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DARTMOOR NEWS

ISSUE 196
SEP / OCT 2024

£4.50



HIDDEN IN PEAT ON CUT HILL

NATURE IN WRAY CLEAVE

SOME LOST NAMES ON DARTMOOR

NORTH DARTMOOR PEAT PASSES

THE DEVONPORT LEAT STORY

Langstone
MANOR
HOLIDAY PARK



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DARTMOOR NEWS

196 | September / October 2024
ISSN 1470-8418

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Printers

Dartprint Limited, Unit D, Union Mine Road, Pitts Cleave, Tavistock, PL19 0PW
Readers experiencing problems with the printing or posting of this magazine are kindly requested to contact the printers first.
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Subscriptions

UK: 1 year - £40 / 2 years - £70 / 3 years - £99
Overseas: £55 Digital: 1 year - £22

Next Issue

Copy date for the November/December issue is 20th September. This will be published in the first week of November..

BACK ISSUES

106, 109, 112, 113, 115-117, 120-124, 126-142, 144-195 only. These cost £4.40 each including postage only. All other copies are now sold out. Please make cheques payable to *Dartmoor News*. A digital copy of issues 1-12 is available for £10; please pay by cheque as above or by PayPal and supply your email address so the document can be sent to you.

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The Editor is always pleased to consider news items, details of events, photographs for the front cover, Dartmoor Views, Dartmoor Memories, Wonderful Wildlife and short articles for publication.

Contributors to this issue include; Dartmoor Chris, Mark Fenlon, Steve Grigg, Stuart Hooppell, Max Piper, Kristy Turner, Viator, Richard Burt, Dave Hartland, Dave Pinkham and Chris Walpole. All the above have written articles or supplied the Editor with news items or photographs.

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FRONT COVER

Sheepstor Village and Burrator Reservoir from Ringmoor Down
Paul Rendell



NEWS DESK

The latest news around Dartmoor is brought to you by Paul Rendell. All items and photographs, unless otherwise credited, are by Paul Rendell. We hope you enjoy!

If you have any news about Dartmoor, please email it to paul.dartmoor@gmail.com.

Ditsworthy Warren House Field Wall Repairs

During June and July work took place on wall restoration around Ditsworthy Warren House.

Field boundaries were rebuilt to try to make the area stock proof. A digger was used to remove the old walls beside the farmhouse so this provided the extra stone needed to build the outer field boundaries.



The old wall removed to rebuild the field boundary

Dartmoor Riding Stables

In 1973 many people wanted to go horse riding on the moors so there were a good number of riding stables including at Mary Tavy, Okehampton, Belstone, Chagford, Moretonhampstead,

North Bovey, Widecombe-in-the-Moor and Holne. Far fewer people want to go riding on the moors these days so this, coupled with high insurance rates and the weight of some 21st century folk, has led to many stables closing.

In 2024 just a handful of stables are left including Shilstone Rocks Riding Centre at Widecombe-in-the-Moor, Cholwell Farm & Riding Stables at Mary Tavy, Finlake Riding Centre in the Teign Valley, Fitzworthy Equestrian Centre near Ivybridge and Liberty Trails based in Tavistock.

Questions

Can anyone help with the following questions? If you can please get in touch.

1. When did Cawsand Beacon revert back to its old name of Cosdon?
2. How did the Cornwood Maidens get their name?

Call for a Reappraisal of Bracken

The stakeholder group representing those with an interest in controlling bracken is calling for a reappraisal of this dominant species and further research into how to mitigate the threats it presents to human and animal health and wider biodiversity. The Bracken Control Group represents a wide range of interests and the group believes that the loss of Asulox in October 2023 (the main herbicide, which had been used to control bracken since the late 1960s) after the manufacturers withdrew their support for it, has precipitated the need for a reassessment of the plant and how to mitigate the threats associated with it through effective, practical management.



A lost right of way across moorland near Cox Tor

Bracken is a common plant species in all parts of the UK and while it provides benefits for some species, where it becomes dominant it provides a challenge to existing land uses and introduces a range of threats. Bracken can take over the landscape, leaving very little for livestock to eat, it can destroy archaeological features with its underground root systems and can crowd out wild plants like heather. The dead bracken bed is home to ticks over winter, who survive there in mild weather. There has been an increase in ticks in the last few years with tick-borne diseases that affect humans, livestock and wildlife increasing too. Reducing the area of bracken is one way of reducing these diseases, of which Lyme disease is the most common in humans.

Drainage Ditch near Crockern Farm

A drainage ditch has been made near the public right of way around the farm. The ditch goes under the track.



The new ditch

New Community Store for Christow

Residents in the Teign Valley village of Christow are trying to get a new community shop built and open very soon. The last remaining shop in the village closed in May 2023 and the locals miss not having a shop. A group of them are leading efforts to establish a new community owned shop. The committee are hoping to raise £60,000 through a mix of community shares, grants, fundraising and donations. If they reach their target, phase one would be to place a shipping container in the village car park and clad it in wood. The shop would offer essential goods and support local producers. In stage two they hope to open a small café area.

Another Bridge Hit by Lorry

At the end of July Cadover Bridge was hit by a lorry. Looking at the skid marks on the road it appears that a lorry came from Beatland Corner too fast and hit the bridge. Some blocks of granite were knocked into the River Plym. The road was closed for a day and then temporary traffic lights were put in place.



The damaged bridge

Steve Grigg



The large blocks knocked off

Steve Grigg

Work on Betsy Grimal's Tower

The remains of one of the entrances into Tavistock Abbey has been tidied up. The remnants of Betsy Grimal's Tower has had vegetation growing over it for years but this has been cleared away thanks to Tavistock Heritage Trust in partnership with Tavistock Town Council and Historic England. Next, an in-depth survey will work out the extent of the repair works required, part of an ambitious project to bring the ruins back to life. A geophysical investigation in the adjacent church grounds will also be undertaken, to work out where the abbey church was. Ultimately the Benedictine abbey in its entirety will be digitalised in 3-D with the result placed online as a visitor attraction.



The building before work started

Will Dartmoor Prison Re-open Again?

Dartmoor Prison has closed temporarily due to the 'dangerously high' level of radon gas found within the buildings. Radon is an odourless radioactive gas formed by decaying uranium found in rocks like granite and is common on Dartmoor. In the last few months over 400 prisoners were removed from the prison in Princetown after a Health & Safety Executive investigation last December. The last few prisoners and prison officers moved to other prisons at the beginning of August. Before the radon alert there were 275 officers at Dartmoor. The closure could last up to two years. The lease of the prison from the Duchy of Cornwall is due to run out in 2048 with a provision to look at options in 2033. Will it cost too much to fix the problem and will the prison finally close for good?

DNPA Buys Buckfastleigh Moor

Following a successful funding bid, DNPA has announced that it has acquired Buckfastleigh Moor. The new acquisition, consisting of 858 acres (357 hectares) of common land, ensures long-term protection of the National Park's special qualities in this distinctive part of Dartmoor. In November 2023 the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) announced additional funding would be available for Protected Landscape teams to apply for, to improve the water environment in these special places. This was in recognition of the vital role National Parks and National Landscapes have in restoring our natural environment. This funding paid for the Buckfastleigh Moor purchase in full, the Defra money being made up of fines from water companies.

DNPA Chair Pamela Woods said: 'With the essential support of commoners, we look forward to delivering the aspirations in Dartmoor's Partnership Plan so our unique National Park can be enjoyed by everyone in years to come.' Subject to commons grazing rights, Buckfastleigh Moor contains upland heathland, blanket bog, rugged hills and species rich valleys as well as natural springs and significant archaeological features.

Accessed from Chalk Ford, Lud Gate or Water Oak Corner, the acquisition area runs in a north-west direction to Ryder's Hill – the highest point on Southern Dartmoor – before tracking south-east to Snowdon and Pupers Hill. As well as sections of the Two Moors Way and Abbot's Way, it contains rivers such as the Mardle and Dean Burn – already identified as priority areas for reducing flood risk. The acquisition adjoins Holne Moor, part of which DNPA already owns and looks after. Connecting the two areas encourages wildlife to spread – key for improving biodiversity and tackling climate change – while the grazing rights provide opportunities to work with local commoners on long-term management plans for this important site.

Caroline Belam, Chairman of Buckfastleigh West Commoners' Association, said: 'The Commoners are delighted to welcome DNPA as the new owner and are keen to work with them for the benefit of the Common and all its supporters.' Rich in archaeology, the area contains cairns, tin workings, Bronze Age reaves and former field boundaries – all of which serve as reminders of our past and the vital role agriculture plays in shaping the landscape.



Walkers on Ryder's Hill

Hidden Treasures of Devon's Wildflower Meadows to be Mapped

A new conservation project will work with landowners and gardeners to survey and better protect hundreds of Devon's remaining wildflower meadows, sites which are a lifeline for pollinators and a haven for threatened wildlife.

The Big Devon Meadows Count is being led by Moor Meadows, a community initiative which has brought together hundreds of Devon residents who want to conserve, restore or create wildflower-rich meadows.



Dartmoor meadow with greater butterfly orchid

Andrew Montgomery

Originating on Dartmoor in 2015, Moor Meadows members – and their 575 meadows – are now found across Devon. Devon's remaining flower-rich meadows are fragments of the habitats found in the past, as most traditional grasslands in Devon were lost to more intensive agriculture during the 20th century.

The count, a two-year project funded by the Devon Environment Foundation, will see landowners and gardeners working with surveyors from the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre (DBRC) on more than 300 meadows across Devon. DBRC collects and manages records of plants, animals and fungi throughout Devon, with more than 8.5 million species records held. Many sites owned by Moor Meadows members can now be assessed by botanical surveyors for the first time. In turn, landowners will learn new skills allowing them to better protect wildflower meadows in future.

Leading the count is experienced conservationist Lisa Schneidau who remembers wildflower meadows inspiring her lifelong love of the natural world.

Taking part in the count, Naomi Oakley and Mark Owen produce high welfare, organic beef and lamb at Challacombe Farm, near Postbridge. Naomi said: 'Our 10 hectares of species rich grasslands are a mix of hay meadows and Rhos pasture, with an extra 10 hectares of upland hay meadow that we are restoring as well.

Our farm is organic, the hay is to keep our livestock through the winter. Our livestock only eat grass grown on the farm, so our meadows are a vital part of our high nature value farming system.'

The pilot year of the count is already underway, with the first training events held for landowners, and a start made on the minimum of 59 sites to be surveyed in 2024.

Vandal and Thief at Whiddon Down

The police have asked for assistance to identify the vandal and thief who has destroyed and removed some plants from the Whiddon Down roundabout and the flower bed almost opposite it, which are part of Whiddon Down Community Village Gardens.

The incident took place between the night of Wednesday 17 and Thursday 18 July. This malicious individual approached the flower beds from the lower walkway opposite the roundabout, waited until the coast was clear, then clambered up the densely brambled bank and proceeded to snap off branches and stamp on the bases of many of the tall 'Yellow Candelabra type Evening Primroses', breaking them and flattening them at their base.

Then, this individual walked over to the roundabout and pulled up many of the 'Calendula Marigolds' that the local school children had raised from seed to maturity. The estimated cost to replace the damage is £200.

'Welcome to Princetown' Signs Replaced

The 'Welcome to Princetown' signs went missing last year. Dartmoor Forest Parish Council has managed to have new ones made and re-erected after receiving donations from the Princetown Charity Shop and the High Moorland WI. The council also thank Devon County Council's Highways Neighbourhood Team for producing the signs and putting them in place. A new 40 miles per hour sign has also been placed near the cattle grid on the road to Yelverton.



One of the new Princetown signs



The new 40mph sign

Devonia Water Used at Bovey Castle Hotel

Devon-based spring water company Devonia is celebrating one year of supplying its bottled still and sparkling water to Bovey Castle, near Moretonhampstead, which has assisted the luxury five-star hotel in obtaining a Silver award for Green Tourism. 2024 has also seen Devonia introduce a new brand identity informing consumers of their collect, wash and reuse process.

Bovey Castle's General Manager, Dean Gunston, said: 'We highlighted in our submission for our Green Tourism accreditation that we stock Devonia Water. It is a product that we purchase in volume and use on a day-to-day basis. The transition to Devonia, with their full recycling process, has improved our sustainable practices considerably. In addition, the locality of the business for deliveries to the hotel creates fewer food miles and is a much better environmental practice. Devonia has become part of the Bovey Castle offering, in our aim to showcase the best of local products and reduce our carbon footprint. We will continue to work on our sustainability journey to achieve Gold status.'



Dean Gunston, General Manager of Bovey Castle Hotel, with bottles of Devonia Water

Devonia director Fiona Graham said: 'We are delighted to be celebrating a year of supplying the stunning Bovey Castle, fulfilling all their bottled water needs, and helping them to improve their sustainability credentials and gain Green Tourism accreditation. They are the perfect example of a luxury hotel aligning with a business that offers a sustainable, local product and a practical solution to industry problems.'

'Reusing bottles instead of recycling means a longer life for every bottle. Our process makes a difference to not only us but also to the environment and our customers within the hospitality and catering industry. We help them to save costs and energy, and reduce their impact on the environment, whilst providing a great product that is key to any drinks menu.'

Devonia prides itself on being the only spring water company in the south of England with a business model centred around reusing glass bottles, which ensures their bottles are refilled on average eight times. Over its 19 years of trading, collecting and reusing its water bottles from hotels, pubs, cafes, restaurants, special events and private customers across Devon, it has saved a staggering 187 tonnes of glass from going to landfill. The traditional wash and reuse system dramatically reduces not only its own but also its customers' carbon footprint and improves their environmental impact.

For more information on Devonia, visit www.devoniawater.co.uk.

Okehampton Parish Church Open Day

This year's Devon Historic Churches Day is on Saturday 14 September and Okehampton Parish Church will be one of those open to the public. Many locals and visitors to Okehampton are not aware of the Parish Church of All Saints, 'the church on the hill', which seems remote from the town especially as it continues to grow to the north-east. The church however is still very much alive, and people attending weddings and funerals are often struck by its beauty. Because of its isolated position the building is not usually open apart from regular Sunday services but on 14 September



Parish church

the doors will be open wide from dawn to dusk for a day of fun and entertainment for all the family. Things start at 6.30am with the opportunity to photograph the sunrise from the top of the tower, then continue with children's games, Teddy bears abseiling down the tower, demonstrations of the bells and organ and displays of the church's treasures and registers. There will also be a good deal to learn about the history of the town with people on hand to answer any questions. There will be food available throughout the day starting with bacon rolls for the early birds, and the day will end with an open mic session with local musicians and a licenced bar. Admission is free although there will be a charge for ascents of the tower.

Chagford Film Festival: 23-28 September

An exciting mix of films and film-related events is in store for the 2024 Festival, which takes place at multiple venues in and around Chagford. The 'Friends of Chagford Film Festival' scheme, with exclusive benefits and access to special events during the year, is a great way to support the Festival. Details are available via the website www.chagfordfilmfestival.com or forms can be collected from The Globe pub in Chagford. There will be an exciting variety of films – something for everyone – including a first foray into the 3D experience, a link up with the National Theatre Live Stage performances and a very special Dartmoor Day celebrating Dartmoor on Film. To see the full programme and to buy tickets, please see the website, as above.

Cox Tor Farm Gate Hanger

Paul Glanville reports that the Cox Tor Farm gate hanger (SX 52183 76247) has got a new replacement gate. The gate mentioned in *Thurlow's Dartmoor Companion* published in 1993 had rotted out a few years ago. In early 2024 a replacement gate was made by local contractor John Pengelly and he used the old granite hanger.



Cox Tor farm gate

Runnage Bridge

The deep pothole at Runnage Bridge near Postbridge (and further up the road opposite Runnage Farm) has been properly filled in and will hopefully be able to withstand timber lorries crossing it to access Soussons Forest.



The filled in pothole at Runnage Bridge *Max Piper*

Huckworthy Bridge Hit by Lorry

Huckworthy Bridge was hit by a four-ton lorry in July leaving a lot of damage to the bridge itself. Repairs have been made but the bridge was hit a few days later by another vehicle.



The damaged bridge

Lost Bike on the Moors

Report by Dave Hartland

My wife Glen and I were out walking in the Bow Combe area near Wild Tor in late June when we came across a child's bike. It seemed to be abandoned so between us we wheeled it all the way back to our car parked at OP22, using the tracks and ring road as the bike had flat tyres and the chain had seized up. A few days later we took it to 'Ride On Cycling for All' which is a charity in Exeter – we also took the opportunity to donate an old bike that one of our grandsons had outgrown as well. They were very happy to accept both bikes. You never know what you are going to find on the moors.



The lost bike

Dave Hartland

Letterbox Meet at Lee Moor

The next Dartmoor Letterbox meet will take place on Sunday 27 October at Lee Moor Village Hall, between 10am and 3pm. Here you can find out about the hobby, collect the official one-day stamp and the one-day stamp at the *Dartmoor News* stand. You can buy the catalogue of clues, as well as clues for charity letterbox walks. Pop in anytime for a chat and find out more about letterboxing.

Bachelor's Hall Fingerpost

DNPA have erected a new fingerpost at Bachelor's Hall, near Princetown.



The fingerpost

Max Piper

Gorse Cutting at Dunnabridge

Gorse beside the B3357 road at Dunnabridge has been trimmed back, allowing a better view for users. This is just below the car park and the bridge itself.



Some of the cleared gorse

New Car Park Planned for Cornwood

DNPA have decided that a field near Cornwood, at the south-western end of the National Park, can be changed into a public parking space. This has been suggested as parking on that side of the moor has become difficult over the last few years as Harford Moor Gate car park and the car park at New Waste have been closed by the landowners.

The owner has offered space for parking but it will be limited to about eight cars which will not be ideal as it is likely that on some days, especially weekends, a lot more vehicles will turn up. If they can't find a space they will start looking to park nearby, possibly causing more problems than are solved. It would be better to have a larger car park for possibly up to 30 vehicles.

Assistant Ranger becomes New DNPA Sector Ranger

Stuart Hooppell now looks after the parishes of Bickington, Ashburton, Buckland-in-the-Moor, Ilsington, Hennock, Lustleigh and Bovey Tracey following the retirement of DNPA Ranger Bill Allen earlier in the year. Stuart has been Assistant Ranger for East Dartmoor for eight years.



Stuart putting in steps at Wray Cleave

Permissive Footpath at Lizwell Farm

Dave Pinkham reports

In July I was walking with a group on the permissive path at Lizwell Farm, Widecombe-in-the-Moor, and came across two six foot newly erected granite waymarker posts. These were not there a number of weeks ago when walking the same route.

They are very impressive indeed and not expected on permissive private paths. They also have new feather and tare markings, which indicate the two waymarker stones were split from one stone.



One of the new granite waymarks

Dave Pinkham

The local farmer Lloyd Mortimore has gone to a lot of trouble and expense to erect these instead of wooden ones. It does make sense, as they are stock and weather proof.

Repairs to Footpath in Ilsington Parish

A footpath (Ilsington Footpath 36) coming from Ramshorn Down to near Yeo Farm was repaired in July. Part of the path had fallen into the stream which flows down the valley so Tim Brook and Paul Rendell helped DNPA Ranger Stuart Hooppell to sort the problem out. The original plan was to rebuild the bank beside the stream by putting a big piece of wood into the bank. On reaching the stream, it was found that it had undermined the river bank – if the original plan had been carried out it would probably have only lasted a year or so as the water would again have undercut the bank.

So it was decided to pile stones on the edge of the stream forcing it away from the bank and then to move the path a few yards into the woods away from the watercourse. To move the path the landowner had to be informed. The path was cut through the trees, a large piece of wood was inserted into the bank above the stream and two steps were added to the new route.



The new route around the problem

New Finger Post for Muddilake

The finger post near the Cherrybrook Hotel pointing to the bridleway across Muddilake has been replaced by DNPA. The wooden gate has also been replaced.



The new gate and finger post

Belstone's New Sign

Josh Scillitoe, West Devon Borough Council's Neighbourhood Highways Officer, has provided Belstone Parish Council with a replacement sign for the entrance to the village. As can be seen from the photo it is not much different from the old sign but, at the parish council's request, is a bit taller, has bigger writing in a different font and includes a new arrow to help visitors find the car park.



Old and new signs

Filming in Tavistock

At the beginning of August a film crew were in Tavistock shooting scenes for the BBC drama series *Beyond Paradise*. They were based at Tavistock College car park. On 5 August the town's streets were filled with film paraphernalia. Kris Marshall and Sally Bretton, the show's two main stars, were seen in Market Street and Duke Street as well as the Pannier Market. An empty stationery shop was turned into a bookshop for the purposes of filming and the rear of one of the shops fringing the outer Pannier Market became a bar.



The film crew in Duke Street

New Defibrillator at Fingle Bridge

A new defibrillator has been placed at Fingle Bridge, near the car park and outside the Fingle Bridge Inn.



The defibrillator

New Footpath Signs Around Drewsteignton

A number of rights of way in and around Drewsteignton and Fingle Bridge are now marked by new DNPA erected finger posts.



One of the new finger posts

New Accessible Path at Fingle Bridge

The National Trust have created a new accessible path upstream to the meadow and added a picnic bench to help people connect to nature.



The new path

Meldon Viaduct Closed for Repairs

Walkers and cyclists were given advance notice that Meldon Viaduct near Okehampton will be completely closed for around three weeks in September for resurfacing. The 150-year-old viaduct, which is part of the Granite Way walking and cycling trail, is due to be closed from Monday 9 September to Friday 27 September.

The viaduct was officially opened for cyclists and walkers by Adam Hart-Davis in July 2002, having been closed for many years after trains could no longer use it.

Hart-Davis is a historian and broadcaster for the BBC whose programmes included *What the Romans Did for Us* and *Local Heroes*; he was also a co-presenter of *Tomorrow's World*.



Adam cutting the ribbon at Meldon Viaduct

Rubbish in Meavy Ford

In August someone thought it was a good idea to fly tip in Meavy Ford. Amongst the rubbish dumped in the river were various nails.

Riding Across Dartmoor with Sara Cox

Sara Cox, author, BBC Radio Two presenter and patron of World Horse Welfare, was on Dartmoor at the beginning of July. She was hosting a riding event for Liberty Trails, an award-winning, luxury adventure, horse riding operator on Dartmoor which offers specialist and tailor made riding holidays for strong, capable riders.

On the first day the group of ladies rode from Throwleigh to Belstone for a drinks and snack stop at Watchet Hill, then rode back to Throwleigh for lunch.



The riders near Kes Tor

The following day they rode from Throwleigh to Kes Tor where they were met by a table laid out with drinks and snacks before riding back, with lunch beside the Forder Brook. Their guides on the horses were Amy and Michele. Paul Rendell met the riders to share stories about Dartmoor with Sara and the ladies, telling them about the area's history. A few days later Sara shared a story about Paul and her time on Dartmoor with her Radio Two audience.



Lunch Time



Tucking in for lunch, Sara Cox on the right

New Bench on Klondyke Hill

A metal bench has been placed beside the road to Okehampton Camp near the junction with Lower Halstock Farm on Klondyke Hill. The bench is in memory of Philip Packer.



The new bench

Finger Post on Haytor Road

DNPA have replaced the finger post on the road to Haytor marking the bridleway to Reddaford Water near Yarner Woods. The path itself has recently been cleared of vegetation.



The new finger post

Clearing Another Path

Report by Stuart Hooppell

On Sunday 11th August a brave troupe of Haytor Second Sunday Volunteers ventured from their usual clime to Yarner Wood. There a mammoth effort ensued in the form of vegetation clearance. Hours of full-on physical exertion led to the successful clearance of the permissive footpath that follows the Templer Way out of Yarner joining the bridleway that runs from Bracken Hill north to Reddaford Water. My thanks to the Second Sunday team supported by Volunteer Wardens Nigel, Richard, Ian and Phillip. Each and every volunteer left it all on the field.



The path being cleared

Stuart Hooppell



The cleared path

Stuart Hooppell

Oval Pound Cleared near Giant's Basin

In July a small team of volunteers under the leadership of Paul Rendell helped clear an oval pound on the right bank of the River Plym. The work was done on behalf of the Sheepstor Commons. The volunteers cleared the pound wall, the two buildings near the centre and a possible building just inside the outer wall to the west. The lower part of the pound is right on the edge of tinnars' workings. The pound may originally date from the Bronze Age but changes have been made over the years and there are low banks to the north and south which were built at later dates. Bracken was cut and cleared away from the low wall so it is now much easier to see the banks.

Nearby hidden in the bracken was what looked like a round house, although it did not seem to have enough stone in it being mainly soil in a U-shape facing down river. Maybe it is a gun emplacement from the Second World War?

Thanks to Bill Radcliffe, Barry Welch, Andy McAuley and Simon Forty their help and local farmers Roy and Helen Radmore for helping us get the gear to the site.



Working to clear the lower part of the pound

Andy McAuley



The team

Bill Radcliffe



Strange object

Paul Rendell

Brent Moor for Sale

The large area of south Dartmoor known as Brent Moor is up for sale. Extending to 2773 acres (1122 hectares) or thereabouts, the land is offered for sale by private treaty as a whole or in ten lots. These large swathes of Dartmoor are to be sold with sporting rights in hand, subject to common grazing rights and public rights of way.

Lot 1 – Brent Fore Hill and Three Barrows; 952.80 acres (385.59 hectares)

A vast area of moorland renowned for its diverse landscape and wildlife, encompassing various sites of interest such as Brent Fore Hill and Hickley Plain. Guide Price: £400,000

Lot 2 – Bala Brook; 933.13 acres (377.62 hectares)

Similar to Lot 1, but incorporating the Bala Brook and boasting incredible views over the valley. Guide Price: £400,000

Lot 3 – Zeal Gully; 382.72 acres (154.88 hectares)

Zeal Gully sits to the west of the Avon Reservoir, with diverse moorland habitat. Guide Price: £200,000

Lot 4 – Land south of Small Brook Plains; 16.94 acres (6.85 hectares)

Guide Price: £25,000

Lot 5 – Dockwell Ridge; 328.76 acres (133.04 hectares)

An outstanding area of moorland to the east of the River Avon. Guide Price: £250,000

Lot 6 – Woolholes; 49.93 acres (20.21 hectares)

Situated to the immediate south of Lot 5, encompassing the historic Woolholes alongside the River Avon. Guide Price: £75,000

Lot 7 – Brent Moor House; 9.37 acres (3.79 hectares)

Historically a 17th century farmstead, Lot 7 offers prospective purchasers the chance to acquire a small land area rich in history and highly accessible in Dartmoor terms. Guide Price: £50,000

Lot 8 – Black Tor; 85.66 acres (34.66 hectares)

This sits above the former Brent Moor House, encompassing landmarks such as Black Tor and Hunter's Stone. Guide Price: £100,000

Lot 9 – China Clay Works; 12.09 acres (4.89 hectares)

This sits above Shipley Bridge car park and is rich with Dartmoor's industrial history. It features the former china clay works, with the area consisting of stone ruins and rough grassland, and benefits from far-reaching views down the valley. Guide Price: £20,000

Lot 10 – Land at Shipley Bridge; 1.65 acres (0.67 hectares)

This provides the opportunity to purchase a smaller section of amenity land. The land is situated adjacent to the Shipley Bridge car park and encompasses both sides of the road. Guide Price: £25,000

Avon Reservoir, the access road and Shipley Bridge car park are not for sale.



Walkers going up the Bala Brook

Becka Brook Clapper

The plaque that said who paid for the new clapper bridge over the Becka Brook below Holwell Tor has gone missing.



The missing plaque was to the right of the feet

Upper Terrace Car Park

The upper terrace car park on Haytor Down has recently been resurfaced with loose chippings.



The resurfaced car park

Max Piper

Tavistock Railway will not be Restored

The new Labour Government has pulled the plug on plans to reconnect Tavistock to the rail network. Following the great success of the re-opened line between Exeter and Okehampton, the Conservative Government last year said they planned to reconnect Tavistock and Bere Alston by rail as part of the 'Restoring Your Railway' programme, but this has now been cancelled.

More Work at Tavy Head

Work started again in August re-wetting the area around Tavy Head, work which will continue until 2025. A number of low pressure machines will be working in a large area around both the Tavy heads.

Walking in that area is already dangerous enough due to the big ponds which have been built – trying to cross is almost impossible without falling into a deep bog. Livestock no longer frequent the area. Ground nesting birds like skylarks and meadow pipits are being driven out by this re-wetting of the moors.



Some of the ponds in August

Mary Tavy Telephone Box

When Bryonie Baxter decided to take on a dilapidated red telephone box in Mary Tavy, little did she anticipate the scale of project it would become. Mary Tavy Parish Council had been asking for expressions of interest to adopt a decommissioned iconic red 1930s K6 telephone box when Bryonie had the idea of turning the box on Bal Lane near her home into a community museum chronicling the mining history of the village.

Initially Bryonie, who has lived in Mary Tavy for 15 years, intended to do all the work herself and started to sand the box down in preparation for its repainting when she was encouraged to apply for a grant from the Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme. The government grant scheme which was aimed at farmers and landowners in the National Park has been enhanced to support projects which 'provide opportunities for people to discover, enjoy and understand the landscape and its cultural heritage'. They were immediately excited by the project, explained Bryonie, and have generously offered her a grant for the restoration of the box and the creation of the museum. Alongside the photos and old maps that the museum will house, she is now working with Dartmoor guide Paul Rendell to create a free guided walks leaflet for visitors signposting the relics of Mary Tavy's mining heritage that are still visible today.



The phone box

THE DEVONPORT LEAT STORY

Leonard John German was writing a book on the Devonport Leat but it was never published in his lifetime. He was the father of Dartmoor-lover Dave German (1942-2023) who once lived at Princetown. The Editor was given the manuscript of this book in 2015 and here is a piece from it, written in September 1984, about the leat below Raddick Hill.

'From here on the leat takes a headlong plunge down the side of Raddick Hill to the River Meavy valley, a drop of some 147 feet, the gradient over this distance averaging 1:9. Another flood weir and hatch at the bottom of the hill before crossing the River Meavy via an aqueduct and into a section of the leat that had granite blocked sides and concrete bottom, work which was carried out early in the 1900s. The aqueduct spans the River Meavy in semi-circular flanged cast iron sections with semi-circular steel sections on the approach and exit. The limited carrying capacity is controlled by the setting of the hatch at the upstream end of the steel launder. This limiting factor was in mind when it was decided to augment the leat from the River Meavy around 1916 by a 16" diameter pipeline which discharges downstream of the aqueduct. Water which had to be diverted in the Meavy downstream of the aqueduct was made by abstracting from the Meavy upstream of the crossing.

Also this Meavy flow is the source at periods when the leat is 'frozen out' during winter snow/blizzards and it is impossible for maintenance crews to re-establish flows over the high ground above Raddick Hill. Although difficulties are also encountered downstream of the aqueduct, the terrain is relatively sheltered compared with the high ground enabling men to work.



Leonard John German, aged 15, on the temporary suspension bridge at Burrator *Paul Rendell Collection*



The Devonport Leat

Paul Rendell

Continuing downstream a cattle bridge is passed and shortly afterwards in the south-east or lower wall a doll's head can be seen. This was a memento put in the joining cement between the granite blocks by workmen during the leat maintenance, and of recent years has become a feature of interest with walkers. My father, who was the leatman at the time of the

fixing of the doll's head in the wall, said it was a piece of china picked up locally and stuck in the cement by workmen, others sometimes carve their initials etc.

Beyond is a cattle crossing bridge and a feature here are twelve 'steps' in the bottom to cater for a relatively rapid change in levels. The 'steps' end at a cart bridge followed by a cattle bridge before coming to a bend reconstructed in 1897, incorporating a small culvert over a stream. The block and concrete section ends at Stenlake Lane Bridge where the leat enters the plantation.'



The top up pipe coming from the River Meavy

Paul Rendell

Editor's note: So it seems the myth that the 'Indian Head' or 'Doll's Head' being carved by a French Prisoner of War (POW) and placed in the leat may be just that. The Devonport Leat was built before the French POWs were at Princetown and it is very unlikely they would have worked on it. In fact it seems the granite walls were not in place until the early 1900s, possibly in 1925. The workmen were employed by Plymouth Corporation Water Works whilst repairing the leat, this organisation having just taken over maintenance of the leat from the Devonport Water Company.

EXPLORING AROUND BURRATOR

by Paul Rendell

This book is about the farms around Burrator Reservoir as well as other buildings and some of the tors, potato caves and other items of interest. 126 pages with lots of photographs and maps. If you want to know about this wonderful area, this is the book to get.

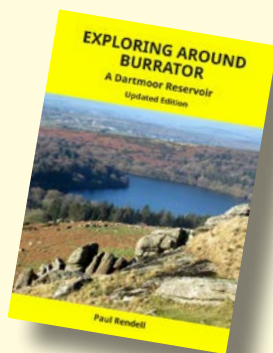
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TALES OF THE TORS

In this new series Paul Rendell looks at the stories behind some of the well known tors on the moors. This time the focus is on one of the most visited tors on Dartmoor

HAYTOR

In 1566 this tor was called Idertordoune, in a deed of 1687 the name was Ittor Doune and since then it has had lots of other names including Eator Down, Athur Tor, Solar Tor, High Tor and Heytor. The outcrops of Haytor stand at 1499 ft (457m) above sea level and consist of two granite outcrops. It is classified as an 'avenue tor', meaning that the central piece has been eroded away leaving an avenue between the two outcrops. In the 19th Century many visitors began coming to the moors and wanted to reach the top of Haytor, so around mid century steps were cut into the rocks and an iron handrail added to allow more people get to the summit. The handrail was removed in the 1960s due to it rusting and becoming dangerous.

You can still see some of the stumps of the uprights in the rocks. In 1902 there was quite a stir when it was announced that the estate of Leighon, which included the tor, was to be sold. On 5 July, the *East and South Devon Advertiser* wrote; 'The sporting estate of Leighon in the parish of Manaton, Dartmoor, included in which are the far-famed Haytor Rocks is announced to be sold by public auction on July 24th. A great part of the estate is enclosed land, but there is another large portion which is unenclosed, over which there are common rights. The announcement of the sale will no doubt cause Dartmoor lovers – and their name is legion – to fear that the open portions may be enclosed.' On the day bidding was brisk under auctioneers Messrs Knight, Frank and Rutley and in the end the estate was sold to Mr Washington Singer for £9500. In 1953 Haytor was used as a major location for the feature film *Knights of the Round Table* starring Robert Taylor and Ava Gardner. An impressive castle was built between the two main rock piles of the tor and traditional medieval sports, including jousting, were staged there for the film.



Knights of the Round Table Paul Rendell Collection



Big Dance

Paul Rendell

In 1974 the whole of Haytor Down was sold to the newly formed Dartmoor National Park Committee and they (from 1997 as DNPA) still own it today. On Saturday 22 July 2006 people gathered for the BBC's Big Dance at Haytor. The Big Dance Class world record attempt was organised by BBC local radio stations including BBC Radio Devon. I was involved at Haytor, getting the dancing in the right place for the event, helping with traffic management and making things happen. On the slopes of Haytor everyone danced to the beat of Taiko drummers. Around 470 people strutted their stuff on the lower rocks and on the pathways surrounding Haytor. Even a herd a Dartmoor ponies couldn't resist stopping by to have a look.

Reference: www.legendarydartmoor.co.uk

GHOSTLY DARTMOOR

Another ghostly story by Paul Rendell

This happened in July 2024. I was out near Yeo Farm, Bickington, working on a footpath with Tim Brooks. The path was in a wood, in a valley. Tim was working a few hundred yards away from me and he heard two women laughing and talking. He came back to me and said there were some people coming along the path. So we waited for them, thinking we would have to move a big piece of wood out of the way so they could get past. After a few minutes, I heard a man and woman talking, sounding like they were coming along the path. We waited and waited and no one turned up.

Tim then told me that last year he was working in the same woods, strimming the path. He had stopped to put more fuel in the strimmer when he heard a woman laughing – the same woman he had just heard.

Half an hour later DNPA Ranger Stuart Hoopell turned up. He had been speaking to a local farmer. Tim and I said to Stuart that the woods were haunted. He said the farmer had just told him that over a decade ago a man in a walking group was in these woods, had a heart attack and died! A few hours later I heard a dog barking down the valley, but no one else heard it.

We finished working and headed back to our vehicles. When we were near Yeo Farm we heard people talking. Was this what we had been hearing before, the voices drifting up the valley or was there something else?

WONDERFUL DARTMOOR

Sheep shearing at Lower Longford Farm by Dartmoor Chris



PERAMBULATION WALK ON 13 JUNE 1987

By Paul Rendell

I have walked the Dartmoor Perambulation many times over the years. Here is my report of the walk we did on Saturday 13 June 1987 in aid of the Plymouth and District Leukaemia Fund. The walk was undertaken by Bob Bruce, Philip Allbutt and myself, with back up/check points by Eric Greenaway and Anne Littlejohn. Our base was at the Plume of Feathers pub in Princetown, with thanks to James Langton.

We met up the day before in the Plume, about 7.45pm. We had a meal, a drink and talked about the plans for our little walk the next day. Then we went to put up our tents in the field behind the pub. The others got theirs up but when I tried to put up mine one of the poles snapped. It was useless, I could not do it so I went back to speak to James in the pub. He let me sleep in the bunkhouse for a few hours – it was only three hours as I did not get to bed until nearly 11.30pm.

We were up at 2.30am, had a cup of tea, a bit of food, got our hiking boots on and set off dead on three in the morning, with torches shining. Feeling great, ready for the challenge. The weather was fine, clear sky, nearly a full moon.

Walking through the dark streets of Princetown with an escaped prisoner on the loose – he had escaped early Friday evening – was not the best thing to do. Bob and I turned left into Station Road but Philip carried on towards the prison. We shouted at him before he got lost. We went to North Hessay Tor, down the tarmac road to Rundlestone and up the farm track, passing the ruins of Great Mis Farm before arriving at Great Mis Tor. What, no mist on Great 'Mist' Tor? We paused to note the time of 3.49am, then it was down to the River Walkham, crossing with ease. Walking up the hillside beside Deadlake and arriving at White Barrow via a small mound with a sheep on top – in the dark we thought this was the cairn at White Barrow we were looking for; what silly wallies we were.

The sun was starting to rise over Fur Tor and Cut Hill as we reached Limsboro' Cairn near Lynch Tor so we put away our torches, for good we hoped. Onwards we went, as a skylark started to wake up and sing us a lovely song above our heads. We found a wet area, so a bit of bog hopping was needed as we came down the River Tavy. Crossing was easy as we used the island just above Rattlebrook Foot. After making a note of the time and having a quick drink we walked up, first on the right hand side of the Rattlebrook, then crossed over passing Curbeam and Rattlebrook tin mines. We arrived at Bleak House just as early morning mist rolled in over the hills and down our valley.

Our next point of call was Rattlebrook Head and then Steng-a-Tor. After a quick look at the map I pointed in the direction we should be going and off we went. We lowered ourselves down the hillside to the valley bottom in which the West Okement flows, then the mist started to lift. By the time we reached Sandy Ford, the sun was out and it promised to be a warm day. We took a run and a jump, hoping to cross the river, but one by one we landed in it and got a little wet.

We each took the 210 metres uphill climb to High Willhays at our own pace, then strolled along the ridge to Yes Tor, where the wind was blowing hard – what mist was left soon faded away for good. We ran down the hill to our first checkpoint at Row Tor, where Eric was waiting for us with hot drinks and our breakfast.

We were travelling very light with just water and snack bars so food and a hot drink was most welcome. We arrived 35 minutes ahead of our estimated time. Bob changed his socks. Soon we were on our way to the Belstone Tor ridge, then crossed the River Taw via the ford. We put ourselves down a gear and started climbing Cosdon Beacon. We almost ran down to Whitemoor Stone Circle and soon passed Hound Tor. A buzzard was flying over us wondering where we were racing to.

It was down to Wild Tor Well, across the Walla Brook and on to Watern Tor. The view from there was great and it was getting very warm. Another fast walk down the hill to the North Teign River, crossing via Manga Ford Rails, passing Stone Tor, up to the Longstone, where we saw our first walker of the day.

From here it was over towards Fernworthy Forest and the reservoir, crossing at the base of the dam, luckily there was no water coming down the spillway – today it would frowned on doing this dangerous crossing. We passed the quarry where stone was taken for building the dam. We started to feel tired as we reached the Heath Stone, so we stopped here and found the food that had been hidden for us earlier.

Then it was over to King's Oven car park where Eric and Anne were waiting for us with a hot drink and hot soup. Philip and I managed to drop our bowls of soup so there was mess everywhere. Now it was sunny although still very cool so we did not change into our shorts but we did all change our socks and put on our trainers, leaving our hiking boots in Anne's van. I started to eat a whole Swiss roll – Anne thought it was funny me hacking my way through the cake.

Philip didn't say anything but he wasn't feeling too well – but he decided to carry on. Bob and I were on top form with new 'get up and go' as we made our way through Soussons Plantation, along lanes and bridleways. At Cator we saw a buzzard trying to hover. As we reached Dartmeet, Bob started to move faster and faster, it was too fast a pace for me. Our back up team were there waiting for us, so it was more chocolate bars and ice cream before it melted. Crossing the stepping stones was going to be easy as the stones were only just under water.

So socks and shoes off to wade across the West Dart River, then back on to make our way to Week Ford, walking up the O Brook to Saddle Bridge, another check point – we arrived 40 minutes early. We stocked up on food and drink. Bob changed his socks again and we all changed into our hiking boots for the last long leg. It was up the O Brook and upwards to Ryder's Hill.

Bob was leading the way, I dropped back to water the flowers and Philip was now lagging behind. I asked him if he was okay, he replied he was still not feeling too good, so I stayed with him to the top of the hill. On the highest point on the south moor, we had a great view of where we were heading to. It seemed a long way away. We moved towards Western Wallabrook together and down the River Avon, passing four tents all set up for the night at Gibby Beam. We had to wade across the River Avon before the steep climb to Eastern Whitabarrow where we arrived at 5.51pm. It was going to be a lovely evening. We all walked together slowly along the ridge

to Western Whitabarrow and along the Zeal Tor Tramway. I then took the lead as we made our way to Redlake Foot where there was lots of bog cotton. Erme Pits was alive with rabbits, great to see so many. Up over the ridge and headed to the north of Calveslake Brook, where we flushed a fox. We took it in turns leading up to Eylesbarrow, hoping to get a cup of tea from the workers at the tin mine but they had gone home. Nun's Cross had no nuns so it was on to our last check point at Peat Cott where Eric and Anne had been waiting in the cold for us.

Now it was the final push for Princetown, the pace got faster and faster as we headed to South Hessary Tor. I stopped to take a photograph of the sunset and Bob watered the flowers but Philip wanted to carry on, so we let him.

It took some fast walking to catch him up but we did, then we all ran down the hill to the Plume where we were clapped in by our backup team, including James from the pub. We arrived 30 minutes ahead of our planned time, we had walked 50 miles (80kms) in 18 hours. We were glowing, feeling so high, so proud, and to think we did not have too many aches and pains. I lost two pounds in weight.

I have since completed the walk in 13 hours but that's another story. I think the quickest it has been done is just 12 hours.

The Real Beatrice Chase

(A Dartmoor Author)

by *Simon Dell* MBE

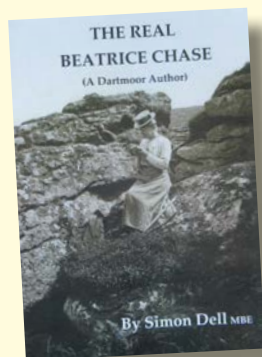
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TALES OF MYSTERY ON BLACK DOWN

Stories of the A386 over Black Down, Mary Tavy, compiled by Paul Rendell

ANNIE PINKHAM'S BOY FRIENDS

Down the road in Mary Tavy was a pub called the Royal Standard which was used in the 19th century as a drinking place for local miners. At one time the bar maid was called Annie Pinkham, a friendly sort of woman who wanted the men to spend their money. It is said that the fifty or so granite posts beside the A386 near the ruins of Wheal Betsy mine were put there by Annie in memory of each of her boyfriends. Today they are known as Annie Pinkham's Men.



One of Annie's men

Paul Rendell

HELLO TO THE MEN

Another version of the above story is that as Annie went to work across Black Down everyday she would say hello to each of the stones and wave at them when coming and going. One day as she was talking to the stones a friend came along and saw her. When asked what she was doing Annie said 'Talking to my men'. Since then they have been called Annie Pinkham's Men.

THEY ARE FOLLOWING ME

Yet another version of the story is that Annie was walking across this wild piece of moorland one dark night when she turned around to see men following her. At least she thought they were following her so she started to run down into the village of Mary Tavy, banged on the door of the first house and woke up the occupants. It took a while and much persuasion to convince her they were just granite posts and not real men.

THE MAN THAT WAS NOT THERE

Over twenty years ago I was driving across the moors after giving a talk to a group in Plymouth. It was about 11pm on a November night as I drove across Black Down heading towards Okehampton. It was drizzling and very misty so I was driving at about 20 miles an hour. As I came very close to the Wheal Betsy engine house, I am sure I saw a man walking on the right hand side of the road in front of me about 20 yards away. He was wearing a peaked cap and long black coat and was walking very slowly. I put my hand on the horn and jammed on the brakes but I knew I was not going to stop in time – and I went straight into him. I felt a small bump with the impact. I stopped the car, got out with a torch and started looking around to see the man that I had just hit. I could not find anyone, I looked in the ditches, I looked further away and even called out, but nothing.

Soaking wet I got back in the car and drove home. I then phoned the police and told them what had happened. The next morning they phoned me back to say they could find nobody anywhere, human or animal. Yet I was sure I hit something so I checked the car and yes, there was a dent on the right hand side where I had hit the man. Was he an old miner who had passed on or was he one of Annie Pinkham's Men?

WAS ANNIE SEEN ON BLACK DOWN?

In early 2007 I was driving across Black Down on a moonlit night. As I drove past the granite posts I thought I saw a light in my wing mirror. I looked into my rear view mirror and saw nothing. Thinking it was just the moonlight I looked forward again and saw what looked like a figure running across the road in a white dress with a white bonnet on her head. I put my brakes on but she vanished into thin air. The full moon that evening must have been playing tricks or did I see Annie?



The misty road over Black Down

Paul Rendell

ANOTHER MYSTERY BODY

A few days later I was speaking to a lady in Tavistock about Black Down and what had happened to me. She said she had also had an unexplained experience on that stretch of road one evening the previous year (in 2006). She was driving to Tavistock and as she got level with the ruined chimney, she thought she saw a person running across the moor towards the road. She looked again but could not see anyone. A few yards further on she saw a black object in the road. She swerved to go around it and then stopped her car to take a look at what was in the road but could not find anything there! What had she seen, was it a trick of the light?

FOOTNOTE: Have you had any strange experiences on Black Down? If so, please tell us. We can omit your name from the account if you wish.



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101 Squares Around Bodmin Moor

by *Sheron Vowden*

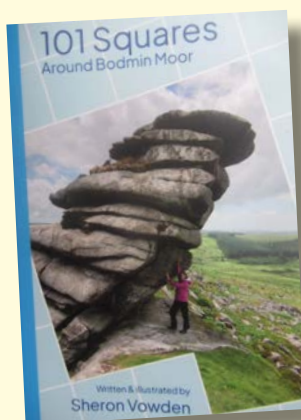
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SOME LOST NAMES ON DARTMOOR

Paul Rendell explores some lost or very little used names on the moors. If you come across any lost names please let us know

EAGLE ROCK; SX 61842 88721

The southernmost and highest outcrop of Steeperton Tor is known as 'Eagle Rock'. It is said that was the place where eagles flew from as they glided down into Taw Marsh valley.

FUGE'S POST; SX 5715 8196

The iron post at the top of Eastern Redlake, placed by a farmer called Reg Fuge.

HUNNAVILS BED; SX 643 680

Alternative name for Fishlake Mire on the south moor.



Flock o'Sheep

Max Piper

FLOCK O'SHEEP; SX 6298 9037

The cluster of rocks on the side of Big Whit Hill as from a distance they look like a flock of sheep.

FLOUR ROCKS; SX 6760 7330

Not far from Babeny Mill near Dartmeet is 'Flour Rocks'. They mark the spot where once a pack-horse returning southward with two sacks of flour lost half of its load, with the result that the rocks received the cascade of flour and retained a pale hue for some weeks to come – a story long remembered in Sherwell.

HAPPY VALLEY; SX 675 805

The miners who lived in this valley below the Warren House Inn called it Happy Valley because it was a warmer place to live than Cape Horn.

CAPE HORN; SX6 722 8069

The ruins of the miners cottages near the Warren House Inn. They were actually called West Cottages but the miners renamed them Cape Horn because of the wind and bad weather often found there.



The base of the cottages known as Cape Horn *Paul Rendell*

BATTERY MIRE; SX 653 868

An old name for Batworthy Mire.

TURN TEIGN; SX 6500 8654

Where the River Teign makes a sharp turn, it's also a quiet place for a swim.

MOUTE'S INN; SX 6177 8527

On the slopes of Whitehorse Hill is a peat cutter's hut. He was called Moute and lived in Chagford. Since his time it has been known as Moute's Inn but he is never there to serve drinks.

RASPBERRY GARDEN; SX 6242 8605

It is said that tanners tried to grow raspberries here.

WILL MAY'S HOUSE; SX 6390 8671

The ruins of a building built by Will May from Chagford many years ago.

NETTLERY; SX 6300 8671

The low plain north-east and below Watern Tor.

CHIMNEY BOW; SX 6215 88156

The neck of Bow Combe on Steeperton Brook.

GRAVEYARD TRACK; SX 5640 8760

The track leading from Rattlebrook Peat Works to the peat workings on Amicombe Hill, named because of the wear and tear on horses and waggons removing the peat.

BERT GRATTON'S HUT; SX 6426 9007

This hut was built by stonemason Bert Gratton to provide shelter for his family while working at Raybarrow.

ARTHUR HILL; SX 56200 79200

The hill and cairn to the west of Cocks Hill.

SANDY PATH; SX 578 674

This path is on the opposite side of Gutter Mire from Edward's Path. Sandy Path joins Eylesbarrow mine-road near the cattle grid. The warrener Percy Ware and moorman Bill Pengelly of Combeshead Farm cut this path to avoid the track across Ringmoor Down.

YEARLICK BALL; SX 5630 7660

Another name for Greena Ball, to the north of Great Mis Tor

THE NORTH ROAD; SX 580 680

A track coming off the Eylesbarrow mine road towards Two Brothers Adit, built by the tin miners.

DOWNING'S HOUSE; SX 6395 6293

A beehive hut just off the River Erme, also known as The Smugglers Cave.

BURCOMBE FORD; SX 57895 67322

A ford across the Sheepstor Brook, just below Gutter Tor. There is a car park beside it today.

JOAN FORD'S MEN; SX 63180 71990

Three standing stones in Joan Ford's Newtake, said to be her 'men'. Possibly the remains of a lean-to.

PIXIES PARLOUR; SX 64810 88664

A place where the pixies dance at midnight.

STUBLEY HILLS GERT; SX 5335 8449

A gert that follows the Wallabrook up beside Doe Tor Farm.

WILCOCK'S DYKE; SX 622 708

The drainage dyke built to drain Fox Tor Mire.

There will be more lost names in the next issue of *Dartmoor News*.

A WINTER OF DISCOVERY

There is always something new to find on Dartmoor as John Deakins discovers

Having walked the moors for over 40 years you get to thinking that there's nothing that you haven't seen before. This was the case until I discovered 'Dartefacts', a very interesting internet resource filled with information, some of which I must admit wasn't even on my radar. Being a devout inner moor walker this made for a very valuable research tool and has pointed me in the direction of making what I believe to be two quite important discoveries in the field of military use on Dartmoor.

It all started when I received a message from a friend asking the question ...was there ever a flagpole on High Willhays? Having written the book *Dartmoor Observation Posts* and studied the area quite extensively I replied no fairly confidently as none had ever been recorded on any military map. It does have to be said that there was almost certainly one on Belstone Tor that was not recorded for some reason but other than that the others were recorded at some point. I was shown a photo of a drilled hole and told that it was in the northern end of the northern outcrop of High Willhays and, being unaware of anything like this here, my interest was piqued and I set off to investigate.



Part of the building on High Willhays

John Deakins

Early next morning I hiked up to the summit and sure enough there it was plain as day, not large enough for a flagpole but certainly big enough to support some sort of mast, but what for? It was obvious that this housed something and I hoped a closer examination of the surrounding area would shed some light on it.

Starting at the southern outcrop I wanted to see if there was any evidence of anything similar and to my surprise there was! Just as on the northern extreme there was another matching hole drilled into the southern end; what could these be? Looking around for any further clues it became obvious that directly in between these two holes was the cairn on the summit and so I thought, with no real conviction, let's have a look around this for anything unusual. Upon checking around the base I couldn't believe my eyes! There at the base of the cairn was the foundation of a wall and even more surprisingly what appeared to be the remains of a concrete floor to what must have been a three- or four-walled structure. How had I never noticed this before? I must have stood at this spot 100 times before and never picked up on it. Whilst writing my previous book on the area I had studied maps and found the locations of several structures that had completely vanished so to find this was unbelievable and made me determined to get to the bottom of its origin. This however was literally the tip of the iceberg!!

Given the area and its proximity to Black Down, and the fact that High Willhays overlooks it, signalling came to mind as the semaphore station was just below and so I began to wander down to see if I could make any comparisons but now searching as I was going soon turned up more questions. Before even leaving the summit I noticed what looked to the casual eye just like a pool; however, upon closer inspection this was without a doubt man-made. Creating this pool is a low wall, crescent in shape, built of rough stone into an outcrop, 30 ft across with a possible entrance on the north-east corner. It was becoming apparent that the summit of High Willhays was once a very different landscape. This construction is larger than an Observation post and I would say possibly used as a stable or munition store at the very first use of the area, given that it isn't recorded on military maps of the area, with the stone track leading to here as well as Yes Tor.



Ockside cross

John Deakins

Moving north toward Black Down I passed the top of Yes Tor and looked with the same scrutiny that I had used on High Willhays and again questions arose. The summit is carved/worked into an avenue with stone flooring between the trig and modern flagpole; this must also be man made as are the rings embedded in the rocks which held the first flagpole, the base of which can still be found embedded between them. More and more was becoming apparent and I ascended to Black Down to see if any similarities could be made and they could! Coincidence or not, the hole in the middle of the semaphore station cross was pretty much the same size as those on the ends of High Willhays – surely this must have been related in some way?

Next step was to consult some of the people who may know of these so I went to *Dartmoor News* editor Paul Rendell, who was unaware, and then Tony Clark OBE who ran this range for many years. I've worked closely with Tony for many years and gained much of my knowledge from him but this was also a dead end. Tony put me onto the Dartmoor National Park archaeologist who again was unaware but he has now put the wheels in motion for this to be recorded in the Heritage Gateway and will be visiting the area soon.

Whilst passing this information on I was pointed in the direction of a previous article in *Dartmoor News* (Issue 177, Jan/March 2021) regarding military remains on Belstone Tor and was intrigued that these were never recorded on maps either. However a postcard of 1938 does show what appears to be a flagpole on the tor which still has a very clear base still in situ on the tor. With this in mind I decided to do the same on the eastern flank of the range and walk out from Belstone Tor and see what I could find.

There were one or two drill holes on the summits but not as obvious as the ones on High Willhays, but venturing further I came across something else I was completely unaware of. Again listed in Dartefacts, there were several stones embedded in the ground set out to mark something and were listed as the Ockside crosses found by Steve Grigg, probably of military use but what? It suddenly occurred to me that during the research for my book Tony Clark had shown me a picture of a mock up



Un-natural cut on Yes Tor

John Deakins

village that was constructed for military training. It was built in the Okement Hill area but the exact location wasn't known. This must have been it I thought, laid next to the military road for access and situated on the crest of the hill for sighting and target practice. Although this part of the journey was purely speculation I felt confident that these were the markings of the village.

Walking back I pondered the findings of the past few weeks wondering if I had opened more questions than answers, but certain that I had plenty of ammunition for my next book if you excuse the pun!

NATURE IN WRAY CLEAVE

Words and photographs by Paul Rendell

Very few people visit this ancient semi-natural wood near Moretonhampstead although it has a lot of wildlife to offer.

Trees include ash, hazel, birch, a few beech, wild cherry, holly, horse chestnut, rowan, mature oak and a few sycamore. There is some laurel which is being removed from the woods.

Some of the birds which can be seen or heard are great spotted woodpecker, green woodpecker, blue tit, buzzard, tawny owl, wood warbler, blackcap, mistle thrush, jay, nuthatch, raven and wood pigeon. A few

years ago two goshawks were seen in the woods. Some insects seen in the woods and nearby meadows include a small number of butterflies – silver-washed fritillary, which normally fly from mid July to the end of August, brimstone, grayling and speckled wood. A moth survey has not been undertaken but species seen include rosy footman (whose caterpillar feeds on lichens which grow on the trees) and copper underwing. Wood ants are seen on a small scale.

Three different species of beetle have been noted; dung (also known as dor), ground and oil.

Dormice have been recorded in a number of places within Wray Cleave – there is a large amount of hazel and honeysuckle which they love. Pipistrelle and lesser horseshoe bats have been recorded in the mine adits. Stoats and wood mice live within the woods, as do fallow deer and roe deer – you can see their wallows which are where the deer roll about or lie in mud or



Rowan berries



Brimstone moth

water, a sort of comfort behaviour. Badgers travel through the woods and will dig out bee nests under the rocks. And of course there are grey squirrels within the woods with plenty of food to sustain them including hazel nuts and horse chestnuts.

Plants and flowers include a very small patch of wild daffodils, wood sorrel, yellow pimpernel, lesser celandine, bugle, red campion, pennywort or navelwort, foxglove, self-heal, nipplewort, buttercups, purslane, wild angelica, common sorrel, bird's foot trefoil and the rare spear thistle growing nearby in the meadow. There is also dog

mercury, sweet vernal-grass and the broad-leaf enchanter's nightshade, which is a member of the evening primrose family. Wood sorrel, herb robert and wood sage are common but the slender St John's wort is very rare in these woods. Go to the cleave in springtime and see lots of wonderful bluebells before the bracken comes up. There are also lots of lichens including tree lungwort and oak moss and a number of ferns including polypody, which grows on tree branches and rocks covered in moss, hart's tongue, broad buckler and of course bracken.

Mosses are everywhere in these woods including the common striated feather and heath star moss.

Get out to Wray Cleave, see what you can find and please let *Dartmoor News* know if you come across something not mentioned in this article.



Self-heal



Mistle Thrush



Pennywort



Slender St John's wort

NORTH DARTMOOR PEAT PASSES

By Paul Rendell

Across the north moor there are large areas of blanket bog which were difficult to take livestock across. The fox hunt also had problems chasing their prey across this terrain.

Frank Phillpotts, full name William Francis Phillpotts, was born in 1837. As a schoolboy he went to Winchester College where he was an outstanding sportsman who soon developed a fondness for shooting and hunting. He also loved sailing small boats around the Cornish coast. He was called to the Bar in 1864 and was a reporter for *The Times* newspaper for a while but he had hearing difficulties and become deaf which caused problems at work but did not stop his love of riding. He became a well-known figure in hunting circles and would often travel to South Devon to hunt, especially on Dartmoor. He would often ride carrying an ear trumpet. He was a fearless rider who loved to ride hard across the moor and was in the saddle until he died in October 1909.

The peat bogs were a barrier to both horse and rider; foxes knew this and would often head to the clitter on Fur Tor, also known as Vur Tor. Here they could go to ground and hide from the hunt. There had to be a way to overcome this problem. There were a number of old cuts or passes such as Cut Lane on Cut Hill, Fur Tor Cut near Cut Hill, Whitehorse Cut which Phillpotts re-opened, and the Sand Path, a raised causeway on the headwaters of the Varracombe and Walla Brooks – but new routes needed to be made to help the hunt and moormen moving their livestock. Phillpotts surveyed the ground most carefully and drew his labour team from among the huntsmen and moormen, people who used the moor daily. He got them to cut passages through the great northern blanket bog interlinking the upper-reach valleys of the North Teign, East Dart, West Dart, Walkham, Tavy, West Okement and Taw. The whole network shows fine design, skill and enterprise. This was all done before machines, so all completed by hand and hard work.

Animals were moved by horseback with long lines of cattle, sometimes up to a mile (1.6km) long. The shortest pass, measuring less than 100 yards (90m), is near West Dart Head; the longest is nearly two miles (3.2km) and stands at 1900 feet (579m) above sea level on Black Ridge, where the peat is some 16 feet (4.9m) deep in places. Work on these peat passes started in the summer of 1895 and continued during the summer months for ten years until they were all completed. For the first few years the workmen were based at Headland Warren and later at Fernworthy. Once the work was completed, they found that the peat banks were constantly being eroded away by the weather and animals. Gutters had to be cleared out as well. Every summer maintenance work was carried out by men from the Mid Devon Hunt using pen-knives and long-handled shovels. This work continued until the late 1950s. To help people find each end of the peat passes wooden posts were erected but these soon rotted away or were used as rubbing posts by the animals, so they were soon lying on the ground and of not much use. After Frank's death, his son Mr Raleigh Phillpotts and his brother the Rev JS Phillpotts arranged for stone posts to be placed at each end of the peat passes instead.

The stone came from Merrivale Quarry and was taken out to the locations by Mr George French of Hartland Farm, Postbridge. In February 1914 it was Mr French who found the body of William Donaghy, a man who had come from Liverpool and died in mysterious circumstances on the moor near Hartland Tor. A bronze plaque was added to each stone, manufactured by

Vickers, Maxim & Co, bearing the words: *This stone marks a crossing through the peat, which may be of use to hunting and cattlemen; the crossing was made by Frank Phillpotts, who died October 1909, it is kept up in his memory by brother and son.*

Seventeen stones were cut and taken out by pack horse, the last ones being put in place in 1919 at Walkham Head Peat Pass. For some reason the peat pass at Ockment Hill never had stones erected – did they run out, miscount, or was there some other reason, even that they thought they didn't need them? These stones were 2 feet 6 inches (76cm) high, 5 inches (12.7cm) thick and 7 inches (17.8cm) wide. Some of the stones stand in peat banks while others lean against the eroding peat walls and are in danger of being lost should the peat collapse. Brian Le Messurier mentions this fact in his paper in the Devonshire Association Transactions in 1965. Since then some stone posts have disappeared, possibly into the peat. The survey below was undertaken by Brian Le Messurier in the summer and autumn of 1964. Each pass is described from east to west, except Little Kneeset and Black Ridge cuts which run north to south.

WHITEHORSE HILL

This is 270 yards (247m) long and comes up from the north end of the Sand Path and winds its way up the hillside to within a few feet of the summit mound of Whitehorse Hill. This pass was 'adopted' by the military authorities in 1963, when they widened it to enable their vehicles to move from Hangingstone Hill to Quintin's Man via Whitehorse Hill. The new track from Hangingstone Hill joins the cut 20 yards (18m) from the eastern memorial stone and follows it to the top.

EAST DART HEAD

Some 330 yards (302m) south-south-west of the top of Whitehorse Hill cut there is a prominent, isolated peat hag bearing a memorial stone. This marks the east end of the cut which leads down to East Dart Head. There is hard ground between the two cuts, for overlaying has been stripped by many years of peat cutting. The cut is wide and grassy and only 40 yards (37m) long. One memorial stone may be seen from the other. The crossing continues beyond the western stone for some distance.

MARSH HILL (also known as Stats House Cut)

The eastern memorial stone is 100 yards (91m) north-west of Stats House and visible from it. Parts of the crossing are indistinct but it is marked by animal tracks. There are one or two sections of causeway along the 360 yard (329m) crossing, which runs downhill in a south-westerly direction. It comes from the fen on to hard ground that borders Broadamarsh by a stone ramp. The bottom marker stands to the north of the ramp.

The edge of the fen here is quite pronounced. The bottom marker broke in half many years ago and was repaired by a metal pin and cement by Mr M Spiller at the request of Mr Raleigh Phillpotts.

FLAT TOR

The left bank of the tributary that joins the East Dart below Broadamarsh is followed up to Cowflop Bottom, where it divides. The northern branch is then traced. At the top of the gully is a memorial stone seen on the north bank. The crossing of the watershed from here is achieved by several lengths of causeway (now rather broken up since 1964) linking stretches of good ground. Stone clapper bridges span the gutters. The western stone is kept in position by wooden stakes.

NORTH-WEST PASSAGE

A hard, grassy strip between the rim of the fen and headwaters of an unnamed tributary of

the East Dart forms the south-east foot of Cut Hill. A narrow neck of fen separates the east foot of Cut Hill and is a prominent feature of the landscape when viewed from the upper end of Sandy Hole Pass. A 50 yard (46m) cut to link these two areas has been made through the bog and this is marked at the south end by a memorial stone and a 'cairn' which is a pile of stones at the north end by two cairns. The cut is deep and narrow with a slight bend halfway along, and partly choked with fallen peat. If the grassy corridor is followed up the hill from the end of the cut for 200 yards (183m), a reed-grown opening to the main section of the North-West Passage is reached on the left hand side. A memorial stone is on the bank. The bottom end of this part of the cut winds considerably and is steep and narrow, but it soon opens out and the passage becomes a green track between isolated peat hags, marked in one or two places by small cairns. The western memorial stone stands on a peat bank about 200 yards (183m) south of Cut Hill summit and is not visible from it, but the crossing may be followed further in the direction of Fur Tor. The main part of North-West Passage is about 450 yards (411m) between the stones. The name was given to the cut by Mr Sam Adams, the Master of the Lamerton Hunt.

WALKHAM HEAD

The eastern approach to this cut is up the left bank of a small stream that flows into the Tavy towards the upper end of Tavy Hole. This was last cleared out in 1956 when a gutter to drain away the surface water was dug. Nearly half-way along the cut bends, and the western end is in better condition. The western memorial stone stands up well and can be seen from some distance. The cut is about 150 yards (137m) long.

BLACK RIDGE

The West Ockment has two branches at its head. Its true source is the eastern branch, which rises on the fen a few yards from Cranmere Pool. The other tributary flows north from Black Ridge. A few yards up the cut a stone leans against a peat bank. This cut meanders uphill in a south-westerly direction for a short distance before becoming more open in character and bears away southwards. The crossing passes a few yards east of the top of Black Ridge. It becomes a cut again and then opens out once more. The track is marked by many small cairns where the crossing is open.

The southern stone stands in a small cairn some way in from the actual end of the crossing but is so sited as to be seen by a person coming up the hill from Black Ridge Brook. The length of this cut is about 1000 yards (914m) and is the longest on the moors.

OCKMENT HILL

This cut is entered from the north-west corner of Ockerton or Huggaton Court. There is no memorial stone to tell the traveller they are in a Phillpotts cut, but one or two cairns help to guide you to the cutting. It winds down the hillside for 230 yards (210m). The west end is by a low cairn on a bank, but it is difficult to see from afar. A friend has shown me what he considers to be another cut near the peat pool which runs downhill in a south-westerly direction. He has known it for many years as Hammond's Cut.

A number of failed peat passes were started but then abandoned such as Lamerton Lane, which if completed would have helped travel from the East Dart to Little Kneeset. It was first started in the 1920s by Mr Raleigh Phillpotts who got some men to cut it. As it was heading towards Lamerton Hunt country, it became known as Lamerton Lane.

NORTH DARTMOOR PEAT PASSES SURVEYED

by Paul Rendell & Max Piper 2023

A documentation of all of the peat passes that were cut under the instruction of Frank Phillpotts, who wanted an easier means for hunters and cattlemen to access the remote, boggy plateau of North Dartmoor on horseback. Most of the passes are marked with memorial posts at each end to show the walker where to enter. Unfortunately to our understanding they are no longer maintained and so this table hopes to showcase what work needs to be carried out.

Name of Peat Pass	Date	Location of granite post with GR	Location of granite post with GR	Length of Peat Pass	State of Peat Pass	Photo taken	NOTES
Black Ridge Cut	26/8/23	South end very good plaque, stone a little loose, SX 59526 84881	Plaque very good, stone firm, SX 59769 85855	1.13km or 1130m	South end not easy to follow, the rest okay, north end not easy	X	Pass forks on top of hill
Cut Hill North-West Passage Short	26/8/23	East end stone firm, no plaques. Not the original post, SX 60266 82264	West end stone loose, plaque okay, SX 60249 82223	59.3m	Just walkable	X	New plaque needed
Cut Hill North-West Passage Main	26/8/23	Plaque bending, stone loose, SX 60153 82427	Top fallen, needs new location, SX 59792 82548	0.40km or 400m (OS shows it longer)	Bottom not walkable, top can be walked	X	Most people use the path above the left bank of pass

East Dart Head Cut	14/8/23	Lower SX 61378 85019	Higher SX 61540 85057. New post. Tiny commemorative plaque missing	0.19km or 190m	Can walk through pass	X	In very good condition
Flat Tor Also known as Johnson's Cut	26/8/23	Stone is facing wrong way. Stone and plaque are fine, SX 61111 81394	Stone is facing the wrong way and loose. Plaque is fine, SX 61205 81443	0.32km or 320m	No peat pass to be seen, just a path in places	X	Should stones be moved to face the right way?
Hammond's Cut Also known as Okement Hill	6/9/23	No posts	No posts	0.29km or 290m	Top walkable, bottom not walkable	X	Should we have posts here? Is this where a post briefly appeared in 2006?
Huggaton Cut Also known as Okement Hill	26/8/23	No posts	No posts	0.30km or 300m	Top walkable, bottom not walkable	X	Should we have posts here? One was said to have appeared briefly in 2006 before vanishing
Marsh Hill Also known as Stats House	14/8/23	Higher SX 62077 82503. Very good post and plaque	Lower SX 61860 82292. Very good post and plaque	0.32km or 320m	Very good and useable	X	Raised Causeway, lined with stone in places with ramp at lower end
Pinswell Cut	26/8/23	Stone loose, plaque okay, needs moving, SX 59057 84046	Both stone and plaque good, though stone faces wrong way, SX 59154 84346	0.33km or 330m	Walkable most of the way	X	Stone needs moving, in danger of falling

Walkham Head Cut	26/8/23	West end plaque missing, stone loose, SX 57787 81377	Stone and plaque good, SX 57847 81491	0.16km or 160m	Not walkable	X	New plaque needed
Whitehorse Hill Cut	14/8/23	West SX 61758 85498. Post is new with tiny commemorative plaque missing. Surrounded by water	East SX 62013 85537. Good condition	0.28km or 280m	Good, wide and very useable	X	One of the best on the moor

Additional Blank Marker Stones

These are not Phillpotts’ stones but are listed because of their interest

Name of Peat Pass	Date	GR	GR	GR	GR	GR	GR	Photo taken
Black Ridge Cut	26/8/23	No.1 SX 59577 85080	No.2 SX 59587 85218	No.3 SX 59593 85260	No.4 SX 59616 85320	No.5 SX 59653 85686	No.6 SX 59699 85801	X

Author's note: Much of the information for this article comes from Eric Hemery and Brian Le Messurier. Permission to use their material has come from the families concerned. They were the first people to record and survey these peat passes.

Thanks to Max Piper and Peter H.L for their help with this article.

References:

Hemery, Eric; *Uncharted Tracks of Dartmoor; Country Life*; 10th October 1957

Le Messurier, Brian; *The Phillpotts Peat Passes of Northern Dartmoor: A Pioneer Survey*; Transactions of the Devonshire Association, Volume 97 (1965)



Frank Phillpotts on his horse



One of the cairns at Black Ridge Peat Pass *Paul Rendell*



The lower peat pass marker at Marsh Hill *Paul Rendell*



Plaque missing and stone loose at Walkham Peat Pass

Paul Rendell

DARTEFACTS CLASSIFICATIONS: CROSSES

This is the second of a series of articles by Max Piper explaining the comprehensive classification system used on Dartefacts, a website showcasing Dartmoor's Artefacts that is without doubt the most detailed database of items to be found across Dartmoor, with more than 17,000 listed. To learn about how the site's owner, Rob Naylor, came up with the concept of a Dartmoor website, you are directed to Dartmoor News, Issue 174, May/June 2020.

One of the defining features across the vast Dartmoor landscape is its granite crosses; typically tall, grand and rich in history, these landmarks are a staple that every visitor to the moor will likely encounter at least one of – and are particularly welcoming when they reveal themselves in the looming mist. Their presence in the modern day for many visitors begs many questions; why was this cross sited here, why is it so tall (or short), how old is it, and what was/is its purpose?



Week Down Cross

Max Piper

The Dartefacts website has a Crosses classification that clearly marks all of the crosses that are to be found across Dartmoor National Park – including a few in peripheral villages – on an interactive Ordnance Survey (OS) 1:50,000 map (or 1:25,000 for logged in Subscribed Users). This is extremely useful in seeing which crosses are adjacent to roads, and are therefore accessible to those with limited mobility, and those which form a 'chain' and are clearly related to one another, such as across the northern rim of the South Moor.

Dartefacts lists (as of May 2024) 223 crosses, and this endeavour is largely thanks to the works of various individuals, including William Crossing, Bill Harrison, Tim Sandles, FH Starkey and GW Ormerod, all of whom have written books and/or articles documenting the crosses of the moor. Last, but certainly not least, is the

incredible Dartmoor Crosses website, run by Glenn Bearne and Maurice Daniel, collating information from the above resources and more, showcasing photographs, the dimensions of each cross if known, and the purpose of each cross. In some instances, a cross may have had multiple roles; the well-known Bennett's Cross, for instance, had three:

- As a boundary stone for the civil parishes of North Bovey and Chagford.
- As a boundary stone for the Headland Warren rabbit warren encircling Birch Tor (incised on one face of the cross is 'WB' denoting Warren Bounds).
- As a boundary stone showing the limit of the Vitifer Mine complex.

Trying to classify crosses based on their purpose, therefore, is a complicated task so Dartefacts has chosen four defining features to group similar crosses together, summarised briefly here but in more detail on the website:

- Churchyard Crosses – Any cross residing within (or just outside of) a churchyard.
- Moorland Crosses – Any cross residing within open moorland away from roads and settlements; the most famous type of cross.
- Village Crosses – Any cross residing within a hamlet, village or town (and outside of a churchyard).
- Wayside Crosses – Any cross residing adjacent to a road but outside of any settlement.

Dartefacts provides a lot for the Subscribed User: they can tick off the Crosses as and when they visit them, either one by one or in bulk using the bulk tick lists; view OS grid references for each cross; explore walking routes visiting at least one Dartmoor 365 square (of which a number are crosses), an ongoing task; and, as for all, any useful information and a photograph.

Together with all of the other items that Dartefacts records, the 'cross bagger' will have great reason to use the site to plan routes.

It is recommended to purchase books about Dartmoor crosses (by the respective authors above) to assist you in your explorations, as Dartefacts does not provide the actual content of the individual pages which are published and are therefore typically copyrighted works.

Next page: Crosses marking an ancient track traversing the wilds of the South Moor. The main Crosses classification shows all 223 crosses (at the time of writing) only on an OS map.

TALES OF SOME DARTMOOR CROSSES

Paul Rendell takes a look at a granite cross that has been badly treated

Headland Farm Cross (SX 51600 76200)

This cross is beside a dead end road leading to Coxtor Farm. Up until 1981 it was also known as Coxtor Gate Cross as it then served as a gatepost nearby.

Today the cross is beside a hedge near a gateway just after a sharp bend in the road. It stands 3 feet 9 inches (1.15 metres) tall and about 1 foot 8 inches (0.50 metres) across the arms. The original position is not known but was possibly along the road from Moorshop to Peter Tavy. This cross has been misused as one of the arms is missing. It is not known when it was first used as a gatepost but Masson Phillips records it being used as such in 1937. Harry Starkey says the gateway was widened in 1981 and the cross moved to its present location

Further information: www.dartmoor-crosses.org.uk

Sandles, Tim; *A Pilgrimage to Dartmoor's Crosses*; Forest Publishing (1997)

Starkey, F Harry; *Dartmoor Crosses & Some Ancient Tracks* (1981)



The cross in 2024

Paul Rendell

WALKS TO LESSER-KNOWN TORS

WRAY CLEAVE

This expedition, the third instalment in this series of walks to lesser-known tors, visits Wray Cleave, a hillside that both Max Piper and the Editor, together with volunteers and a DNPA Ranger, have worked on tirelessly to improve public access

Starting Point: Blackingstone Rock Car Park (SX 78648 85682)

Distance: 4 miles (6.4km)

Severity: Moderate to difficult; a walk consisting of quiet country lanes but with a steep descent of Pepperdon Hall Lane and an equally steep climb in Wray Cleave, followed by a stiff ascent out of Wray Cleave near Lewdons Farm.

Time: 2½ hours

Nearest Facilities: Toilets and eateries in Moretonhampstead; pub in Bridford

Overview: Enjoy a walk on East Dartmoor starting at the majestic lump of Blackingstone Rock, followed by a pleasant wander along quiet lanes to reach Wray Cleave, a steep hillside that is brimming with wildlife. Listen out for the birdsong, explore the granite tors that can be seen from the top footpath, and catch the bluebells if you take this walk in May. Leave the car park and turn right to follow the lane uphill. Ignore a right and left turning to pass the entrance to Blackenstone Quarry and Didworthy Cottages, turning left after the latter. This lane soon bends sharply to the right and gently ascends to meet the main Hennock-Cossick Cross lane. As you crest the hill the views become far-reaching. Turn right and, after little more than 100m, turn left down a rough farm track to meet another lane; turn left again. Above this very narrow lane, characterised by grass growing in the middle, stands the outcrop known as Little Pepperdon; on its crest is a deeply drilled hole, presumably to once support the base of a flagpole. Carrying on down the lane, pass Pepperdon Farm and take the right to begin



Moor Barton Avenue

Max Piper

rapidly descending Pepperdon Hall Lane. Signed at either end as not being suitable for motor vehicles, this incredibly steep, twisting lane passes a house and you will need to turn left, signed 'Wray Cleave'. Descend the steps on the footpath and follow it as it curves right, then left, before crossing a stream and becoming flat. To the left the trees clear. Look out for a waymarker on the left bank; when you come to this, bear left and start the lung-busting climb, weaving between trees. On Dartmoor, 'cleave' is a ubiquitous term, especially in the eastern part, almost certainly derived from the Anglo-Saxon 'cleof'; cliff. This delightful path becomes less taxing as it bends southward and keeps to the upper contours of Wray Cleave. However, it does abruptly angle left to crest Furze Park Tor, which has also seen an old wall built into it. Follow the waymark posts along this route, dropping down slightly to cross a stream. The next section is rather arduous but the steps make the climb more manageable, plus there are fine views of the huge rocks of Wray Cleave Wood Tor to experience. This is a mammoth tor.



Furze Park Tor

Max Piper

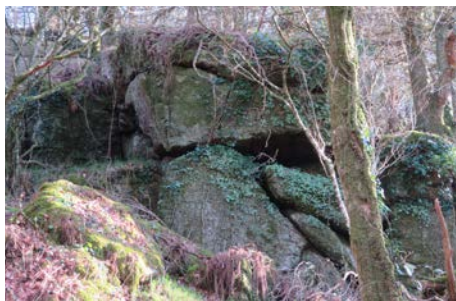


Gate out of Wray Cleave

Max Piper

Take a breather at the summit of the steps and, ignoring a left turning, continue southward above the lesser, but nonetheless striking, pile of Middle Tor, and diminutive South Tor. Keeping left at a path junction, rise to a dilapidated wall and proceed through a wooden gate. This fenced-in path runs adjacent to a field and a stone wall and scales a stile. Carry on through a gate at the junction here, now following a permissive path beside two more fields, to reach two stiles and a lane. Turn right and, after about 200m, left, signed 'Didworthy Cottages via Moor Barton'. Following the tree-lined driveway, this wonderful track is seen at its best in autumn, but the colours are vibrant all year round. Once at Moor Barton, bear left as signposted and walk beneath a fantastic avenue of trees, with Trenchford Stream trickling below. The source of this stream is very close to this path and, as such, it can be wet.

At the sharp bend on the lane, meeting up with where you were earlier, keep right, then turn right at Didworthy Cottages. To visit the jewel of Blackingstone Rock, or Blackystone, as it is known in the locality, bear right, signed 'Christow, Hennock', and left through a gate on a footpath to the tor. If it is neither windy nor wet and you do not fear heights, you can carefully ascend the crudely erected Victorian staircase to the dizzying summit, at 355m, where the vista is excellent. The eminence is pitted with impressive rock basins. William Crossing remarks of this and a neighbouring tor; *Like Hel Tor, it is seen for many miles round, but according to tradition there was a time when these tors were not to be seen at all. This tells us that on the hills on which they are*



Wray Cleave Wood Tor

Max Piper

placed King Arthur and the Evil One once took their stand and threw quoits at each other, an encounter in which the latter was defeated. As the quoits fell they became changed into rocks, and thus the masses that we now look upon were formed. After admiring the feature, return to the car park by taking a small path around the west side of the outcrop.

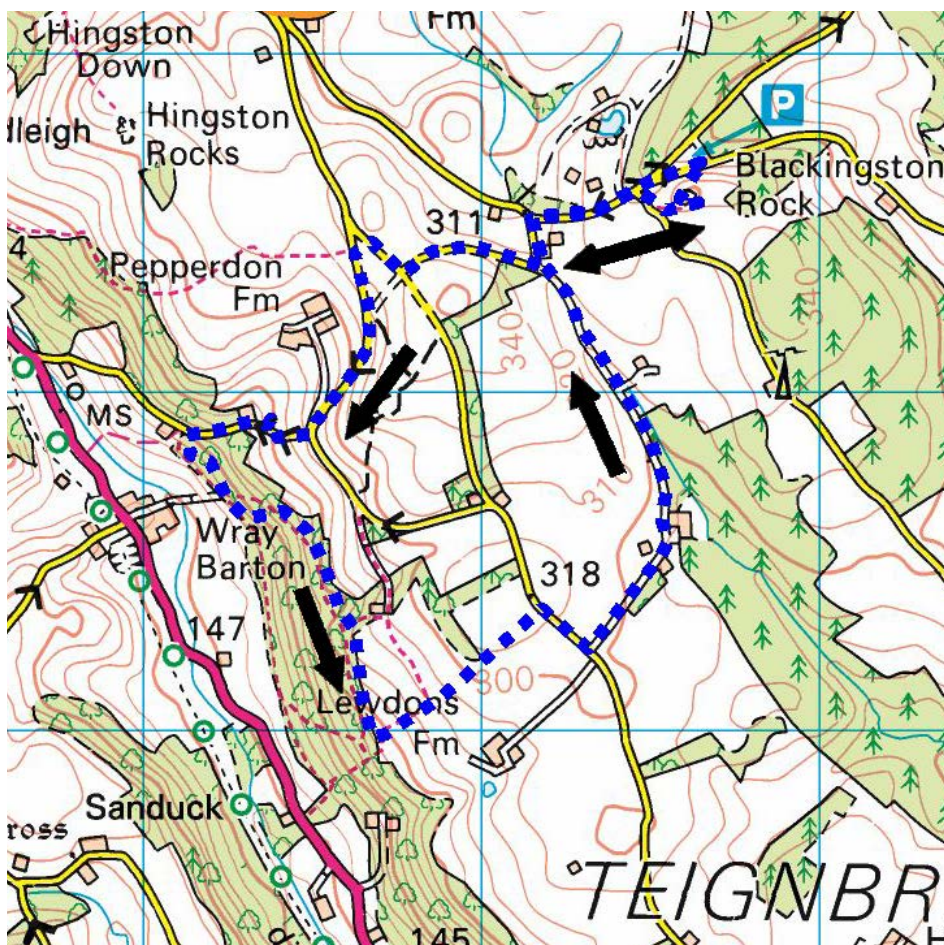
Further Reading:

Crossing, William; *Guide to Dartmoor*; David & Charles, Newton Abbot (1965 reprint of original 1912 edition)

Jenkinson, Tim; *Dartmoor Magazine*, Issue 133, Winter 2018: *The Rock Piles of East Dartmoor: The hidden landscape Part 2*

Piper, Max; *Dartmoor News*, Issue 173, March/April 2020: *Exploring the Tors in Wray Cleave Wood*

Piper, Max; *East Dartmoor's Lesser-Known Tors and Rocks*; The Dartmoor Company, Okehampton (2022)



THE STORY OF WRAY CLEAVE

By Paul Rendell

Wray Cleave lies in the Wray Valley and is an Ancient Semi Natural Woodland (ASNW), in other words woodland that has developed naturally with trees growing here for 400 years. Wray Cleave forms part of the continuous run of woodland each side of the road between Moretonhampstead and Bovey Tracey and the high ground to the south of Moretonhampstead.

Within these woods you will find rocky outcrops and part of the area was once a micaceous hematite mine which was worked in the early 20th century before production ceased around 1931. The mine was probably the most extensive of the Wray Valley workings, employing between three and twelve men at any one time and yielding an average of 210 tonnes of ore a year. Remnants from this mining era include the mine buildings, a wheel pit and two large circular buddles, a tramway, two adits and spoil tips, an explosives store, a small granite quarry and a few leats.



Wray Mine 2007

Paul Rendell



One of the blocked paths which is now cleared

Paul Rendell

The hillside is very steep with some wonderful nature within the woods. At one time the woods would have been carefully managed as the remains of charcoal burning platforms can be found as well as signs of coppicing.

Steward Wood and Wray Cleave were previously part of the extensive Dartington Woodlands Holdings owned by Wray Barton. After the area was sold DNPA acquired Wray Cleave and part of nearby Steward Wood (the rest of

Steward Wood is privately owned), taking over about 25 hectares on 29th March 1974. At the time of purchase the woodland was scheduled to be clear felled and replanted with exotic conifer species. DNPA fenced the woods to keep livestock out and this attracted 75% funding from the Countryside Agency on the basis that the woods were being bought to maintain the amenity value of the area and that sporting rights would not be exercised. The area was also used in the medieval period as the remains of ridges and furrows can still be seen today in the area known as the Meadow.

New vehicle access was established from the A382 to a locked gate at the edge of the woods. DNPA supplied and laid stone across the field. A ride was created along the



Trying to dig in a gatepost

Paul Rendell

area becoming overgrown and attracting fewer and fewer walkers. I visited Wray Cleave in 2007 and found that the micaceous hematite mine had recently been cleared which was good to see. The rest of the woods were very easy to walk but two years ago I and a number of walkers tried to walk the rights of way again and had problems following them. We contacted DNPA and a meeting was arranged in January 2023 for these walkers and DNPA staff to talk through what could be done. A small team of volunteers was put together, led by DNPA Assistant Ranger Stuart Hooppell. Work started in February 2023 surveying the paths on the ground and comparing those to the definitive map, which could be different to the OS map. Routes were then decided on as close as possible to the definitive map bearing in mind physically impassable barriers (eg granite tors!) and the steepness of the terrain.

lower boundary sweeping up around the mines in 1976. A further spur was added in 1986 to gain access for sycamore felling. A small loading and stacking bay was created in 1986 during the ride extension work to enable easier handling of timber and timber products. Since the 1990s small clumps of non-native cherry laurel have been removed and this work still takes place today.

There were a number of rights of way leading to and passing through Wray Cleave; over the years these have deteriorated with the



Hidden rocks within the woods

Paul Rendell

Once the survey was complete work started on restoring and reviving the paths in the cleave, cutting through fallen trees, cutting back the vegetation, adding waymark posts, erecting gates, building steps and generally having fun.



Putting in a post

Stuart Hooppell

Because of the site's topography, volunteers often needed to transport timber, tools and waymark posts up and down steep hills by hand – something made a little easier with, as Stuart Hooppell remarked, 'good humour and doughnuts'.

'There was real joint ownership of the project,' Stuart continued, 'It has been an incredible effort by everyone, and thanks go to the neighbouring landowners who gave us vehicle access across their land. What the team have achieved is amazing – they certainly expended more energy than the doughnuts could offer! – and they should feel proud for seeing this challenging project through.'

One of the worst days working on site was when we were trying to replace an old stile with a new gate. Wherever we tried to dig a hole for the gatepost big rocks were in the way. We managed to smash most of the rocks but we could not get as deep as we wanted. After three hours digging the hole and smashing the rocks, we managed to get one of the gateposts in place. Doing this wasn't the only problem as we had cows watching and 'helping' – in the end we had to fence ourselves off to keep the animals away. Then of course it was wet and muddy all the time ... but the work went on into the evening until we finished. I think some of us were ready to give up on those gateposts.



Some completed steps

Paul Rendell

The work was completed in June 2024, thanks to this group of tenacious and passionate volunteers, Max Piper, Paul Rendell, Tim Brook, Bill Potter, Paul Buck, Tim Jenkinson, and Barry Welch, led by Assistant Ranger Stuart Hooppell.

FACTS

275 volunteer hours
 3 stile to gate conversions
 40 oak waymarkers
 40 steps
 3km of footpaths strimmed / slashed
 About a dozen trees cleared from across the paths
 100 metres or so of earthworks to make paths easier to walk
 About 400 doughnuts eaten
 Oh, and don't forget the hand rail!

Over the last sixteen months the Wray Cleave team have dedicated 275 volunteering hours – including entire days and evenings – to cut, dig and bracken-bash their way around the site in a bid to re-establish this steep and beautiful valley as somewhere for all to appreciate and enjoy. With clusters of lesser-known tors, old stone walls, veteran oak trees, footpaths and glade openings, Wray Cleave is now a special place for quiet enjoyment and tranquillity

References:

DNPA Report about Wray Cleave written by Rupert Lane (unpublished)

Dartmoor News: various issues between March/April 2020 and July/August 2024

DARTMOOR EVENTS

Bovey Tracey Heritage Trust Talks

Forthcoming talks at the Bovey Tracey Heritage Trust over the next few months. Phoenix Hall, St John's Lane, Bovey Tracey. 7.30pm. Admission: £4.00 members; £6.00 non-members. Further information from Mike Lang on 01626 821631.

SEPTEMBER

24th (Tues) Reverend Bray's Bardic Boulders – Sermons in Stone. An illustrated talk by Simon Dell.

OCTOBER

22nd (Tues) Dartmoor: Land of Lore and Legend. An illustrated talk by Michael Bennie.

NOVEMBER

26th (Tues) AGM followed by an update talk on the Devon House of Mercy by Frances Billinge.

Dartmoor Tinworking Research Group (DTRG) visits

An Exploration of the Sortridge Mines

Sunday 15th September 2024 between 10.30 am and 3.30pm

Meet at Bleak House car park – grid reference SX 509 725

Accessible via the lane to Higher Statsford

Leader: Stephen Holley. This circular 4.5 mile (7.2km) walk will visit a number of tin mine remains on Plaster Down and the remains of North Wheal Roberts and Sortridge Consols. North Wheal Roberts and Sortridge Consols were mainly copper producers, but both also produced some tin – 84 tons and 34 tons respectively.

Please bring a packed lunch. If you wish to attend please e-mail chairman@dtrg.org.uk.

Visit to Lady Bertha Mine followed by Lunch and Talk

Saturday 19th October 2024

Meet at Access Land north of Berra Tor settlement at 10.30am.

Grid reference SX 479 694. In the morning we will be visiting Lady Bertha Mine. The DTRG have never visited this mine as it was principally a copper mine. However it did also produce some tin and the remains of the tin dressing floors survive along with other building remains and wheelpits. There is a half mile walk to the mine. Following the visit to Lady Bertha Mine we will make our way to the Yelverton Golf Club for lunch at the period club house (grid reference SX 517 666). Following the meal there will be a talk/presentation. Numbers for both the walk and/or meal to Stephen Holley.

E-mail chairman@dtrg.org.uk or phone 01752 880029

SPOTLIGHT ON DARTMOOR BRIDGES

Paul Rendell explores a very old bridge on west Dartmoor

HORRABRIDGE BRIDGE (SX 51325 69914)

HOW TO FIND: In the centre of the village of Horrabridge.



Horrabridge Bridge

Paul Rendell

HISTORY: The name of the bridge is generally accepted as meaning 'boundary bridge'. It was the meeting place of four parishes – Buckland Monachorum, Sampford Spiney, Walkhampton and Whitchurch – until October 1950, when Horrabridge became its own parish.

The bridge has three acutely-pointed arches. There are recesses for foot passengers over each of the cutwaters, these being very necessary considering that the width between parapets is only 11 feet (3.4m) and the total span is 16 yards (14.6m). The present bridge was built in the 11th century and is one of the oldest in Devon. There is evidence of an even older bridge beneath the existing road.

The oldest spelling seems to be Horebrigge in 1345. In 1396 it was spelt Horebrugge when



The boundary cross on the bridge

Paul Rendell

There are two hidden 'C' stones, the northern one is at SX 51423 69946, while the southern stone can be found at SX 51276 69833. There is also a disused GR post box, now painted black, on the outside of the old post office building.

OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION: The opening antique village vignette in the BBC children's television programme *Bagpuss* (first broadcast in 1974) is a cropped 1898 image of Horrabridge. The road bridge can be busy so be careful exploring this wonderful structure.

Bishop Stafford granted an indulgence for the upkeep of the bridge between Barum (Barnstaple) and Plymouth. In 1665 it was called Harrowbridge and by 1675 had become Hollowbridge. The bridge became Grade 1 listed on 14th June 1952.

THINGS TO SEE: Not easy to see, but embedded in the bridge parapet (downstream side) is an inscribed cross. This was also the boundary between various parishes before 1950. There is a rivet and bench mark on the upstream parapet.



The bench mark and rivet

Paul Rendell



Horrabridge north 'C' stone

Mark Fenlon



Horrabridge south 'C' stone

Mark Fenlon

THE WICKHAM TROLLEYS AT ROW TOR

By Richard Burt

On the north moor near Row Tor is a disused target railway with a shed at one end. The engines that were used on these tracks were Wickham Trolleys, made by Wickhams based in Ware, Hertfordshire. The main product they made before the Second World War was bottle washing machines, the trolleys were built for war production. The company is no longer in existence.



The Wickham Shed

Paul Rendell

The original Wickham Trolleys arrived on Okehampton range in 1943/44 and were disposed of in the 1960s. One of these engines went to the Museum of Dartmoor Life in Okehampton, and the other to the Army Apprentice College, Chepstow. When Chepstow closed it was given to the Army museum at Beverley but that also closed. All items then went to auction. The engine was a two cylinder, side-valve unit of 870cc, made by JA Prestwych, makers of agricultural and industrial engines. The trolley covers are armour plate. The braking system is vacuum and it has a manual handbrake. Drive to the axle is via chain. Axle width/gauge is 30 inches. The only other original Wickham set-up the writer knows of is at Fort George in Scotland. There is also a modern version, believed to be at Lulworth tank range.

During 2001, when foot and mouth disease broke out in the UK, all military training stopped on Dartmoor and the range staff had to remain on camp. The commandant at the time, Lt Col Tony Clark, was very keen on all aspects of military heritage and knew of a collection of Wickham Trolleys awaiting the scrapheap elsewhere in the country. He also knew of my interest and asked me to help. When two engines arrived at Okehampton they were repainted and got running, ready to be returned to the anti-tank range on

Dartmoor. During the Second World War, H-range was the anti-tank range and had various old tank hulks as hard targets, and a Wickham target trainer that was made up of two trolleys, a shed and a railway line in the shape of a figure-of-eight. This would allow the engines to continue running for long periods and return to the shed when live firing was complete. On top of the trolley would sit a target made of a wood frame and hessian, in the shape of a vehicle, tank or running troops.



The Wickham Trolley

Paul Rendell

The anti-tank weapon of the day was the 'Boys' anti-tank rifle, followed by the Projector, Infantry, Anti-Tank weapon, or PIAT. A few days before the new engine was due on the range it appeared that the width of the track was greater than the width of the trolley axle, the track being 30 inches compared to the Wickham engine at 24 inches.

I expressed my displeasure, in a less-than-polite manner, to the Commandant. 'Don't worry Dick' he said, 'I will recover the original trolley from Okehampton museum; they still belong to the Queen!'

This extra six inches gave the system stability in the high winds and bad weather conditions often experienced on Dartmoor. The trolley was soon collected from the museum but it was in a bad way. Rusty and with no engine, it was going to be necessary to start all over again and remove all parts from the good trolley and rehouse them in the useless trolley.

The foot and mouth epidemic was still going on, so, with no range work or live firing, I restarted the project but with far less enthusiasm than I had for the original project! I cannot remember how long this operation took me but I went ahead and, in time, had a working trolley ready to go with the correct axle width for the line. 'Very good. I'm sure the Queen will be more than pleased!'

It would require helicopter support in order to re-locate the unit from camp to its new home on the range, so, for the next step, the Commandant arranged to send the trolley up to the Joint Air Delivery Test and Evaluation Unit at Brize Norton. After evaluation at Brize we were told that we were on a very long waiting list for an airlift so, after the all-clear was given for foot and mouth, we put the engine on a trailer and delivered it to H-range. We got the trolley on the line, engine running, and after a full day of testing around the figure-of-eight track, all was looking good.



The type of target that would have been used on the trolley

Paul Rendell



Richard Burt beside the trolley

Paul Rendell

Soon after the work was completed the MOD changed the anti-tank weapon system for the British military land forces. Overnight this mothballed the Wickham system as it was not compatible with the new weapons. A few years later there was a live firing exercise involving HE (High Explosive) grenades.

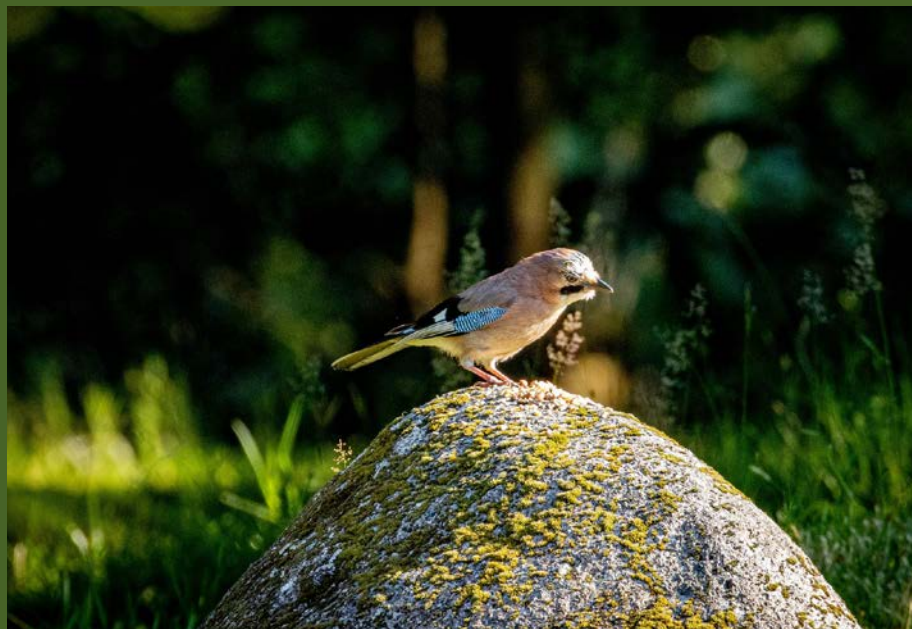
Some of these grenades, lobbed over the bank that protected the line, landed on it destroying portions of the rail and bending the profile so the trolley could not run – and it never has to this day.

Today you can still see the engine shed and part of the disused tramway but nature is slowly taking over. All part of the military history of Dartmoor.

NATURE NOTES

A round-up of what is happening in the natural world on the moor. If you see any unusual wildlife, please let us know

During June Hillary Radcliffe saw a red kite flying around a number of times over South Zeal.



Jay near Nosworthy Bridge

Dartmoor Chris

During May and early June the Sheepstor Commoners asked the RSPB to undertake a bird count at Ditsworthy Warren. On 18th May they recorded 19 species including a mallard, two cuckoos, three snipe, two willow warblers, three reed buntings, 12 carrion crows, 73 skylarks, 11 stonechats and 48 meadow pipits.

On 1st June they recorded 23 species including three mallard, three cuckoo, one snipe, 300 herring gulls, four lesser black-backed gulls, 116 rooks, 38 carrion crows, one goldcrest, one redstart, seven stonechats, 71 skylarks, 45 meadow pipits and five reed buntings. Both counts were over a four hour period.

Lots of bog pimpernel were seen on the west side of Little Cox Tor, near Cox Tor Farm. Jays are often seen at Nosworthy Bridge, Burrator. Dartmoor Chris managed to photograph this one on a rock.



Royal fern in flower

Paul Rendell

There has been a big increase in the number of royal ferns growing in the River Tavy valley. They prefer moist, rich soils and are partial to full shade. They are commonly found in wetland habitats such as bogs, swamps, and along the banks of streams and rivers and are considered an important food source for several species of wildlife.

It is not often you see hares on Dartmoor, but there is one location where they can be seen and that area is increasing. The Editor saw one the other evening which was great. The area is kept secret as some people like to hunt hares.



Hare

Paul Rendell

It has not been a very good year for butterflies, even the usually common ones have been rare. Should the Devon Wildlife Trust and other organisations start breeding butterflies before we start losing even more of them?

On 3rd August the Editor saw a roe deer in the road near Belstone village.

Two swallows were seen by Chris Chapman flying over Cut Hill on 12th August.

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TALES FROM THE MUSEUM

This time Kristy Turner from Okehampton's Museum of Dartmoor Life looks at spells

SPELL CHECK

Roald Dahl wrote 'There is a little witch in all of us, waiting to be set free' and maybe that is true, as spells have been a part of everyday life from Egyptian times to today. At the museum we have a photo of a white witch's market stall selling spells and blessings to the public of Okehampton with many people gathered around. Before the birth of the National Health Service, doctors were expensive luxuries for most and some healers had great success with their spells, lotions and potions which they sold for a fraction of the cost.

Even today on Dartmoor there are farmers who swear by the abilities of charmers to heal their animals and vanquish their warts.

Currently on display in the museum are a selection of handwritten spells we think are from the late 1800s, as can be seen in this photograph. Here is a translation of one of them;

A Blessing for a strain -

'Christ over the bridge he rides

strain his leg down he lights

puts it to rights blood to blood

vein to vein by Christ's help

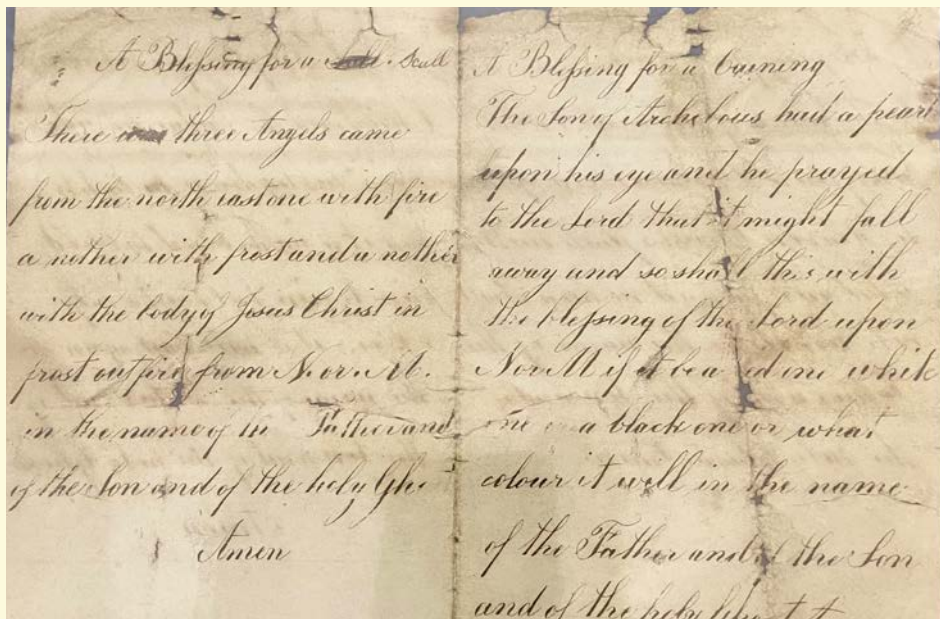
N or M it will hail again in

the name of the Father and of

the Son and of the holy Ghost.

Amen.'

As you can see, some wise folk kept a foot in both courts, and many spells at this time mention Christ, his disciples and the angels. However, this is not a prayer. Prayers involve asking a deity for help but leaving the results in the god's hands. Spells work with the power of spoken words and results are expected. We now know how powerful words are and the use of placebos in medical testing shows that people can get well or improve if they are told that something will make them better. Many of us agree with the power of positive thinking today.



The handwritten spell

But just as positive words can lift our energy and make us feel great, negative words can destroy a person and this is where the idea of black magic develops. Just look at so called 'trolls' on social media to see the damage still being done today.

Surviving written records of historical magic spells were largely obliterated in many cultures, due to the growth of Christianity and other monotheistic religions.

They promoted the idea that magical activity was associated with the devil or evil spirits. But generally, the wise folk of yesteryear were just trying to help their communities acting as councillors, healers, midwives, herbalists and vets. Interestingly there are testimonies singing their praises but many would never have called themselves Witch.



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HIDDEN IN PEAT ON CUT HILL

By Paul Rendell

I have been visiting Cut Hill on the north moor since the 1980s and have seen many changes there with the peat eroding away over the years. I first saw the big slabs of stone across the top of the hill when I was letterboxing but took no notice of them – they were later identified as a stone row. In the early 2000s I saw some stone in the bank near the top of the hill but once again took no notice except to think it did not look natural. In 2016 I noticed these stones in the peat bank had become more exposed but still did not take much notice of them.



The site in April 2021

Paul Rendell

Over the next few years I became more aware of them. In April 2021 I was leading a guided walk to Fur Tor via Cut Hill. As we climbed to the summit on my usual route, Steve Diamond was in front of me as we reached the stones, which I had been watching for years. Steve turned to me and we both spoke at the same time, 'That looks like a cist'. The peat had eroded even more in the six months since I had last visited.



Lee Bray and Andy Crabb, November 2021 *Paul Rendell*

We stopped, had a drink and took photos and measurements (luckily one of the group had a tape measure). We noted details of the location and carried on to Fur Tor. The other walkers included Gail Fursdon and Mike Stannard.

This possible cist was reported to DNPA. They were not aware of it and wanted a site visit with me later in the year. In the meantime I put a small news item in *Dartmoor News* about a possible cist. Then I was informed that Tom and Lis Greeves had found this possible cist while they were investigating the nearby

stone row in 2004. They had not told DNPA or English Heritage who look after the archaeology on Dartmoor so it had not been officially recorded.

Later in 2021 a small team comprising DNPA archaeologists Dr Lee Bray and Andy Crabb, Steve Diamond and myself, visited the site on a very wet and misty day. Some samples of the contents were taken and it was recorded as a possible cist. It was then covered by blue plastic, stone and turf to protect it from the weather and animals.

Over the next few years I visited the site every two or three months to keep an eye on it, replacing the turf when needed. During this time DNPA were deciding what they



Start of the excavation

Paul Rendell

were going to do and informing the landowner, the Duchy of Cornwall.

Site surveys and analysis, including radiocarbon dating of charcoal from inside the cist, gave a date of around 1800BC – or 3800 years ago. Subsequent pollen analysis has confirmed the likely prehistoric origins for this feature, which is not of natural origin, as well as noting that the construction of the feature took place at a time when the local area was characterised as ‘open heath-type vegetation’.

Part of the early analysis was a palaeoecological (palynological) investigation of the structure to develop an understanding of the environmental context of Cut Hill during the period in which the cist was likely constructed and to obtain a minimum age for the structure by dating peat that had developed over the cist. The pollen analysis and new radiocarbon dates from peat immediately above the feature confirmed the structure is most likely of prehistoric origin, given the accumulation of peat by the end of the late Bronze Age, and this supports the interpretation of the stones as a cist. Furthermore, this feature was likely constructed in an open heath-type area, set within a broader landscape of deciduous woodland, periodically affected by different disturbance processes (herbivory, burning) over time. The analysis also notes that during the Late Neolithic period (between the 28th-26th centuries BC), there was a short-lived, temporary phase of notably enhanced openness around Cut Hill which



Possible wood in the cist

Paul Rendell



The waterlogged cist

Paul Rendell

was closely associated with increased local herbivory (probably livestock).

DNPA had learnt a lot after working on the Whitehorse Hill cist which had been found by Joe Turner many years ago. This time it was decided to excavate the site, remove and wrap the contents of the cist, and transport the contents to the laboratory at the Wiltshire Conservation Centre in Chippenham for analysis.

After days of delay because of the remote location (much remoter than Whitehorse Hill), work started on the excavation on Friday 9th August 2024, a good day weather-wise being overcast but dry. Wide-track vehicles were used to bring all the equipment in from Holming Beam around Maiden Hill to Tavy Head and then across to Cut Hill. This took nearly 90 minutes across some rough terrain.

It is now thought that the stone row may link to this new cist. The stone row discovered by Tom Greeves consists of an alignment of eight large stones orientated south-west to north-east. Radiocarbon dating on the peat stratified above and below the monoliths provided the first secure date for a stone row within the region. The results date this alignment to the second half of the fourth millennium BC, significantly earlier than previously assumed – Dartmoor rows having previously thought to date to between the late third and middle of the second millennium BC.

A team from the University of Leicester together with DNPA's Lee Bray (Excavation Director) and Andy Crabb started to dig around the stone cist, taking some more samples. Very soon some wood was found inside the cist which showed promise.

Dr Laura Basell, a landscape archaeologist, spent the next few days using a scanner to scan the landscape around the top of Cut Hill including the site.

The team were back on Saturday but the weather was not so good being misty and drizzly all day; nevertheless they worked at the site until nearly 7pm. I led a group of walkers from Holming Beam to the site via Beardown Man and Flat Tor. Lee Bray gave the group a talk about what had been found up to then. We walked back through the mist and rain to Holming Beam via Crow Tor. About three hours after we left Cut Hill, they removed the top and side stones to expose the contents. Inside were two layers of wood, one we had discovered on the Friday and deeper down was more wood. Also what looked like fabric and some very small round objects. The cist had two slabs of granite as its base and three slabs as the cap stone. It was much larger than the Whitehorse Hill cist.

The contents were wrapped in cling film and plastic of Paris to immobilize them before further work and the long journey across Dartmoor to Holming Beam and then on to Chippenham.

On Monday the team were back for another day's work and once again Dartmoor was



Filming before it was lifted

Paul Rendell

not kind, as for a good part of the day it was misty and drizzly again. This was the day the cist was to be removed. The first thing that had to be done was to bucket water out of the hole around the wrapped up contents. More digging was needed before a metal plate was pushed through the peat under the cist and the whole thing was placed on a pallet, then put on the back of the wide-track vehicle to be taken to Holming Beam. While the main lift was taking place it rained the heaviest but once it was on the vehicle the rain stopped and the mist cleared. It is over twice the size of the cist found on Whitehorse Hill, leading to the thought that it may be a double grave. Under the spot occupied by the grave a lot of roots were found in the peat from the heath-type vegetation that was there before the cist was built.



More wrapping up

Paul Rendell

On this last day of the excavation two ladies were filming for *Digging For Britain*, the BBC TV series presented by Alice Roberts.

Lee Bray said; 'It's a stunning discovery with the potential to be every bit as fascinating as the finds at Whitehorse Hill. We were all pretty speechless when we lifted the capstone and looked inside. Not only is the cist bigger than we expected, but it contained multiple pieces of wood that appear to have been deliberately shaped and cut. This prompts more questions: could the wood have been an object that was dismantled and deliberately placed inside the grave? If so, what was it and who did it belong to?

'The volume of material reaches a depth of about 30cm so there's every chance it contains objects or artefacts we can't see yet. The next stage is for micro-excavations to determine what's in there. It's painstaking work that'll take time to complete but we're all very excited about it.'

The remains of the cist are now at the Wiltshire Conservation and Museums Advisory Service, part of Wiltshire Council, where they will undergo the micro-excavations. Some of the team were back on Cut Hill undertaking other work on the site a few days later.



Safely on the vehicle

Paul Rendell

The team working alongside Dr Bray were: DNPA and Historic England Archaeologist Andy Crabb; Laura Warren-Ratcliffe, Alexandra Taylor-Redish and Paul Redish from the Cornwall Archaeological Unit; the University of Leicester's Dr Laura Basell; Professor Ralph Fyfe of the University of Plymouth; Andy Coleman, Elliot Clarke and Josh Ashby of Quantock and Exmoor Ltd.

This is just the start of the story, with more discoveries hoping to be made in the coming months.

Reference: www.heritagegateway.org.uk

SUNSET WALK AT THE EQUINOX DRIZZLECOMBE

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BOOK REVIEWS

- ★★★★★ BEST BUY
- ★★★★ VERY GOOD
- ★★★ GOOD
- ★★ OKAY
- ★ NOT WORTH BUYING

BODMIN MOOR'S BOUNDARY MARKERS – A LEGACY IN STONE
by Peter Moore. 147 pages, A4, £18.95

★★★★

This new book takes a look at a subject most walkers would just pass by when on Bodmin Moor – in contrast to Dartmoor, where there is plenty of interest in the subject of boundary stones. Local author Peter Moore knows the area well and describes over 260 boundstones in the book, not including the quarry marks of Bearah Tor, Kilmar Tor and Stowe's Pound.

Individually many of the stones are insignificant, but collectively they help give us a glimpse into the past, a picture of who owned what piece of land and when. They tell us stories of disputes over ownership and boundaries. There are chapters on the Fleurs-de-Lis around each of the tors, Kilmar and Bearah, as well as Stowe's Pound. Each stone has a photograph, usually in context so you can see the surrounding area, which makes them easier to find.

There are ten-figure grid references as well. Hand drawn maps with numbers on which relate the stones and photos are also included. The only thing that lets it down is that it is not easy to use in the field due to being A4 size instead of A5 – otherwise this is a first class book, although an index would have been useful.

It is a well-researched book and I for one shall now be wandering around Bodmin Moor looking for boundary stones that I have never seen before.



DISCOVERING DARTMOOR by Julian Baird. 64 pages. Available from julianbaird.com/discoveringdartmoor. £29.95

★★★★

Julian Baird is a local photographer based in Exeter whose passion for landscape photography has taken him all across the Scottish Highlands, where he grew up. With huge mountains and grand lochs, this glorious landscape captivated Julian and inspired him to venture into photography.

He moved down to Devon in 2009 and found himself a proverbial stone's throw from Dartmoor, which, while lacking the elevation and grandeur, nonetheless boasts many fabulous features that



merit photographs – including the granite tors, surging rivers, deciduous woodlands and Bronze Age prehistory.

A vision of Julian was to know more about Dartmoor and he has meticulously filmed five episodes documenting Dartmoor at its finest, showcasing some of its most knowledgeable ambassadors; people who work in the National Park.

The focal point of this YouTube series was landscape photography as Julian tirelessly visited locations across Dartmoor in all seasons and all weathers, primarily shooting colour compositions. However, as he points out, the best way to view a photograph is in the printed format, and Julian has collated all of the images from the series into a wonderful zine of 55 landscape photographs.

Reviewed by Max Piper

BOOK NEWS

Echoes Through the Plym Valley by Eyan Danes is due to be published before Christmas.

★★★★

the rock inn



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