A List of Mines in North Devon and West Somerset

2nd edition (October 1997)
by Peter Claughton

PREFACE (2nd Edition)

Since the first edition of this list was published in 1994 detailed investigation of mining in North Devon and West Somerset has moved ahead rapidly. The bulk of the new work has been archaeologically led and concentrated within the National Park boundary. Results show that, while new documentary evidence will continue to come to light, future progress in our understanding of past mining activity in the area will come primarily through archaeological investigation.

The work of the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments in England (RCHME), based in Exeter, in surveying features of historical and archaeological significance within the National Park has proved invaluable. Bampfylde Mine, in particular, has benefited from a large scale survey, allowing us to inter-relate the various features on the site. Investigations into early ironworking, carried out by Dr Gill Juleff on behalf of the National Park, has identified a number of substantial smelting sites and produced a date (using Carbon 14) for the Sherracombe Ford site of around 160BC to 90AD. That brings into focus the age and scale of mining on and around Exmoor. Further investigation is envisaged including a geophysical survey of the Sherracombe Ford site.

Whilst not strictly based on recent work, being a development of papers presented to a seminar held in 1992, the recent publication of Exmoor’s Industrial Archaeology, edited by Michael Atkinson, has put on record much of what is known about mining archaeology in the National Park area. It is a collaborative effort by a number of authors with research experience in different areas of mining - iron, silver/lead and copper - quarrying and associated industries. Many features, such as the Gourt Mine engine house - the purpose of which was confirmed in excavations carried out by the Exmoor Mines Research Group - are recorded in detail for the first time.

When the first edition of this list was published the Exmoor Mines Research Group had only just been formed. Now, three years later, it has established itself as an effective organisation in research and conservation of mining landscapes on and around Exmoor, much of it in co-operation with the National Park.

One advance, initiated by the author, and as yet in its infancy, is the establishment of a Internet (World Wide Web) site devoted to providing mining history information. The site is based on the University of Exeter server and accessed through the following URL http://www.exeter.ac.uk/~pfclaugh/mhinf/ A number of the pages on that site cover particular aspects of mining in North Devon and West Somerset and, where relevant to this list, they are referenced in the usual manner.

INTRODUCTION

Nearly twenty years have gone by since the original list of mines in North Devon and the Exmoor area was published in the Plymouth Mineral and Mining Club Journal; with continued research it has been amended and expanded at intervals but never re-published. Prompted by a request for a list of workings within the Exmoor National Park it was evident that a revised list was needed pending publication of a detailed history. Covering as it does an area which has contributed much to mining over at least seven centuries; from medieval silver lead through all phases of the iron industry to carbon black production in the 20th century.

This list is in a sense a halfway house, not a full history of mining in the area but not just a list of sites. It is intended to provide the reader with a brief history plus details of surviving features on all known mines in an area stretching from the borders of Dartmoor in the south to the edge of the Brendon Hills in the northeast. Already certain mines within the area have been covered by detailed studies and further information on the archaeology of mining will soon be available in a book to be published by West Country Books in association with the Exmoor National Park. Eventually it is intended that full histories will fill the gap between A K Hamilton Jenkin’s ‘Mines of Devon, vols. 1 and 2’ and Sellick’s ‘The West Somerset Mineral Railway and the Story of the Brendon Hills Iron Mines.’ Roger Burton has already made a start on Exmoor and a book on the North Devon mines is pending but there is scope for much more research particularly in respect of the small copper and iron mines in the newer rocks in the Minehead area. Such researchers should find this list a useful aid to their work.

The mines are ordered by parishes, provided with an identification number for future reference and named using that by which they are commonly known along with alternative names; the location where known is then given using the National Grid Reference and brief topographical details. An outline of the mine’s history is followed by a note of surviving features, where significant, and reference to detailed histories where published (see bibliography).

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This list could not have been completed without the help of many people involved in mining history research in the area. Many of them are the core of the recently formed Exmoor Mines Research Group, but in particular I would like to thank Roger Burton and Mick Warburton who have been constant correspondents and critics over many years.

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