for the amount of the peat resource on Exmoor which has been exploited for fuel as at least one-sixth (by area, based on figures from Merryfield 1977 and discussed in Smith 2006).

The grid reference given for the approximate centre of the turf cutting areas recorded from air photographs is also shown on Figure 3, giving the distribution of the visible remains of turf cutting across Exmoor. This shows a concentration of the turf pits on the deeper areas of blanket peat, but with some turf cutting also occurring on shallower blanket peat and areas of peaty soils. A total of 83 areas of turf cutting were identified and recorded (Appendix 1). The turf pits are clearly visible in some areas on aerial photographs, particularly where peat cutting continued into the 20th century, for example on Brendon Common and on Exmoor Forest at Blackpits and Buscombe. Where turf cutting ended before this the turf pits tend to be obscured by peat regeneration and/or vegetation growth, and transcription from air photographs is more difficult. The use of LiDAR data can help in identifying these areas more clearly. For example, on Madacombe (SS 84 SW 266) numerous turf pits can be seen as irregular, water filled hollows, but the Lidar image clearly shows a discrete area of small turf pits (Fig 42). The LiDAR images can also show the extent and complexity of areas of turf pits which have been used for several hundred years, like those on Brendon Common (Fig 43).

Turf pits

There are several different kinds of disused turf pits on Exmoor's moorlands. One of the most distinctive seems to be confined to the commons. These are turf pits with curved edges, often with two or more dug out areas, separated by baulks (narrow uncut areas). There are many examples of these turf pits on Brendon Common. Aerial photographs are often the best way to appreciate the form of the pits. Figure 44 shows two large turf pits toward the north edge of Brendon Common, to the SE of the rectangular enclosure below Withycombe Ridge. The turf pit on the left of the photograph (centred SS 76782 44743) is 90 x 50m; the pit to the right (centred at SS 76850 44817) is 65 x 55m. This one shows at least 14 different working areas, separated by baulks, and an uncut area at the NW edge of the pit which serves as a track into the working areas. Several tracks are also visible, leading from the turf pits on Brendon Common to the moorland edge farms.

Large scale surveys of two turf pits on the south edge of Brendon Common illustrate how the pits were worked. In one pit, centred at SS 76321 43842, two rectangular hollows on the south side of the plan are the first areas to be worked. Then the inner

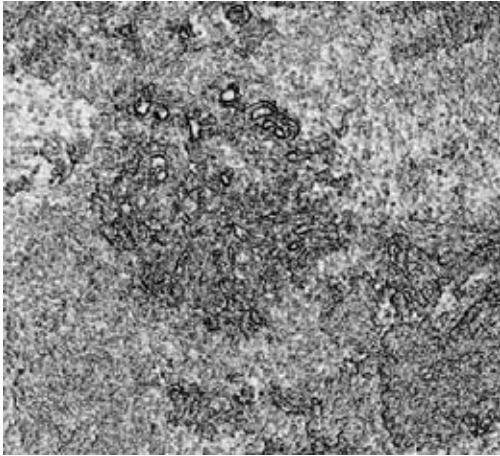


Fig 42 LiDAR image showing numerous, discrete small turf pits on Madacombe (based on data supplied by South West Water) (© Geomatics)

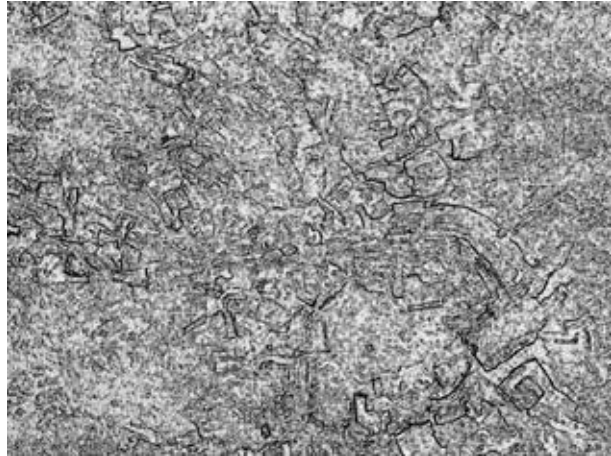


Fig 43 LiDAR image showing the extent and complexity of turf pits on the south of Brendon Common (based on data supplied by South West Water) (© Geomatics)

Fig 44 (below) Aerial photograph of the northern edge of Brendon Common showing two large turf pits with curving edges (NMR 26881_032) (© English Heritage)



curving area was cut, followed by the outer curving area, with cuts through the baulks as needed to drain the pits into areas which had already been cut (Fig 45). Details of the turf cutting process are visible in a turf pit east of the road and north of Brendon Two Gates, in an area which was burnt in early spring 2013 (centred SS 76224 43864). The NW sides of this turf pit have curved edges to three working areas (Fig 46). The removal of vegetation by burning shows how individual spade cuts are preserved in turf pits. Around virtually the whole perimeter of the pit spade marks from the last time the pit was dug can be seen in the bottom of the pit, close to the edge (Fig 47).

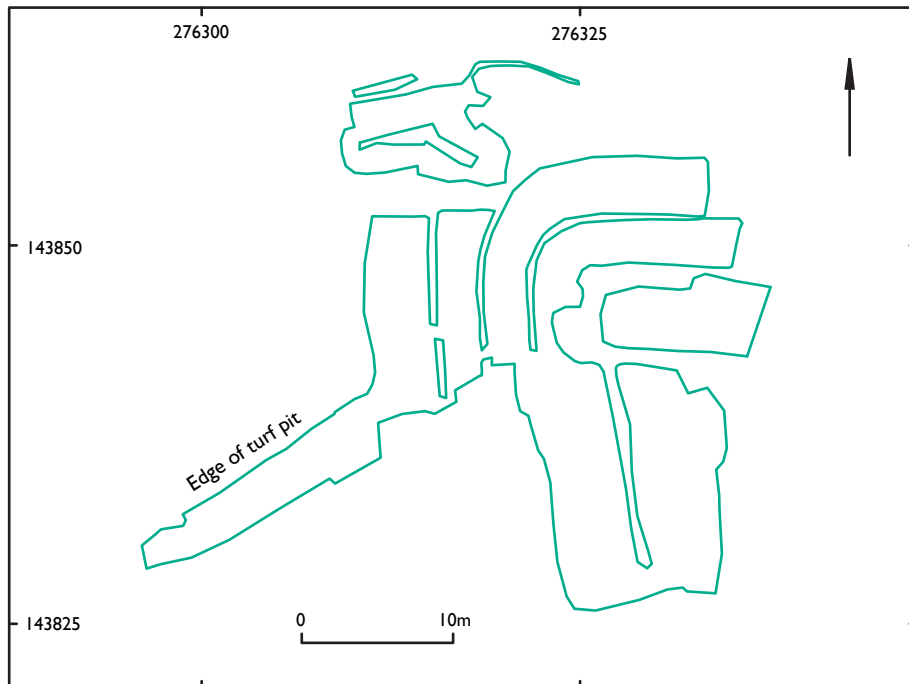


Fig 45 Survey of a turf pit on south edge of Brendon Common showing two large turf pits with curving edges (1:500)

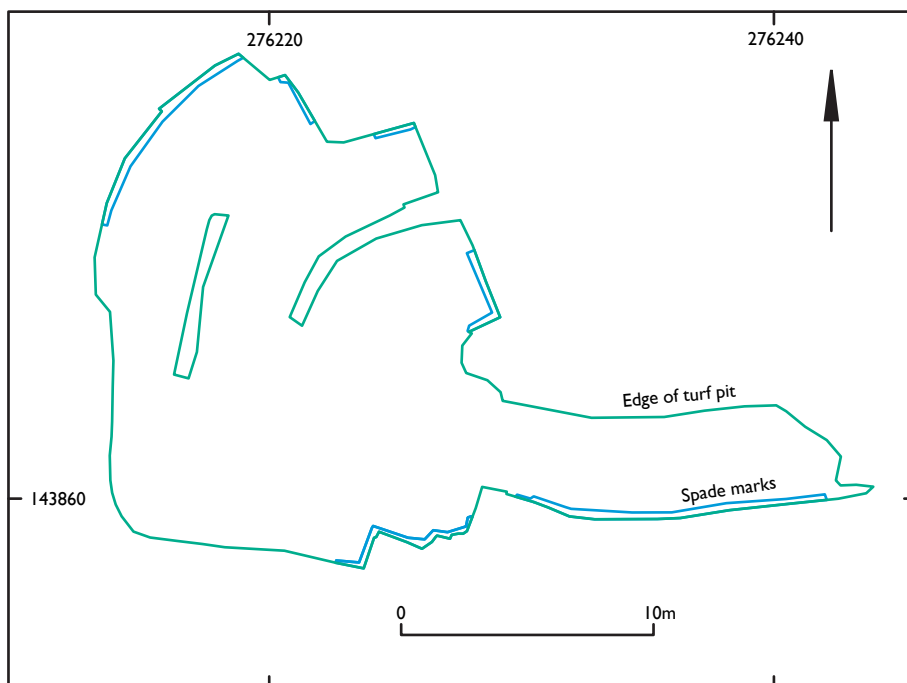


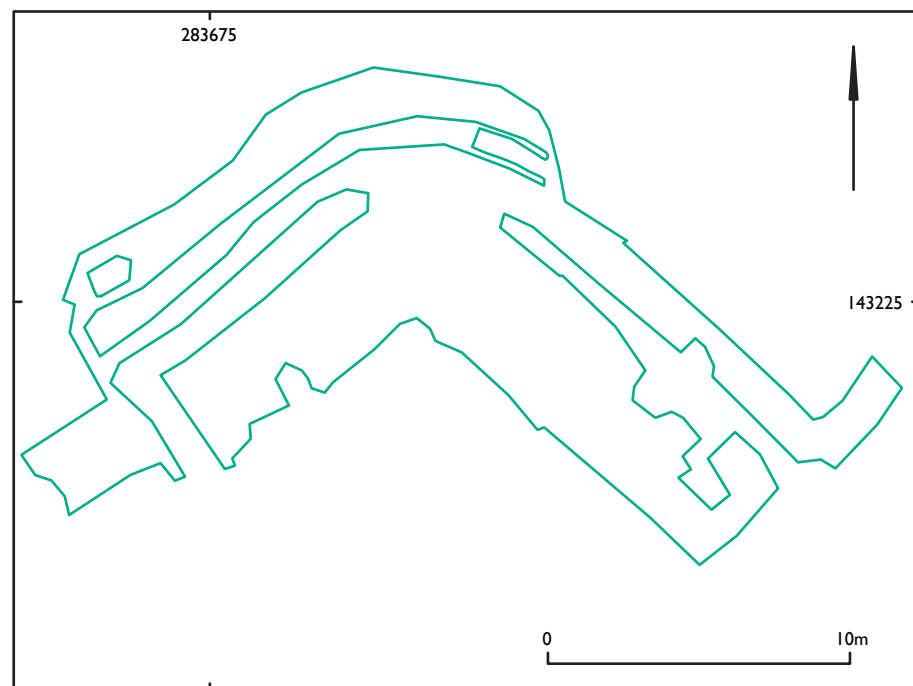
Fig 46 Survey of a turf pit on the south edge of Brendon Common with spade marks around the perimeter (1:300)

A similar turf pit can be seen on the west side of Porlock Allotment, in an area of small, rectangular pits (centred SS 83681 43226) (Figs 48 and 49). Here, the cut-through baulks to aid drainage are clearly visible and were needed in this very wet ground, which is probably the area being cut in photographs of Acmead in the 1930s-1940s (Figs 29 and 30).

Another characteristic feature of Exmoor's disused turf pits is a step down around all or part of the perimeter. This was noted during fieldwork around some of the pits on Exe Plain, for example. On the south side of Brendon Common a turf pit, 86m long and 40m wide, centred SS 76408 43778, shows this particularly well (Fig 50). Around the north and west edges is a step down of 0.5m to a narrow, flat area 0.8m wide. This is the 'bench', the area cleared for the next session of turf cutting, but in this case not carried out. It shows particularly well in the section surveyed across the turf pit (Fig 51); so does the spade mark left by the last round of turf cutting.



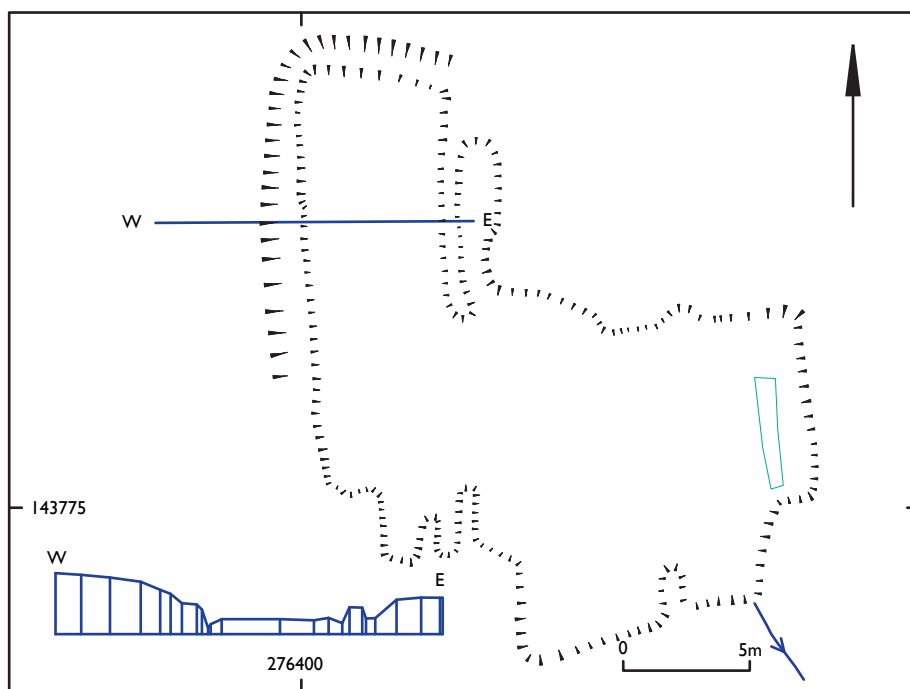
Fig 47 (above)
Spade marks
from last season
of turf cutting
visible in turf
pit on Brendon
Common (Hazel
Riley)
Fig 48
(above right)
Waterlogged
turf pits on the
west of Porlock
Allotment (Hazel
Riley)
Fig 49 (right)
Plan of turf
pit Porlock
Allotment



Large, uniform, rectangular disused turf pits are a characteristic of parts of Exmoor Forest and can be seen on Exe Plain (Front cover), Hoar Oak Hill (Fig 7) and on both sides of the road between Little Buscombe and Hoar Tor (Fig 52).

On Exe Plain the largest pits measure, on average, 120m x 40m and are 0.5m deep. At SS 7538 42081 the pits are very close together, separated only by narrow baulks c 1-2m wide. Small cuts through these baulks drain the current working area into one that has already been dug (Fig 53). These sort of turf pits are clearly visible with little sign of peat regeneration and are probably the turf pits dug by the Knights' tenants and the Exmoor Estate workers in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

As well as the cut-through baulks and cuts in pit edges to drain working areas, several areas of turf cutting seem to have been subject to more widespread drainage, perhaps after the pits became disused and the land was needed for grazing. This is a particular feature of turf cutting on Exmoor Forest and can be seen NE of Driver, on Hoar Oak Hill and near the barrow west of Elsworthly (Fig 54). Here, several regular pits radiate



*Fig 50 (top left)
Stepped edge
to a turf pit on
south of Brendon
Common (Hazel
Riley)*

*Fig 51 (right)
Survey of turf
pit on south
of Brendon
Common (1:300,
vertical x 2)*

*Fig 52 (top right)
Large, uniform
turf pits north of
Buscombe (Hazel
Riley)*



Fig 53 Survey of turf pits on Exe Plain (1:1500)

out from the round barrow; to the NW the pits merge with drainage ditches which are part of a large drainage system across Elsworthy (Fig 55).

The disused turf pits on Exford Common, Cheriton Ridge and Furzehill Common are very different from the regular working areas described above. Here, the pits are smaller and irregular, with areas of peat regrowth and detail blurred by vegetation (Figs 56 and 57), suggesting that they were not worked in the 20th century.

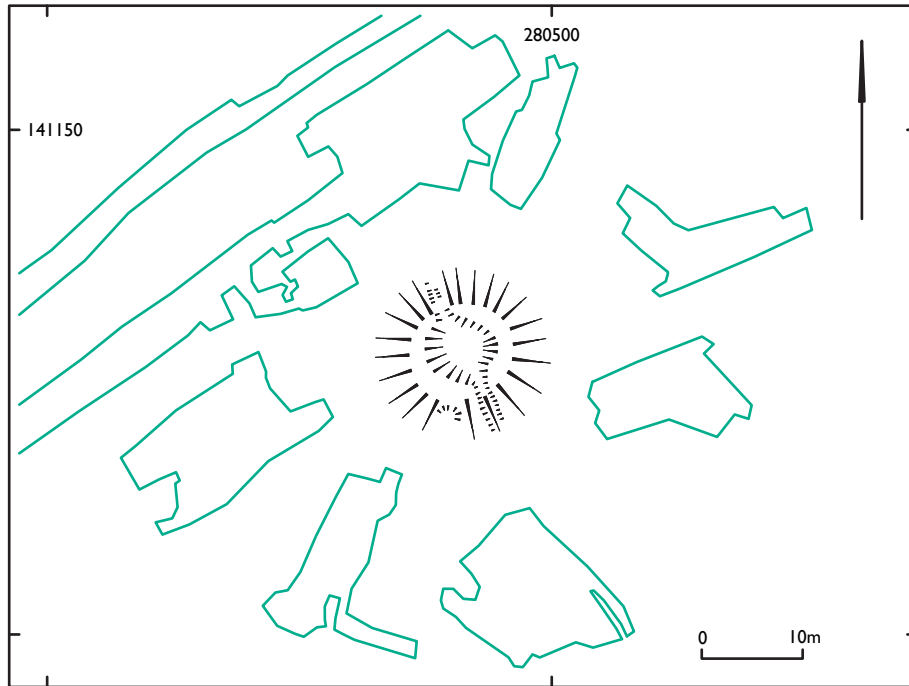


Fig 54 (left) Drainage ditches merge with turf pits north of the round barrow, Elsworthy (Hazel Riley)

Fig 55 (top) Survey of turf pits and drainage ditches by the round barrow, Elsworthy (1:750)

Fig 56 (below left) Waterlogged turf pits on Exford Common (Hazel Riley)

Fig 57 (below) Small, irregular turf pits on Furzehill Common (Hazel Riley)



Turf stacks

As well as the disused turf pits, earthworks interpreted as the decayed remains of turf stacks were located during the course of this survey. Small, circular or sub-circular peaty mounds close to disused turf pits were noted on Challacombe Common, west of Pinkery Pond, on Horsen Hill and south of Tom's Hill (Fig 58). On the west side of Challacombe Common at SS 68801 43009 is a sub circular mound, 2.2m NS, 2.4m EW and 0.5m high (Fig 59). On the east edge of the common, south of the Chapman Barrows at SS 69445 43437, is a second mound. This is circular, 2.3m in diameter and 0.75m high (Fig 60). South of Long Combe, opposite the abandoned Knight farm at Tom's Hill, is a small area of disused, rectangular turf pits (EH NMR 84 SW 244). A sub-circular mound, 4.5 m NS, 2.5m EW and 0.6m high was recorded on the east edge of the turf pits (Fig 58). West of Pinkery Pond four mounds, very similar to those described above, were interpreted as the remains of turf stacks during survey work for the Exmoor Mire Project (ECH12; Riley 2012).

Larger mounds were recorded north of Larkbarrow Farm and on the east edge of Horsen Hill. At Larkbarrow Farm, fieldwork by EH identified four mounds as possible '19th-century peat drying stacks' (Jamieson 2001, 32; EH NMR SS 84 SW 178) (SS 81821 43271; 81878 43286; 81838 43376; 81930 43174). The mounds lie some 500m NW of Larkbarrow Farm on ground which is part of a ridge of higher ground south of Kittuck and the headwaters of Chalk Water. They are all circular or sub-circular, c 11.5-12m in diameter, 0.8-1m high, covered with reeds and peaty in composition (Fig 61).

Fig 58 (right) Plans of decayed turf stacks south of Toms Hill (a) and on Challacombe Common (b,c) (1:100)

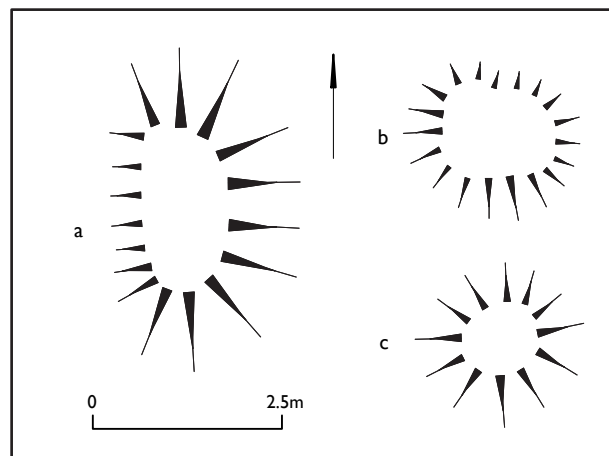


Fig 59 (below) Decayed turf stack south of the Chapman Barrows (Hazel Riley)

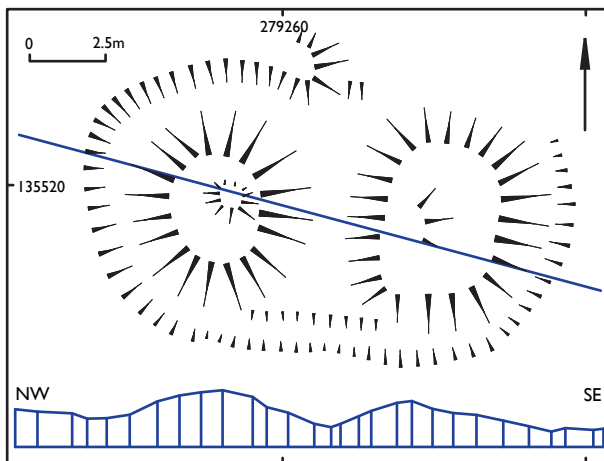
Fig 60 (below right) Decayed turf stack on the west side of Challacombe Common (Hazel Riley)



Similar mounds have been located on Standon Hill on the NW edge of Dartmoor (Figure 62), where they have been interpreted as the decayed remains of cut turfs which were stacked ready for carting back to the farmhouse, but were abandoned when the land was requisitioned by the army in the 1920s for military training (information from Simon Probert, 2013).

There are several areas of turf pits around Tom's Hill and Larkbarrow which would have provided turf for the farms and cottage. Ricks for storing cut turf would have been built in the yard, close to the house, not 500m away on a windy ridge. These mounds are probably the result of large quantities of turf being cut out in the more remote turf pits on Kittuck and stacked in large ricks before being transported back to the Fortescue's home at Castle Hill (Ramsay 2010, 12). Tom's Hill and Larkbarrow were requisitioned by the army in the Second World War for artillery training (Orwin *et al* 1997, 165). The mounds could be the decayed remains of turf ricks which were unable to be taken off Larkbarrow because of artillery training.

Two mounds on east side of Horsen Hill, just to the east of a round barrow, are the remains of decayed turf stacks (EH NMR SS 73 NE 5) (Fig 63). The mounds are both sub-circular and 1m high. The one to the west is 7m NS and 6m EW, the other is 8m NS and 7m EW. A sharp ditch, 0.7m wide and 0.5m deep encircles both mounds (Fig 64). The two small, circular mounds to the north are the remains of small turf stacks like those described above.



A rectangular, embanked platform with an intermittent, external ditch, between the Longstone and the Chapman Barrows (SS 7036 4321) (Fig 65) has been variously interpreted as a prehistoric enclosure or the remains of turf cutting (summarised in Pullen 2009). Given its size, its location on the edge of an area of disused turf pits and its similar size and morphology to the Horsen Hill turf stacks, this enclosure could represent the remains of a turf stack.

Some of the best evidence for storing cut turf in large ricks on the commons or moors before transporting it back to the farmhouse or cottage comes from Davidstow and Bodmin Moor in Cornwall. On Davidstow Moor, Croft Andrew investigated four earthworks in 1942, before the moorland was levelled for an airfield. He recorded four ditched and banked enclosures. Three were sub-rectangular and measured 8.5x 6.1m; the fourth was circular and 4.3m in diameter. He interpreted these as:

'the remains of stacks of turf fuel, each protected against the animals which were formerly set to common pasture by a surrounding ditch with exterior bank.... The practice of stacking fuel on the open moor after drying, to be carried home at a more convenient season, is doubtless some centuries old and may still be maintained in a few remote spots, as I was informed [in 1942] by two of my labourers at Davidstow, one of whom had made and ditched such stacks, the other had watched such work being done on Pridacombe Moor under Brown Willy.'
(Christie and Rose 1987, 183-184)

Croft Andrew excavated three of these earthworks. He found no dating evidence, but in each enclosed area an irregular layer of brown peat above the original turf line was interpreted as the debris from the turf stack. He noted that the earthworks were not prepared in advance but that the ditch was dug after the stack was complete, in

Fig 61 (far left) Turf stack Larkbarrow Farm (Hazel Riley)

Fig 62 (left) Turf stack, Standon Hill, Dartmoor (Hazel Riley)

Fig 63 (far left) Plan turf stacks Horsen Hill

Fig 64 (left) Turf stacks Horsen Hill (Hazel Riley)

Fig 65 (right) Platform SE of Chapman Barrows (Hazel Riley)



order to keep the bullocks from the stack and, as an additional defence, a big thorn was sometimes cut and planted against the corners to keep the beasts at bay. Croft Andrew's photographs, taken in 1942 on Pridacombe Moor, show a rectangular turf stack, some 2-3m high, with turfs angled on the top to shed water, and the turf cutter standing in a freshly cut ditch with a bank of spoil upcast on the outside (Christie and Rose 1987, figs 16 and 17).

These details from Cornwall differ from the memories of turf cutting on Exmoor in the 1920s-1940s (above), when bullocks were a nuisance, and nothing seems to have been done to protect the stacks. This may be because the dry turf on Exmoor was more robust than that from Bodmin, where turf ricks left on the common had to be thatched with reed otherwise the turf spoiled if rewetted. (Herring *et al* 2008, 123). The ditch around the mounds on Horsen Hill was perhaps for drainage rather than protection from stock.

Chronology of the field archaeology of turf cutting

Some areas on Exmoor allow general observations about the relative dates for turf cutting. North of Furzehill Common, overgrown turf pits are visible in pasture fields which were enclosed by 1805 (bl.ac.uk) (Fig 66), giving one of the earliest relative dates for disused turf pits on Exmoor.

One of the few areas where a direct relationship between turf pits and a dated archaeological feature can be seen is on Porlock Allotment, where the track bed of the proposed Simonsbath-Porlock railway overlies disused turf pits (for example, at SS 83892 43509; 83817 43565; 84203 43410) (Fig 67). The trackbed was constructed c 1850, giving a date of the 18th and early 19th century for turf cutting on this part of the common.

Some of the clearest turf pits on Brendon Common, around Exe Plain, Blackpits (now rewetted), and on Lanacombe and Buscombe, can be linked with periods of turf cutting, farms and cottages, and even particular people in the latter part of the 20th century. Dick French of Brendon Barton had a turf pit on Brendon Common and retired Exmoor Estate workers Jack Buckingham and Sante Lafuente cut turf for him in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Jack Buckingham also cut turf for Rose Cottage, Simonsbath,



Fig 66 Overgrown turf pits in enclosed land, north of Furzehill Common (Hazel Riley)



Fig 67 Survey of the Simonsbath-Porlock railway trackbed built across disused turf pits (1:1000)

from a turf pit on Buscombe (Burton 1994, 107-8). In 1994, Sante Lafuente, John Watts and Peter Charman worked turf pits on Buscombe (Burton 1994, 134, 136). In 1987, Jack Buckingham, an Exmoor Estate worker for 50 years, compiled a list of the locations of turf pits in Exmoor and Brendon parishes in relation to the farms and cottages which worked them (information from R Burton).

The mounds which are the decayed remains of turf stacks are difficult to date because of the conflicting oral traditions. There is plenty of photographic and documentary evidence for making stacks on the commons in the early 20th century, but they seem to have left little trace, although the small mounds are not visible on aerial photographs and this study has not involved detailed reconnaissance of all of the turf cutting areas. The practice of leaving stacks of dry turf on the moor before carting it back was not known to several former Exmoor Estate workers in the later 20th century, suggesting that the mounds on Horsen Hill, interpreted here as the remains of decayed turf stacks, are probably of 18th or 19th century date.

CHARACTERISATION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR PEAT EXPLOITATION ON EXMOOR

Disused turf pits have been recorded from air photographs on most of the moorlands of Exmoor which have a covering of blanket peat. They are concentrated in the areas of deeper peat, but also occur on shallower areas of blanket peat.

The disused turf pits on the Exmoor commons represent the remains of peat extraction for domestic fuel.

In the most favourable areas of deep, blanket peat, a turf pit was cut each year for many years, by the same farmer and his family.

The shapes of some of the turf pits on the commons reflect this process, as the turf was cut each season around the perimeter of the pit, giving curved edges to the cut areas as the pit got larger.

Smaller, more regular turf pits reflect a different way of working, where the turf was dug from the pit in straight sections along the long edge of the pit.

Some turf pits are now visible as irregular hollows, which often hold water, and have edges obscured with regenerating peat and/or vegetation growth. These represent turf pits which have been disused for many years, in some cases well over 200 years.

There is little archaeological evidence for the preservation of formal tracks or routes to and from the turf pits, although there are references to these in the oral histories from the moorland edge farmers.

The turf pits on the Exmoor commons are discrete working area, separated from other pits by areas of uncut peat, giving access between them. Within the pits are narrow baulks of uncut peat which served as access within the cut areas. They are often cut through to drain cut areas.

They range in size from small, single pits, like the one on the edge of the large area on Porlock Allotment, which is 100m long and 2m wide and represents one session or a single season of cutting, to the large, curving turf pits on Brendon Common which are up to 100m long and 50m wide.

A characteristic feature of peat extraction on parts of Exmoor Forest, particularly around Simonsbath, are large, uniform rectangular and sub-rectangular turf pits, measuring up to 250-300m long by 50m wide.

These were probably dug by the Knights' and Fortescues' Exmoor Estate tenants and workers in the 19th and 20th centuries. This turf cutting also seems to have been for domestic consumption and it was part of the workers' rights to be able to cut enough turf for fuel for their families every year.

A further characteristic feature of the turf pits on Exmoor Forest is the association of turf cutting areas with drainage ditches. The latter seem to be later features than the turf pits and represent attempts to improve the drainage of former turbaries for grazing.

Oral histories from the early 20th century document the practice of stacking cut turfs in ricks on the commons before carting it home. There is some evidence for this in the form of small, circular and sub-circular mounds, c 2-4m in diam and 0.5- 0.6m high.

Structures associated with turf cutting are absent from Exmoor's moorlands, reflecting the domestic nature of the peat extraction and, in most cases, the relative proximity of the turbaries to settlements.

Structures associated with storing turf at the farm do survive in the form of dedicated outbuildings, usually close to the kitchen.

A small but representative selection of turf cutting tools used on Exmoor in the 20th century are preserved in small museum collections on Exmoor.

The tools used on Exmoor for removing the top layer of vegetation or for cutting skin turf are similar to others used in the domestic turf cutting areas of western Britain. The turf cutting spade with the flat, heart-shaped blade seems to be restricted to Exmoor and has similarities with the long-handled Devon shovel, with its V-shaped blade, used for ditching.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF PEAT EXPLOITATION ON EXMOOR

The archaeological evidence for peat exploitation on Exmoor is significant regionally and nationally for several reasons.

The most significant feature of Exmoor's peat industry is that it was entirely for fuel for domestic, local use. This has resulted in excellent preservation of the process of hand turf cutting in the field archaeology, as hand turf cutting was not followed by machine

cutting as in the Somerset Levels, parts of northern England and across much of Ireland (Somerset Peat Heritage Project archive, Glastonbury; Rotherham 1999; Feehan and O'Donovan 1996). Poor transport links and the remote nature of the peat deposits on Exmoor combined to keep turf cutting as a seasonal activity for farmers, tenants and estate workers, unlike on the Somerset Levels, where light railways, better road links with markets and deep deposits of peat, meant that a man could make a living cutting and selling turf up until mechanisation in the 1960s and 1970s (Somerset Peat Heritage Project archive).

The oral histories recorded which give details of how turf was cut on Exmoor in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, together with historic photographs, combine with the good state of preservation of the turbaries, mean that details such as the spade marks from the final season of cutting a pit can be observed.

The turf cutting tools in museum collections are significant regionally and nationally. Some of the tools were probably locally made and could well be at least 100 years old. The spade with the heart-shaped blade, used for cutting pit turf on Exmoor in the 20th century, is local to Exmoor: different to the flanged blades used across other parts of upland Britain for cutting blanket peat, including Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor (Newman 2010, fig 12; Herring *et al* 2009, figs 97 and 98).

A broad range of documentary evidence is available for the further study of turf cutting on Exmoor in the medieval and post medieval periods.

The combination of oral histories and historic photographs has resulted in a good knowledge of the way turf was cut on Exmoor in the late 19th and 20th centuries by individuals, both on the commons and on Exmoor Forest. Links can be made between the moorland edge farms and turbaries on the commons; similar links can be made between Exmoor estate properties and turf pits on parts of Exmoor Forest.

Specialised structures for storing turf survive at several moorland edge farms.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Fieldwork

Those involved in rapid assessment and walkover surveys of moorland should be aware of the potential for turbaries to yield details of the turf cutting and drying processes. For example, details of spade cut marks and the remains of turf stacks or mounds.

Turf cutting implements

Researching the provenance and history of the tools in museum collections

Researching the provenance and history of the tools on display at the Exmoor Forest Inn

Location of turf cutting implements in private collections

Documentary research

There is scope for enhancing the medieval and post medieval history of the use of peat

as a fuel on Exmoor. Documents such as leases give details of common rights, including the right of turbary, allocated to specific individuals at specific have been located at the SRO and the DRO.

The history of the enclosure of commons with rights of turbary is also a topic for research and should be linked to the above theme.

A study of moorland edge farms to identify surviving turf houses.

A study of buildings associated with the Exmoor Estate to identify surviving turf stores.

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APPENDIX I

Analysis of NMR Data Date of data extraction: 12th and 13th July 2012				
Fields searched: PARISH PEAT CUTTING PEAT EXTRACTION SITE PEAT STAND PEAT STORE				
PARISH	NMR NO	TYPE	LOCATION	SIZE or EXTENT
Brendon	SS 74 NE 84	PEAT CUTTING	Shilstone Hill	20 ha
Brendon	SS 74 SW 204	PEAT CUTTING	E of Hoar Oak	3.5 ha
Brendon	SS 74 SE 152	PEAT CUTTING	Cheriton Ridge	29 ha
Brendon	SS 74 SE 160	PEAT CUTTING	NW of Brendon Two Gates	8 ha
Brendon	SS 74 SE 161	PEAT CUTTING	Brendon Common	116 ha
Brendon	SS 74 NE 85	PEAT CUTTING	Withycombe Ridge	?
Brendon	SS 74 SE 248	PEAT STAND	Brendon Common	6m across
Challacombe	SS 63 NE 24	PEAT CUTTING	Wallover Down	?
Lynton & Lynmouth	SS 74 SW 129	PEAT CUTTING	Hoar Oak Cottage, Lynton	25m x 18m
Lynton & Lynmouth	SS 74 NW 123	PEAT CUTTING	Furzehill Common	?
Lynton & Lynmouth	SS 74 NW 124	PEAT CUTTING	Furzehill Common	?
Lynton & Lynmouth	SS 74 SW 192	PEAT CUTTING	Furzehill Common	5.5 ha
Lynton & Lynmouth	SS 74 SW 193	PEAT CUTTING	Furzehill Common	7 ha
Lynton & Lynmouth	SS 74 SW 194	PEAT CUTTING	Thornworthy Common	3 ha
Lynton & Lynmouth	SS 74 SW 230	PEAT CUTTING	Cheriton Ridge	small pits
		PEAT STAND		small mounds
Lynton & Lynmouth	SS 74 SW 274	PEAT CUTTING	W of Hoar Oak Cottage, Lynton	11.8 ha
Molland	SS 73 SE 100	PEAT CUTTING	SE of Cussacombe	0.5 ha
Molland	SS 82 NW 80	PEAT CUTTING	SW Yeo Mill	?
North Molton	SS 73 NE 130	PEAT CUTTING	SW Long Holcombe Cross	8 ha
North Molton	SS 73 SE 99	PEAT CUTTING	NE of Darlick Farm	4 ha
Cutcombe	SS 84 SE 136	PEAT CUTTING	W of Dunkery Beacon	2.6 ha
Cutcombe	SS 84 SE 138	PEAT CUTTING	Rowbarrow	up to 30m
Exford	SS 84 SW 189	PEAT CUTTING	S of Larkbarrow Corner	?
Exford	SS 84 SW 217	PEAT CUTTING	Almsworthy Common	2.2 ha
Exford	SS 84 SW 226	PEAT CUTTING	S of Larkbarrow Corner	2 ha
Exmoor	SS 74 SW 72	PEAT CUTTING	NW of Driver Farm	2.5 ha
Exmoor	SS 74 SW 159	PEAT CUTTING	SE of Chains Barrow	10.5 ha
Exmoor	SS 74 SW 195	PEAT CUTTING	Hoar Oak Hill	7.5 ha
Exmoor	SS 74 SW 196	PEAT CUTTING	The Chains	42 ha
Exmoor	SS 74 SW 197	PEAT CUTTING	SW of Chains Valley	14 ha
Exmoor	SS 74 SW 198	PEAT CUTTING	S of Chains Barrow	11 ha
Exmoor	SS 74 SW 199	PEAT CUTTING	NE of Pinkery Farm	3 ha
Exmoor	SS 74 SW 202	PEAT CUTTING	Broad Mead, NW Pinkery Farm	3.5 ha
Exmoor	SS 74 SW 203	PEAT CUTTING	N of Pinkery Farm	2 ha
Exmoor	SS 74 SE 153	PEAT CUTTING	Exe Plain	45 ha
Exmoor	SS 74 SE 154	PEAT CUTTING	Dure Down	16 ha
Exmoor	SS 74 SE 155	PEAT CUTTING	W of Blackpitts Farm	1.5 ha
Exmoor	SS 74 SE 156	PEAT CUTTING	The Warren	5.5 ha
Exmoor	SS 74 SE 157	PEAT CUTTING	N of Warren Farm	17 ha
Exmoor	SS 74 SE 158	PEAT CUTTING	N of the Warren	11 ha
Exmoor	SS 74 SE 159	PEAT CUTTING	Hoar Tor, Exe Plain, Lanacombe	75 ha
Exmoor	SS 74 SE 195	PEAT CUTTING	Exe Plain	?
Exmoor	SS 74 SE 235	PEAT STAND	W of Brendon Two Gates	10m diam
Exmoor	SS 84 SW 228	PEAT CUTTING	Swap Hill	0.4 ha
Exmoor	SS 84 SW 236	PEAT CUTTING	Swap Hill	?
Exmoor	SS 84 SW 237	PEAT CUTTING	Elsworthy	?
Exmoor	SS 84 SW 242	PEAT CUTTING	Swap Hill	?
Exmoor	SS 84 SW 244	PEAT CUTTING	Swap Hill	?
Exmoor	SS 84 SW 245	PEAT CUTTING	Swap Hill	?
Exmoor	SS 84 SW 249	PEAT CUTTING	Madacombe	?
Exmoor	SS 84 SW 266	PEAT CUTTING	Madacombe	?
Exmoor	SS 84 SW 267	PEAT CUTTING	Madacombe	?
Exmoor	SS 84 NW 268	PEAT CUTTING	Madacombe	73m x 9m
Exmoor	SS 84 NW 269	PEAT CUTTING	Madacombe	0.5m
Exmoor	SS 84 SW 282	PEAT CUTTING	NE Larkbarrow Farm	
Exmoor	SS 84 SW 283	PEAT CUTTING	N of Larkbarrow Farm	2.5 ha
Exmoor	SS 84 SW 178	PEAT STANDS	N of Larkbarrow Farm	5m diam, 0.9m high
Exmoor	SS 84 SW 284	PEAT CUTTING	Kittuck Hill	5 ha
Exmoor	SS 84 SW 285	PEAT CUTTING	Manor Allotment	8 ha
Exmoor	SS 84 SW 286	PEAT CUTTING	Kittuck Hill	5 ha
Exmoor	SS 84 SW 290	PEAT CUTTING	NW Larkbarrow Farm	
Exmoor	SS 73 NW 106	PEAT CUTTING	Squallacombe	11 ha
Exmoor	SS 73 NW107	PEAT CUTTING	Horcombe	8 ha
Exmoor	SS 73 NW 108	PEAT CUTTING	Horcombe	2.5 ha
Exmoor	SS 73 NE 131	PEAT CUTTING	E of Hangley Cleave	16 ha
Exmoor	SS 73 NE 132	PEAT CUTTING	Long Holcombe	2 ha

Exmoor	SS 73 NE 133	PEAT CUTTING	Horsen Hill	24 ha
Exmoor	SS 73 NE 134	PEAT CUTTING	Burcombe	14 ha
Exmoor	SS 73 NE 135	PEAT CUTTING	Deer Park	81 ha
Exmoor	SS 83 SW 123	PEAT CUTTING	Litton	30 ha
Exmoor	SS 73 SE 98	PEAT CUTTING	S of Long Holcombe	13 ha
Exmoor	SS 73 SE 6	PEAT STAND	N of Darlick Moor	7m diam 0.4m high
Exmoor	SS 73 NW 40	PEAT STAND	White Ladder	
Exmoor	SS 74 SE 241	PEAT STAND	Dure Down	12m across
Exmoor	SS 74 SE 242	PEAT STAND	Dure Down	11m across
Exmoor	SS 84 SW 241	PEAT STAND	Elsworthy	15m across
Exmoor	SS 73 NE 125	PEAT STAND	Long Holcombe	15m across
Exmoor	SS 73 NE 126	PEAT STAND	Long Holcombe	16m across
Exmoor	SS 73 NE 166	PEAT STAND	Sherdon	16m diam
Exmoor	SS 73 NE 5	PEAT STAND	Sherdon	6m across
Luccombe	SS 84 SE 80	PEAT STAND	Tarr Ball Hill	8-12m diam
Luccombe	SS 84 SE 112	PEAT STAND	Tarr Ball Hill	6m across
Luccombe	SS 84 SE 141	PEAT CUTTING	Dunkery Wilmersham	40 ha
Luccombe	SS 84 SW 255	PEAT CUTTING	Chetsford Water	0.3 ha
Luccombe	SS 84 SE 144	PEAT CUTTING	Exford Common	25 ha
Luccombe	SS 84 SW 257	PEAT CUTTING	Lucott Moor	1.5 km
Luccombe	SS 84 SE 95	PEAT CUTTING	Thurley Combe	25 ha
Luccombe	SS 84 SW 258	PEAT CUTTING	Lucott Moor	0.3 ha
Oare	SS 84 SW 287	PEAT CUTTING	Stowey Allotment	23 ha
Oare	SS 74 NE 95	PEAT CUTTING	Cloud Allotment	?
Porlock	SS 84 SW 148	PEAT STAND	Porlock Allotment	7x2m
Porlock	SS 84 NW 50	PEAT STAND	Porlock Common	3x4m
Porlock	SS 84 NE 71	PEAT STAND	Porlock Common	3m diam
Porlock	SS 84 SE 109	PEAT STAND	Porlock Common	4x2m
Porlock	SS 84 SW 271	PEAT CUTTING	Porlock Allotment Black Mires	7 ha
Porlock	SS 84 SW 272	PEAT CUTTING	Porlock Allotment Black Mires	
Porlock	SS 84 SW 273	PEAT CUTTING	Porlock Allotment Black Mires	8 ha
Porlock	SS 84 SW 274	PEAT CUTTING	Porlock Allotment Black Mires	2.5 ha
Porlock	SS 84 SW 281	PEAT CUTTING	Lucott Moor	1 ha
Withypool & Hawkridge	SS 83 SW 122	PEAT CUTTING	Withypool Common to	200 ha
			Humbers Ball	
Withypool & Hawkridge	SS 83 SW 64	PEAT CUTTING	Halscombe Allotment	

