

Historic Environment Best Practice in Peatland Restoration



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- 2 South West Water
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Programmes of peatland restoration have been established on the uplands of southwest England since the 1990s. The uplands of the South West also contain some of the most important, best preserved and visible archaeological landscapes and sites in Britain. These form part of the 'cultural' ecosystem services group and are generally protected by local and national designations. Upland peatlands do not sit in isolation from the cultural landscape, and are very much a part of the Historic Environment. Furthermore, there are many historic features located in uplands that have yet to be recognised and recorded.



A Mesolithic hammerstone (7000-4000 BC) lost on Exmoor by a prehistoric hunter-gatherer. Unearthed during mires restoration and recognised by the historic environment officer

The archaeo-environmental record can provide long-term ecological datasets; e.g.: pollen, plant macrofossils and testate amoeba. These can assist in measuring restoration successes and are indicative of past ecosystems and their reaction to human and environmental pressures.



Left: A prehistoric standing stone on Amicombe Hill, Dartmoor. First erected in the Late Neolithic or Bronze Age (2900-700 BC), covered by peat development, revealed by modern peat cutting, and first recognised in 2018 as part of mires restoration

Broadly speaking, the Historic Environment in peatlands can be considered in four ways; all of these can be demonstrated in southwest Britain:

- landscapes/sites preserved under and around the peat
- monuments/artefacts preserved within peat
- surface traces of human exploitation of peatlands
- the archaeo-environmental record preserved within the peat



Left: A peat-storage steading at Blackadon, Bodmin Moor, discovered during survey for mires restoration. Peat cutting was a source of fuel in upland areas of the South West until the second half of the twentieth century but is now a largely forgotten activity

A major success of the peatland restoration projects in the South West has been the explicit recognition of the importance of the Historic Environment, and appropriate inclusion of this within the restoration project. Best practice for the inclusion of Historic Environment in peatland restoration programmes would comprise the following:

- including Historic Environment representatives on project steering committees from their inception
- identifying funding to undertake appropriate Historic Environment work
- desk- and field-based Historic Environment survey for restoration sites
- incorporation of archaeo-environmental knowledge and recognising the potential benefits to restoration practice
- involving local communities in archaeological work wherever possible; recording and disseminating the results

Right: A Bronze Age cairn (2600-700 BC) lying on a parish boundary near to Shoulsbury hillfort, Exmoor. Not recorded until noted by mires historic environment officer

