

Moorland Classroom

Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnership Scheme

A Volunteer's Perspective



Interview with: David Binks, volunteer and local accommodation provider

Name of project: Moorland Classroom

Location: Based in Dulverton with 10 moorland sites across Exmoor, with the flexibility to work from home

By who: Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnership Scheme (EMLP)



Aims: To provide web based on-line resources for teachers of primary school children about Exmoor National Park. Specifically to provide both classroom exercises and fieldtrip activities to help learn about the history, the flora and fauna, the ecology and other aspects of Exmoor.

How and why did you get involved in the project:

I moved down to Exford in late 2011 and saw an advert (I think in an Exmoor National Park newspaper) asking for a volunteer to help proof read and upload information based at Dulverton. I had decided I might like to do a small amount of volunteering to help me make contacts and get to know something about how Exmoor National Park worked so that I could give more useful information to the guests at our holiday cottages. This opportunity appealed because proof reading and IT related things were things I had done for a large part of my working life. So it seemed an ideal opportunity so I applied. I was one of three and eventually I joined the team.



Benefits to you:

As it turns out the project was the ideal way for me to learn about Exmoor: I have found that I now know a lot more of the history and wildlife of Exmoor than many locals and it really helps to be able to give our guests good advice on where to go and what to see on Exmoor. I also made many contacts within the organisation and amongst volunteers who have helped with advice on aspects of living on Exmoor when needed.



Downsides:

Not really, although most people (including me) under-estimate the time they are committing. Most projects involve a lot of planning meetings before performing the related activity and can involve travel. The meetings can wander or get bogged down if there isn't a strong chairman moving things forward.



A typical day in action:

There were no typical days on this project and in most cases I could split the work into blocks of a couple of hours in between my own activities.

To produce a typical Moorland Classroom resource would involve 2 or 3 meetings with interested parties usually including a Park ranger. There would be discussion on the aim of the resource, things to add, things to avoid. In between, I would put up to a dozen hours of editing and formatting plus a visit to each site to check directions etc. The initial resource probably took twice as long as we developed the approach but after that the process was well defined.

How much of your time?

Hard to answer for the Moorland Classroom. We had monthly meetings with occasional interim meetings for specific issues. In between I would initially spend between 10-15 hours a week as we were setting up the different resources but as formats were agreed and the process became established this dropped to about 5 hours a week and then after about 15 months it was only as needed.

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

Be aware that volunteers do have other commitments in their lives so early notification of meetings or other activities really help.

Any advice to those looking to get involved?

Just do it. Don't be afraid to make suggestions or offer advice on particular topics. Try and remain enthusiastic and keep a sense of humour – remember most people you are working with are also volunteers, so enjoy it. If you don't understand what is being asked or it seems a bit vague then speak up – other people are probably in the same boat! Also sometimes you need to be self-motivating otherwise things can slip/ be put off until later.

Other comments:

Volunteering is an inexact science. Be prepared to be flexible and don't be afraid to try something outside of your comfort zone. There is usually someone with experience who is willing to offer advice and assist where necessary. Volunteering is a great way to learn new things and a successful project/event is very satisfying and greatly appreciated by the wider Exmoor community.

To find out more about the Moorland Classroom,

please visit: www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/learning/the-moorland-classroom

