

Museum of Dartmoor Life Review of 2025

It has been another busy year at the museum and none of it would have been possible without our wonderful volunteers and support of our trustees.

Sadly, visitor numbers were down on 2024 figures for the Museum and the TIC, by over 900 visitors which is a huge loss. In 2024 we welcomed 7938 visitors (inc. 3087 for TIC only) and 2025 saw only 7021 (inc. 2786 for TIC only). The Museum Sector has generally suffered with some attractions showing visitor numbers down by 25%. Our decrease was 13%, but still troubling. However, it is quite clear that some of the blame lies with the terrible road closures that Okehampton has suffered and are still currently enduring. During our peak season, any visitor who left the A30 was greeted with a sign saying road closed, with several more along the route. People not knowing the area turned around and went elsewhere. Why there wasn't a sign saying 'Access to town centre but no through traffic' we do not understand. Not just the museum but all the businesses in Okehampton have suffered financial losses. We hope the 2026 season will be roadwork free.

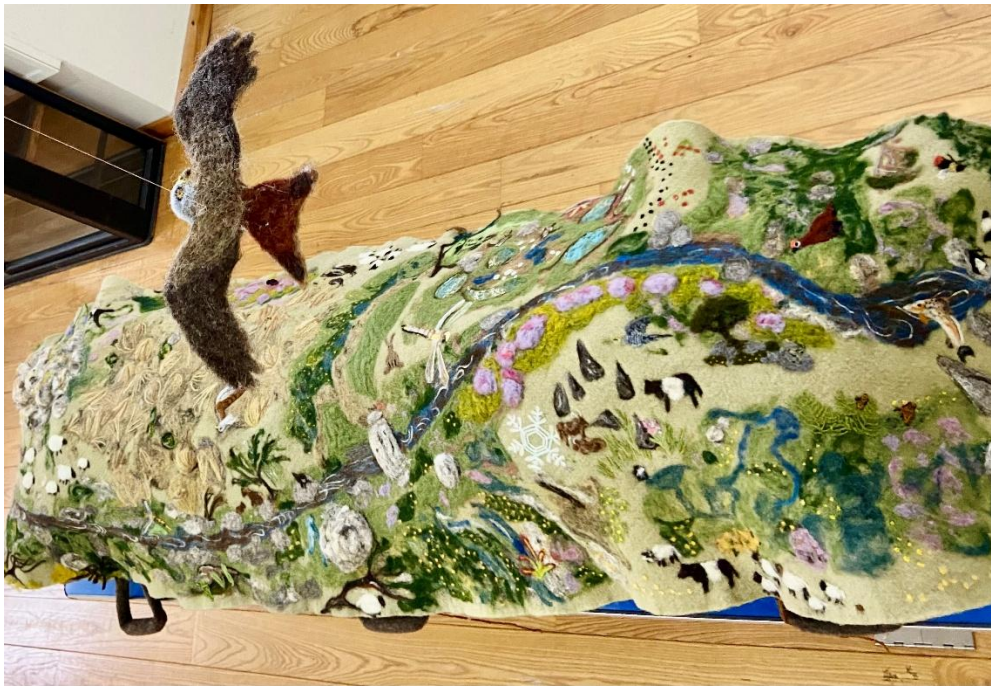
At the beginning of the year, during our closed period, we held various events for our volunteers. Coffee mornings, conservation cleaning training sessions, walks and a visit to Castle Drogo. We also enjoyed a reciprocal visit from the Drogo volunteers.



While closed we also took the opportunity to refurbish the manager's office. This was necessary due to water ingress and black mold. A new roof with sky lights was added, triple glazed windows and door, new flooring, decorating and a simple electric panel heater for warmth. This has made a huge difference to the comfort of the manager.

We were fortunate to receive funding from the Association of Independent Museums to have a day with a conservation specialist to carry out a collection care audit. This was done and we now have a document to help us move forward with funding to improve the museum.

We had three exhibitions this year. The main one was 'A Shroud for Mother Nature – Is Dartmoor Dying?'. This was a collaboration between the Museum and many other charities, associations and individuals all concerned with the environment and the future of Dartmoor. We had funding from the Royal Society in London which allowed us to produce a beautiful shroud which was hand felted by over 50 people from the Dartmoor community creating a wonderful moorland scene peppered with many of the endangered flora and fauna. The funds also paid for us to produce 15 display boards where each of our partners answered the same three questions; Is Dartmoor dying? What are you doing to save it? What can the public do to help you?



The exhibition was very well received and we held a private view for all our partners to share their views. Another evening, we held a premiere of a new film, 'Dartmoor Calling'. As well as the film showing, there was live music and a Q&A panel. This tied in brilliantly with our exhibition so we continued to play it as part of the exhibition for the rest of the year.

Across Devon last year there was a huge project called 'Devon in the 1920's' led by Dr Julia Neville. Many locations were involved and we held the 'Tourism in the 1920's' exhibition in our Tourist Information Centre. It was great to offer something free of charge to our community and visitors.

Our third exhibition was a photographic trail around the museum to discover the 'Hidden Faces of the Southwest' produced by Hummingbird Photography's Caitlin Pharoah.

We also produced an exhibition on the Women's Land Army for Okehampton Town Council's VE Day celebrations in Simmons Park on the 8th May. Volunteers dressed as land girls and showed visitors our fantastic collection of Land Army photos, documents and stories. It was a great day and spread the reach of the museum outside of its four walls.



The museum was also involved in the Railway Heritage Project and supported its creators and loaned items for an exhibition at Crediton Library.

June was a busy month with a volunteer visit to the Okehampton base of the Dartmoor Search and Rescue. This was amazing and helped inform our volunteers with health and safety advice to share with our visitors who venture onto the moor. Thank you to all involved.

The White Hart at Bridestowe generously held a pub quiz again for the museum. All profits were given to the museum. Several volunteer teams enjoyed a great night.

We gratefully received cheque presentations from Okehampton Town Council and the Inner Wheel. The museum really depends on these donations and support and we are truly thankful.



The manager and trustee chairperson attended and spoke at the Dartmoor History Day held at Parke. It was great to hear about all the differing projects going on on Dartmoor and to be considered integral to sharing this news. New useful contacts were made.

At the end of June, we ran a creative writing day at the museum for staff and volunteers of the Dartmoor National Park Authority. We talked about how to write poetry, structures you can try, playing with words and how good writing is for our mental health. Dartmoor is such an inspiring place and some beautiful prose and poems were created.

In August, to get the museum out onto the moor, we worked with Dartmoor Preservation Association to lead a free walk from Widdicombe in the Moor. We took our Shroud out to be seen by new diverse groups and to capture those days when bodies had to be carried across the moors on the coffin trails to be buried. It was beautiful and moving and people were really inspired by the day. A short film, poem and a song all followed.



Later in August the Shroud had a second outing to attend an amazing fire ceremony held in a replica Bronze Age hut near Postbridge. Again, the DPA pulled this together and funded a curator to lead the event. There was singing and contemplation and shared hope for the future of the moor. Thanks to everyone involved.



At Meldon Day run by the DNPA the focus for 2025 was Bogs. The museum attended and encouraged children to get creative by drawing their idea of a bog monster. This was a great social media sharing event and another opportunity to bring the museum outside.



The Museum hosted seven evening talks this year which were well attended and enjoyed. Subjects from archaeology, Devon dialect and Myths and Legends were covered. The audiences were often made up of people who do not generally visit the museum. The ticket sales were shared between the speakers and the museum so these events were worthwhile for all. Thank you to the volunteers who enabled these events to go ahead.

New fire alarms have been fitted to improve the security of our buildings.

We displayed the winners of this years CPRE 'Devon's Best Young Landscape Artist Competition' this year so the winners could visit and see their work in a museum. The standard was very high. Congratulations to all involved.

Halloween was a weeklong event for half term and the volunteers helped dress the museum and set up some scary animatronics. It was well attended and crafting was also enjoyed by our younger visitors.

We are very lucky to have a group of volunteers who give a lot of time and creativity to produce many crafting sessions at the museum during school holidays and for special events. Thank you to them.

Edwardian evening was our busiest ever with 91 children visiting Father Christmas and enjoying the decorations and crafts while their adults' enjoyed teas and coffees and our huge tombola. Thank you to everyone involved.





Our manager and conservation volunteer attended a Museum Development South West 'Hazards in Collections' course at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in December. They have since begun to set up a separate folder of collection items that could be deemed hazardous. This will ensure health and safety is upmost in anyone's minds when dealing with these objects.

We have sadly said goodbye to several volunteers this year which has left some gaps. We attended the Health and Wellbeing Fair at the Charter Hall in search of new recruits. We will also be making appeals on social media in the hope of finding more volunteer support going forward.

2025 came to an end with the volunteer Christmas lunch. Held at the London Inn, the staff did a fabulous job of food and service and it was the perfect finale to another wonderful year.

Kristy Turner - January 2026