

Simonsbath Mires Volunteers

Practical maintenance of peatland restoration work



Interview with: Ollie Gowen

Name of project: Simonsbath Mire Volunteers, Exmoor Mires Partnership (EMP)

Location: Based at numerous moorland sites around Exmoor

By who: Exmoor Mires Partnership, Exmoor National Park Authority and equipment funded by Heart of Exmoor Scheme



Aims: As I understand it, the main aim of the project is to rejuvenate the mires of Exmoor that for centuries have been drying out due to past human activities, such as installing drainage ditches and digging peat for fuel.

As a result there has been a significant drop in natural bog vegetation species and a dominance by a single variety. The project is looking to reverse this and produce a better, sustainable ecosystem.



The mires act as a reservoir for the River Exe. Without the reservoir in place (current situation), the water leaves the moors down the ditches very quickly, resulting in the “flashy” nature of river flows. With the mires restored it gives a longer, slower reaction time to the water leaving the moor, which is good in summer as it keeps low flow river levels slightly higher.

How and why did you get involved in the project:

When I started volunteering with the National Park, I was recommended to join the Mires project so that I could better understand the workings of the moor overall (and they needed strong people to lift large chunks of turf to build blocks in the ditches to slow the water flow off the mire).



Benefits to you:

I have gained a big increase in knowledge about the mire and the reasons behind the project and why it is important on a local, national and global scale.

My physical fitness has improved and I know I can work in torrential, horizontally moving rain and laugh about it.

Downsides:

Getting soaked (sometimes), but that's part of the fun as well because after about 10mins you stop caring about how dirty and muddy you are.





A typical day in action:

We usually meet at Simonsbath Sawmill on the second Monday of every month, where we have a short briefing about what we will be doing. We will then move to the site in question and begin work.

The work usually consists of cutting blocks of turf from the upper slope and repairing or creating a ditch block to prevent/slow down the water flow off the mire.

Once we are soaked to the bone (10 mins in) and have had lunch, worked long enough in the afternoon, we will finish the block we are on and then walk off site.



How much of your time?

I have been volunteering with the project for a year now, once a month. I spend on average 5 hours a month on the project.

I have also volunteered at several one day events, such as the Mires conference and Bogtastic.

As a volunteer what are the most important things for organisers to be aware of?

Information about what we're doing and why we're doing it. From the overall picture to the small ditch we're currently blocking. I feel however that the Mires team do this really really well and I am always happy with the level of information provided. It is also just enough information, I am sure that the team members would be able to talk for days about certain small aspects of the project and are happy to talk about this when asked, but also seem to be able to judge when enough information has been given.



Any advice to those looking to get involved?

This is only one aspect of the mires that I've discussed, and there really is something for everyone. Don't let the weather put you off (it is occasionally sunny), our natural heritage is so important.

To get involved with this event or to find out more about it, please visit: www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/get-involved

Facebook: Exmoor Mires Project

