Dartmoor, beautiful as it is, would naturally be much more wooded. Only fragments of the forest that once covered the moor still remain. Moor Trees’ vision is to restore some of the lost forests of Dartmoor by creating new woodlands and supporting their creation by individuals and communities: woodlands that coexist with farming, archaeology and recreation, that connect people to their woodland heritage, offer environmental benefits and new livelihood opportunities.

A new future for Dartmoor’s woodlands

Moor Trees has been planting native trees in and around Dartmoor since 2001. In 2015, we celebrated the creation of 66 hectares (nearly 40 football pitches) of native woodland using over 60,000 trees, mostly nurtured and grown in our own nurseries from locally collected seed. All this has been achieved by a dedicated team of volunteers, supported by students from Plymouth University, local conservation groups, company team building days and many local families – a true community-led venture.

We have planted on the fringe of the open moor at Scorriton and have increased the woodland cover of the Avon valley. We have supported over 40 landowners who have made the lifelong commitment to create a native forest that will only mature beyond their lifetime, a truly visionary choice.

We understand the long history of Dartmoor and the part it has played in human endeavour. We understand that residents and visitors alike cherish the open landscapes with far reaching views but there is also growing enthusiasm for more native woodland on Dartmoor among both urban and rural communities. We believe that there is plenty of space for both.

This leaflet describes the vision of Moor Trees. It explains how we want to create community woodlands and to nurture, in appropriate places, the woodland that is already starting to return to Dartmoor.
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Post ice-age – 10,000 years ago

Today

Our vision for the future
**Dartmoor through the ages**

**Post ice-age – 10,000 years ago**

After the last ice age came to an end in Europe around 10,000 years ago, a milder climate allowed trees to recolonize Britain. Our native trees, such as oak, birch, hazel, willow and rowan, formed a wooded landscape across Dartmoor with a scattering of open areas on the highest and wettest ground. High ground would have remained heather moorland with sparse trees and wet valley mires and glades kept open by grazing animals. The expansive forests gave rise to a rich variety of abundant plant and animal life with both large herbivores, such as elk and wild cattle, and their predators, including wolves and bears. Beavers populated the river valleys.

**Today**

Roughly 6,000 years ago, the landscape started to change. It’s thought a combination of a cooler, wetter climate, together with clearing of the forests by settlers, allowed the spread of blanket bog in the higher areas where trees could no longer grow. Lower down, the area of agricultural land and settlements increased, century by century, pushing the woodland back to the more inaccessible valleys. In the last century, commercial conifers replaced native woodland in many places, forming plantations of non-native trees with only limited wildlife value.

The historical landscape that we see today, with its prolific archaeological remains, is evidence of the varying efforts of humans to shape their environment. Sadly, the once rich wildlife has dwindled over the centuries as the native woodland has become reduced to a fraction of its former extent and many of the wild animals replaced by sheep and cattle.

Although Dartmoor is much-loved for its peace and tranquillity, it is largely deforested. However, there is potential for it to be a much richer place – richer in woodland habitats, wildlife and landscapes, which can only enhance the special qualities of Dartmoor.

**Our vision for the future**

Moor Trees’ long term vision is for a Wild Heart of Dartmoor, a core zone that is predominantly wooded and largely shaped by natural processes, but combined with low density grazing. The core zone would be surrounded by a mosaic of moorland, blanket bog, mires, pasture and crops with managed native woodlands, including working woodlands.

It isn’t possible to turn the clock back 10,000 years. Ancient cattle, elk and large predators may not be appropriate for Dartmoor with its patchwork of roads, settlements and tourist destinations. However, there is room for a more wooded landscape with farm animals grazing at low densities to mimic natural processes.

Our vision includes strong linkages between all the woodland on Dartmoor, with increased woodland along the river valleys, such as the Dart and the Teign, that flow from Dartmoor.

*We advocate a Wild Heart of Dartmoor in the long term, but we also fully recognise the rights of landowners and Commons and believe that promoting support for the ecosystem services provided by low impact farming is key to restoring some of Dartmoor’s lost forests.*
Dartmoor has lost most of its original woodland cover. Yet woodlands are our heritage.

Our vision is to restore some of Dartmoor’s lost forests by helping to establish a network of community woodlands and nurturing the native woodland regeneration that is taking place in some areas on Dartmoor.

In 250 years’ time, Moor Trees envisages a Wild Heart of Dartmoor: a core zone of native woodland of approximately 10,000 hectares on Dartmoor (about 10% of the National Park area) combined with semi-natural grazing. Full public access would allow people to enjoy this Wild Heart.

Outside the core area, we picture a doubling of the area of native woodlands (both working woodlands and conservation woodlands) from today’s 7% to 15% of the Dartmoor area.

Moor Trees:
- engages communities and stakeholders on and around Dartmoor, to explore opportunities to bring wildlife rich, amenity-friendly native woodlands, with all their associated practical benefits, within reach of every parish and hamlet.
- works with landowners, tenants and communities to identify suitable areas for the creation of new woodland, including natural regeneration.
- supports the concept of payment for ecosystem services provided by low impact farming for Commoners and landowners
- advocates the concept of a “Wild Heart of Dartmoor” within the National Park in the long term, one that coexists with farming, archaeology and recreation.

We are happy to discuss our vision further – please contact:
Graham Burton (Director – Moor Trees)
Dr. Janet Cotter (Chair - Moor Trees)
info@moortrees.org • www.moortrees.org • 0845 456 9803
The Old School Centre, Totnes Road, South Brent TQ10 9BP

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