

Deborah Griffiths

Managing the common.

Haytor Down, where we're standing, is an area of common land, which much of Dartmoor's open moorland is, and for many hundreds of years farmers who have farms in the surrounding area have had what are known as common rights over the moor, although they don't own it, and those rights are many and varied: they have a right to graze their animals there, they have a right to dig turf, to take bracken off, they can take stone from the moor, but the principle one is the right to graze. And the animals grazing here obviously are feeding themselves; but they're also important conservation tools now, and they are part of the mechanism of creating habitats for wildlife and also for keeping the vegetation low so that people can see and enjoy archaeological sites, for example, and also so that visitors can have fairly free access. And the commoners themselves have to have various management techniques in order to complement the grazing, so for example they burn areas of gorse off, such as the one that we're standing in front of, in order for fresh grass to come up and to attract animals to facilitate grazing.