

# Dunster Forest

## Volunteering with the Crown Estate – a volunteer's perspective

**Interview with:** David Brabban, volunteer

**Project:** Volunteering with the Crown Estate at Dunster Forest, Exmoor

### What?

There are opportunities to take part in practical management tasks regularly (at the moment there are volunteer days on the second and last Thursday of every month) while individuals can assist with a number of surveys on Estate land.

One of the nice things about volunteering is the wide range of tasks undertaken. I have been helping at Dunster for a number of years and the list below will give a flavour of some of the work done in the regular sessions (there are many more):

- Coppicing as part of improvements to Withycombe wood where the understorey had become rather dense.
- Helping to set up a community orchard in Dunster.
- Raking meadows in an area where some rare limestone plants are being encouraged.

There are a number of surveys taking place. I have helped to: count wood ant nests; look for signs of squirrels; measure and record the position and status of trees which can be classified as notable, veteran or possibly ancient.

### Aims:

All tasks help to conserve and improve the forest and offer an opportunity to meet like-minded individuals. Nearly all the volunteering opportunities are advertised on the Exmoor National Park website where details of the tasks and surveys are described. Contact information is provided.

### How and why did you get involved with the project?

Initially, I heard of the conservation tasks via Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA). Dunster Forest is one of my favourite areas so I needed little persuasion to get started. Once involved, I learnt of the surveys that were to be done and these gave a good reason to spend more time in the area.

The regular tasks offer a chance for some exercise in the open air with an interesting group of people. The survey work means that I can walk around the forest with a purpose and feel that I am contributing something of value that will help to maintain this beautiful part of the world.

### As a volunteer, what are the most important things for an organiser to be aware of?

Volunteers want to help but like to know that what they are doing is of use and that it is appreciated. It is important that organisers communicate clearly before, during and after the event especially when there are changes to the advertised programme.

### Any advice for those looking to get involved?

Look at all the opportunities on offer and choose something that you think will be of interest. Don't be afraid to get involved, both staff and other volunteers are more than willing to help and give advice. Don't be put off if a task sounds beyond you; give it a go but stop if it really becomes too much. One of the privileges of being a volunteer is to be able to rest when you want to.

**To get involved with this project or to find out more about it, please visit:**

[www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/get-involved](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/get-involved)