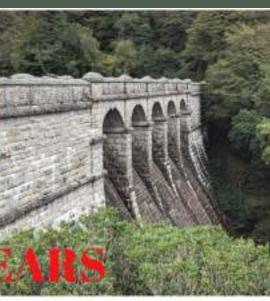
NEWS • WALKS • HISTORY • WILDLIFE • BOOK REVIEWS











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DARTMOOR NEWS

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Contributors

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

Contributors to this issue include: Neil Armstrong, Dartmoor Chris, Clive Darke, Richard Elliott, Mark Fenlon, Peter and Drew Freeman, Jane Gourlay, Peter Hamilton-Leggett, Eleanor Ludgate, Steve Grigg, Paul Glanville, Rob Hubble, Peter Mason, Shamus McCaffery, Liz Miall, George Newell, Max Piper, Paul Ramsbottom, Kathy Tipping, Malcolm Snelgrove, Stella Tracey, Chris Walpole, All the above have written articles, or supplied the Editor with news items or photographs.

Copy date for the July/Aug issue is 15th May. This will be published in the first week of July.

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Front Cover

From L-R: Windy Post, Burrator Dam, pony, Fur Tor Cover design and

photographs by Max Piper



Fined for 'Driving Around the Moors'

Two people have each received fines after they were caught by the police on a 'drive around the moors' during lockdown in January. Officers from Tavistock were out on their usual patrols around Dartmoor when they came across two males who said they were out 'just to have a drive'. Both were issued with fines for breach of the lockdown restrictions, and sent on their way. Police said that one was fined £200 for a first breach, but the other was fined £400 for a second breach.

Large Fire Across Northern Dartmoor

In February a large fire took hold of the moorland near Tavy Cleave. The Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service deployed five pumps and other units but struggled to tackle the fire due to its remote location. The blaze could be seen as far afield as Kit Hill. Plymouth. Sourton and Saltash as it illuminated the night sky. A spokesperson at the time said 'the weather is making conditions for firefighting extremely dangerous - it's very windy and low visibility so we're maintaining our presence but fighting in 'defensive mode', which means we're working to stop the fire from getting worse until conditions improve for us to do more '

Rob Steemson, DNPA emergency officer, said 'the blaze is estimated to be around 5km wide.' The area was very wet underfoot but there had been strong winds across the moor for several previous days drying the top surface off. The area burnt was part of Standon Hill, Eastern and Western Redlake, Tavy Hole and Walkham Head, all wet areas with lots of sphagnum moss.

The Fire Brigade were phoned next day by someone who said they'd accidentally tipped over their stove!!

The Editor and Malcolm Snelgrove visited the site a week later and were surprised to see plenty of red sphagnum moss which did not seem to be burnt and even more surprised to see 12 dunlin and six golden plover feeding along the burnt areas.



The fire at Tavy Hole

Paul Glanville



Walkham Head Peat Pass

Paul Glanville



Looking towards Fur Tor

Malcolm Snelgrove

River Meavy Rescue

Report by on-site reporter Liz Miall

December 23rd 2020 saw exceptionally high rainfall on Dartmoor, the roads were awash and every stream and river swollen. The Plym had burst its banks at Cadover and water was rushing off every hillside into the rivers.



Raft/mat used in the rescue

Liz Miall

Driving down towards Marchant's Bridge at Meavy in the early evening I was confronted with bright headlights and the unmistakable flash of blue lights from the other side of the ford; it was the Fire and Rescue Service. I was asked if I could position my vehicle so that the headlights illuminated the river, enabling the teams to better see what they were doing. At that point I realised with horror that a large vehicle had been swept from the ford about 10 metres downstream and was wedged in the raging river. The waters were rushing

over the bonnet and had reached the level of the windows. Meavy Ford is usually relatively benign and frequently used by larger or towing vehicles to avoid the narrow bridge which is also on a sharp bend. The only hazards to this crossing usually are the occasional paddling child or errant boulder but on that day the ford was a raging torrent, deep and very dangerous.



Meavy Ford on an average day

Liz Miall

What unfolded was an alarming but skilful operation conducted by three crews including a specialist crew from Camel's Head, Plymouth. The vehicle, a black Isuzu type double cab pickup, was secured as best and quickly as the crew could manage given the water was deep and flowing fast, and vegetation and branches were sawn and cleared from the bank. A large floating raft/mat was put into the water at the ford and two roped crew members, instantly up to their waists in the river, guided the raft to the vehicle. The raft/mat was then used as a bridge between the vehicle and the bank.

Meanwhile the roof of the vehicle was having an opening sawn into it, and the windscreen removed. I was horrified to realise that it contained not one but two adults along with two young children. One by one the terrified occupants were guided out of the front over the bonnet and onto the mat where they had to crawl carefully to the bank and safety.

Although scared, fortunately all were unhurt thanks to the bravery and skills of the Fire and Rescue Service. Apparently the family were local, the driver must have underestimated the power of the flooded waters in the ford that day.

Clam Bridges of Dartmoor

By Peter F Mason

Since the publication of Clam Bridges of Dartmoor in 2019 I have discovered information on other bridges in the area. One of these (Fig 1) was sketched by the artist Clara Augusta Collis on a visit to Devon in 1860. Entitled Bridge over River Teign, at Chudleigh, I haven't yet been able to pin down its exact location. It has been suggested that it might have been on the River Teign south of Farley Mill. However, the river is quite wide at this point so this doesn't seem likely. Another idea is that it was situated somewhere along the Kate Brook which runs past Chudleigh Rocks, and Collis did do a drawing of the Rocks at the time. A third possibility



Fig 1 Bridge over River Teign at Chudleigh. CA Collis, 1860 © Tom Greeves Collection

is the clam bridge over the River Bovey in Lustleigh Cleave. We know Collis also visited Lustleigh, as she did a drawing in the centre of the village, but if the drawing does portray a section of the Lustleigh clam bridge it means that she labelled it wrongly.

One of the bridges that I included in the book was near Dartmeet (Fig 2). The bridge, photographed possibly in the 1920s or 1930s, is at a spot that I couldn't locate at the time. It is probably on the East Dart, possibly at a point near Brimpts Farm or adjacent to Badger's Holt (possibly around SX 672 735). Evidently there are iron fixings on the river bank approximately two hundred yards upstream



Fig 2 Postcard of the Clam Bridge, published by Rawlings

Paul Rendell Collection

from Badger's Holt which may indicate its location. However, there are no footbridges in the area marked on the six-inch Ordnance Survey maps surveyed at the turn of the nineteenth century.

I would welcome information on either of these clam bridges, and indeed on any others that I didn't include in the book. Please write to me at dartmoorclams@gmail.com.

Clam Bridges of Dartmoor is available from www.dartmoornews.co.uk.

Problems at Wotter Play Park

During the last lockdown people were driving from Plymouth and Plympton to Wottor near Shaugh Prior to use the public play park. Some days it was very busy, too busy for the locals to use, as people in Plymouth thought it was safer to use this park than those in the city.



Bagga Tor Gate

The signpost near Bagga Tor, Peter Tavy, marking the public right of way has recently been replaced. The old wooden finger post had 'Lich Way' marked on it and often when these posts get replaced we end up with round plastic discs which fade in the sun – but in this case DNPA have replaced it with another wooden sign, again with 'Lich Way' on it.



The finger post

Paul Rendell

New Signs at Bellever

The Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust have been placing new signs on the gates around Bellever, explaining about the ponies that live near the tor and asking walkers to close all gates behind them.



Maria Bailey with one of the new signs

Paul Rendell

Deancombe Tree

In February a very old sycamore tree had fallen, blocking a right of way, at Deancombe Farm, near Burrator Reservoir. DNPA Ranger Paul Glanville and Sam LeBaily, the Warden from South West Lakes Trust, swiftly removed the tree.



The fallen tree

Paul Glanville

Moor Otters Arts Trail coming to Dartmoor

The Moor Otters Arts Trail involves 81 stunning sculptures of otters with cubs, all designed and decorated by local and national artists, being placed around the National Park and at other sites near Dartmoor. The trail aims to help people discover and learn more about the wild landscape of Dartmoor, while raising money for its ongoing conservation and providing a boost for local businesses. There are four trails on Dartmoor, as well as the Mayflower Trail in Plymouth with several more otters dotted around in towns and villages on the edge of the National Park. The trails are designed so people can safely explore Dartmoor on foot, bike, car or public transport and learn about the National Park as they go. There will be prizes and competitions too. It is hoped to launch the new trail on 28th May this year after it was cancelled last year due to Covid restrictions. More details at www.dartmoor.gov.uk/moorotters.

Devon Building More Houses than Required

Latest government figures show Devon is building one-third more houses than required, says Devon Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE).

Devon CPRE's analysis of the 2020 data shows the county as a whole has delivered 30% more new homes than it was required to over a five-year period, in effect building 6332 more houses than it had to. The charity says the data substantiates what it has been saying for years – that Devon is building far more homes than required and the countryside is being ravaged as a result.

Analysis of the measurements reveal:

Plymouth, West Devon and the South Hams over-delivered by 108%, 5% and 28% over the past three years (average 44%) and by 44% over the past five years (2401 excess houses).

Mid Devon over-delivered by 76%, 19% and 28% over the past three years (average 39%) and by 30% over the past five years (473 excess houses).

Teignbridge over-delivered by 32%, 5% and -35% (under-delivery) over the past three years (average -2%) and over-delivered by 11% over the past five years (342 excess houses).

Devon CPRE Director Penny Mills said, 'The government's own figures vindicate what we have been saying for years. In 2018, Devon CPRE commissioned an independent report from specialists at Opinion Research Services to establish the true number of homes needed across the county. It showed that delivering 4300 homes each year would meet all local needs, allowing for a continuation of past migration trends and a fall in average household sizes.'

Devon CPRE hopes local planning authorities, their officers and elected councillors will now start to put the countryside and green spaces first, before permitting any more unnecessary new housing developments.

Work on Path around Bellever Tor

During February DNPA completed work on the path leading from Bellever towards Dunnabridge. This path had been worn away with much public use but now it should be easier to walk as the worst of the ruts have been filled in.



Part of the completed work

Paul Rendell

'Steeperton Tor Cafe' Closed

On Facebook in January a photo appeared on the Tors of Dartmoor page saying 'Just to let all you tor baggers know that Steeperton Tor cafe is currently closed owing to the Covid restrictions!! So don't be going up there expecting to get a hot pasty or a cappuccino!'



The mock up photo

Pete McCrickard

More Houses for Moretonhampstead

There are plans to build more houses in Moretonhampstead. This time part of the old railway station, currently being used as the Thompson & Sons (Transport) depot, is due to have houses built on it. A number of two, three and four bedroom houses and bungalows will be constructed, to be called Hingston View.



The site of the new development

George Newell

Belstone Noticeboard

A new noticeboard, made by villager John Moppett, was erected at Belstone village car park in February. One half of the small board is for Parish Council notices about the car park ('No overnight parking' etc) and the other half is for Belstone Commoners' notices ('Beware cattle in the village' etc).



The new noticeboard

Chris Walpole

The Summer of 2021 on Dartmoor

During the summer of 2020 visitor numbers on Dartmoor soared with around 22% being first time visitors to the moor. This increased interest and use of the National Park continued into the autumn and winter and has presented both opportunities and challenges for DNPA. Last year they contracted a private security firm to provide marshals to help engage and educate the public. This proved to be a success because there was a clear need for action and DNPA were able to develop a strong partnership of organisations to support the action they took. They plan to bring back the marshals again this year.



Cones at Two Bridges

Mary Vale

DNPA have started a programme of verge treatment at Two Bridges, Shipley Bridge, Meldon and Foggingtor to better manage parking and reduce vehicle impact on the verges. The long-term solution for Two Bridges could be the introduction of double yellow lines but this decision rests with Devon County Council and Highways.

Off-road cycling was another issue in some areas and two volunteer mountain bikers have been recruited to work with DNPA on this matter.

The summer of 2020 showed that a number of DNPA byelaws are out of date; they have not been fully reviewed since they were first implemented in 1989. Since then recreation pressures and society has changed. DNPA are aiming for a revised set of byelaws that are relevant to the 21st century, are easy to understand and are clear for both those enforcing them and the public.

CCTV at Princetown

Dartmoor Forest Parish Council have now installed a CCTV system at Princetown. During snowy and icy conditions the village has been plaqued by drivers, often at night, who use the conditions to race their cars, perform stunts and drive significantly in excess of safe, legal speeds. This antisocial behaviour has endangered people, property and the peaceful existence of the parish, significantly affecting the residents for a number of years. It is hoped that the CCTV system will deter and detect this activity as any relevant footage can be handed to the police if required.



The cameras on the Duchy Hotel

Paul Rendell

Letterboxing Otter

As part of the Moor Otters Arts Trail, artist Christian Allen has painted an otter with lots of letterbox stamps on it. This otter will be placed in the Jaded Palates Wine Shop in Chagford in May, along with a letterbox stamp. Gotterey Swinscow Letterboxing Otter is named after the late Godfrey Swinscow who founded the Dartmoor Letterboxing 100 Club. Gotterey is adorned with over 100 stamps many of which hold a special memory from letterboxers' personal collections. Emma Cunis is planning a River and Otter walk to link up with the Moor Otter Trail.



Gotterey Swinscow Letterboxing Otter

Tors Cleared on Pepperdon

A number of tors and rocks have been cleared on Pepperdon Down, near Moretonhampstead. High above the Wray valley is a piece of ground that used to be moorland but because there has not been any livestock there for years the area has turned into scrubland with trees, brambles and lots of bracken. There are many outcrops of rocks including Pepperdon Rocks, Little Pepperdon and Rose Cottage Rocks and recently someone has started to clear the vegetation from around these.



Part of Rose Cottage Rocks (SX 778 847) after clearing

Paul Rendell

Old Dartmoor

Clive Darke reports

With reference to the 'Old Dartmoor' article on page 55 in the last issue of *Dartmoor News* (No 177), the tank track has been identified by members of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and Bovington Tank Museum Facebook groups as from an early Churchill tank. There is a gate guardian Churchill Mk II at Bovington with the same track pattern. It is assumed that these are remains of a target, so the question is where is the rest of the tank?

Rubbish Dumped

For years there has been a big pile of dumped tyres on Pepperdon Down, near Moretonhampstead. It is a bad eyesore that has just been left there with black plastic also dumped to make matters worse – it will all still be there in 50 years time unless something is done as it takes many years to break down. It is not a place many visitors go to but the mess cannot be seen from the road. This photo only shows a small number of the dumped tyres.



The dumped tyres

George Newman

Path Improvements near Blackaller Tor

Recently improvements have been made to a path which goes from Wotter to Lee Moor. This is a popular route for horse riders but part of it, a steep bank near Blackaller Tor, was very difficult for riders to get up. In March work was undertaken to make it easier for users, but it remains a steep bank whether going up or down.



The improved path

Paul Rendell

Nothing New Under the Sun

Report by Chris Walpole

We read all too often of reports to Karla McKechnie, Dartmoor Livestock Protection Officer, of injuries and fatalities to animals on Dartmoor roads caused by speeding vehicles that do not stop. Sadly, this is a problem at least one hundred years old as the following letter to the *Western Morning News* on 28 March 1921 makes clear. It was signed 'One who has suffered loss by motorists'.

Sir, May I ask all motorists to be more careful when passing people walking or driving horses or cattle on the public highways? It is gross cruelty to go whizzing by like the motorists do across Dartmoor roads, frightening animals or causing injuries, and go on at racing speed. This is what is happening on our roads on Dartmoor. Cattle are maimed and people injured, all through these reckless motorists. There are a few exceptions, some drawing up and helping in case of need, but more often they race on and do not care so long as they are all right.

Motorists should please remember that we who use the roads with horse-drawn vehicles pay our rates for the upkeep of roads, and paid to make the roads before motor vehicles existed. And I hope this letter will meet the eyes of the motor drivers, and that they will exercise due care when passing others on the highways in the future.

Higher Cadover Car Park

Recently another car park at Cadover Bridge has had large boulders placed around it. The higher car park above the bridge next to Shaugh fishing lakes now has boulders surrounding it which has reduced the number of cars that can park there. Vehicles were parking all over the place around Cadover and Blackabrook last year and even blocking the main road - this problem is likely to continue during the coming year.



Boulders around the car park

George Newell

Riddon Bridge

A stone wall near Riddon Bridge, not far from Bellever and near the cattle grid on the edge of Cator Common, has been repaired.



Pixies' Parlour

Often when I am on the moor I am looking for ideas for articles, including the 'Hidden Gems' feature. Last January I was walking in the Kennon Hill area and realised that I had not visited the green hollow known as Pixie's Parlour for a long time. On arriving in the hollow I thought that there wasn't much to see, just a few rocks, a spring and nothing much else, so it would be no good as a 'Hidden Gem' ... then suddenly, to one side of me, was a loud noise. I looked around to see a red deer running away up the hillside to the top of Kennon Hill. It had a set of antlers and was a really fine stag - in fact I have never seen such a big deer out in the open on Dartmoor. Normally they are found in the forest plantations of Fernworthy.



The wonderful stag



Paul Rendell The stag running up the hillside

Paul Rendell

Brent Moor For Sale

The Brent Moor and Dockwell Ridge estate is up for sale. This land is part of the catchment area for the Avon Reservoir near South Brent and the 2764 acres concerned was sold by South West Water in the 1980s. Before long it was back on the market for £220,000 before changing hands a number of times over the next few years. Nearly every time it was bought the new owners wanted to build on the old Brent Moor House site near Shipley Bridge but planning permission was always refused. In September 2002 it returned to the market at £300,000



Part of Brent Moor

Paul Rendell

and sold again. In 2012 it was for sale once more with an asking price in the region of £500,000 but did not sell. In March this year it re-appeared on the market for £750,000. The land includes Three Barrows, Black Tor and a lot of open moorland.

Work on the Lich Way

During the next few months Forestry England and the DNPA are due to start improvement works on part of the Lich Way near Bellever hamlet. Coming from Bellever Forest down into the hamlet near the youth hostel is a sunken lane which is part of the ancient track between Lydford and Bellever known as the Lich Way. In recent years this track has become badly eroded by water gushing down the hillside from a water tank at the top of the hill, making it dangerous when wet and even more so when the water freezes over. The track is used by horse riders and walkers to reach the forest.



Looking up the Lich Way



Paul Rendell Looking down the track

Paul Rendell

Full Moon on Dartmoor

There was a full moon – called a 'snow moon' – on 27th February. After a very clear night Chris Walpole took this photo at 7am as it was going down behind a pony on Brenamoor Common, Belstone.



Ten Tors Cancelled for the Second Year

Ten Tors, one of the UK's biggest outdoor adventure events for young people, due to take place over the weekend of 8th and 9th May, will no longer be possible due to England's latest lockdown roadmap. This is the second year that the demanding trek over the northern part of Dartmoor has had to be cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic but, whilst the youngsters will not be able to gather in Okehampton to undertake the event together, there will be an opportunity to participate in virtual events in the true spirit of the challenge.

The event is led by the British Army's Headquarters Southwest based in the heart of Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire and usually involves 1000 Reserve and Regular personnel from all three services across the region along with partner agencies such as the Duchy of Cornwall, British Red Cross, DNPA, Devon and Cornwall Police, local authorities and a host of volunteer organisations.

What was 'The Boyril Club'?

This recently acquired postcard of well-dressed gentlemen is intriguingly titled 'The Bovril Club at Okehampton'. On the reverse is a small printed set of numbers which could be the date the photo was taken, possibly 7 May 1910. A brief handwritten comment reads 'Tom, I suppose you will know all these'. A different hand has added the words 'Princetown Bovril Club'. Does anyone recognise the wall behind?! What was 'The Bovril Club'? One explanation is that the



The Boyril Club at Okehampton

Richard Norrish Collection

group were employees of Bovril on a social outing to Dartmoor. Enquiries to the Unilever company archives are on hold as they are closed during the Covid lockdown. I have found references to a 'Bovril Social Club' and a 'Bovril Swimming Club' in online newspapers of the 1920s and 1940s but I don't think they are relevant. Do any readers have any suggestions – if so please get in touch with the Editor.

Black Hill Works on Peat Banks

Over the last few years work has been undertaken in a number of areas of the north moor as part of the Peatland Restoration Project (see report in *Dartmoor News* issue 165, November/December 2018). Work has taken place at Flat Tor Pan, Hangingstone Hill, Whitehorse Hill and Amicombe Hill and now this spring attention has turned to Black Hill between Cranmere Pool and Cut Hill. The peat banks are being rebuilt and in some places timber is being used to hold back the water and peat. A digger is on-site and some material (such as the timber) is arriving by helicopter, with several flights a day transporting the wood from Ockerton Court to Black Hill. All in all, the usually quiet Cranmere Pool area has not been so quiet recently.



One of the vehicles on Hangingstone Hill

Paul Rendell



Part of the restored wetland on Whitehorse Hill

Paul Rendell

Harford Moor Gate

During February the gate to the car park at Harford Moor, near Ivybridge, was locked by the landowner due to erosion within the area caused by heavy rain and snow and the increasing numbers of people using the car park. On some days it was impossible to park there with so many people wanting to get onto the moors.

Chagford Two Hills Race Returns

Chagford Two Hills Race will return this year (all being well) on Sunday August 29th. It normally takes place in May but after it was cancelled last year due to Covid and with this spring's lockdown also in place, it was decided to move the event to later in the year. Check www.twohillsrace.co.uk for the latest news. Any enquiries please email 2hillsrace@gmail.com.

The White Pebble Trail



Part of the pebble trail on the King Way

Paul Rendell

During the lockdown in February a white pebble trail was laid across the moors from Sourton to the stone circle below Corn Ridge. Sally Thomson from the Highwayman Inn at Sourton placed the stones as a number of local people did not know about this Bronze Age feature on the moor, mainly because none of the stones are standing, they are all lying down.

Sally laid around 500 white pebbles to enable people to follow the trail past the ice works and along part of the King Way before reaching the fallen stone circle. The pebbles,

ranging in size from tennis balls to ping pong balls, were placed across the open moor but a few weeks after the trail was laid they all disappeared.

Butterfly Competition

The winners of the competition in the Nov/Dec issue are:

1st prize - Mary Nockles from Kent

2nd prize - Clare Meiklejohn from Exeter

3rd prize - Sue Jones from Plymouth

Tyrwhitt's Wharf

Planning permission has been submitted to DNPA for conversion of a barn, part of Tyrwhitt's Wharf, to create a venue providing a cafe, cycle hire, bike workshop and an area for attending courses.

The historic building, which is just above Clearbrook beside the Plymouth Leat (Drake's Leat), was once a staging post for the exchange of horses on the horse-drawn railway between Princetown and Sutton Harbour at Plymouth, and is unique on Dartmoor. The tramway carried granite from



Tvrwhitt's Wharf

Jane Gourlay

Foggintor and Swell Tor quarries and was built by Thomas Tyrwhitt. A number of people have objected to this proposal stating that there is already a bike hire establishment near Yelverton and that turning this into a cafe would create more traffic problems on Roborough Down.

Road Closed

A public road near Holne seems to be closed to the public. The road concerned goes out of Holne village to Mill Leat and up to Hawson Cross. For a while now Devon Highways (part of Devon County Council) have placed a sign saying 'Unsuitable for long and wide vehicles' but now a bigger sign has appeared at both ends of the lane saying 'Road closed, access only'. Have Highways decided they no longer want to maintain this road so have closed it to the public? This is not the first time this has



The 'Road closed' sign

Paul Rendell

happened on Dartmoor; one day a sign appeared on a public road passing Yellands Farm near Chagford which said 'Unsuitable for vehicles' – today that lane is overgrown and is almost impossible to drive along. We seem to be losing our public roads.

Meldon Hill Fire



Part of Meldon Hill

In the last few years it seems that someone has deliberately set fire to Meldon Hill every spring, usually at night. On 11 February part of the hill was set alight yet again, starting just after midnight when a strong wind was blowing. A spokesperson for Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service said: 'Fire Control immediately mobilised one fire appliance from Chagford, one fire appliance from Moretonhampstead, a water carrier from Danes Castle. Exeter. and a 4x4 from Chagford to attend this incident. On arrival the incident commander confirmed a

fire at the above location involving gorse on open moorland with three fire fronts covering approximately five hundred square metres. Crews promptly got to work with beater, one hose reel jet and one fogging unit to extinguish the fires.' The next evening a large fire took hold near Tavy Cleave – more on this elsewhere in the magazine.

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SEVENTEEN THINGS THAT HAVE MADE AN IMPACT ON DARTMOOR IN THE LAST THIRTY YEARS

- The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, which came into effect on Dartmoor in 2005, providing a right of access on foot, meaning that approximately 50% of the National Park is now open access land (Dartmoor Commons + CROW access land).
- The closure of the ring road on north Dartmoor, thus preventing many walkers from reaching places in the depths of the moor.
- Sticklepath & Okehampton Conservation (StOC) Group was formed in September 1991 so they celebrate 30 years this September. Now they really have made an impact on Dartmoor. A conservation success story!
- The discovery of the kistvaen on Whitehorse Hill by Jon Turner.
- Foot & Mouth in 2001 when walking on Dartmoor was banned.
- Publication of Dartmoor 365 by John Hayward a great book to get people out on the moors
- Closing of Vixen Tor by Mrs M Alford in 2003.
- Opening of the Granite Way Okehampton to Lydford cycle route in 2014.
- Covid-19 brought more people than usual onto Dartmoor causing more damage to the moorland and wildlife.
- The launch of The Dartmoor Newsletter, now called Dartmoor News, in 1991.
- The closure of New Waste to public parking thus putting the Erme/Staldon area virtually out of bounds.
- The installation of pay and display at some car parks. Is this the thin end of the wedge?
- The filming of War Horse at Ditsworthy Warren.
- The death of Godfrey Swinscow -- the self-styled grand master of letterboxing.
- The removal of the Transmoor Bus from Plymouth to Exeter via Moretonhampstead in 2016 after much messing around of the routes and timetables, making it impossible to plan decent walks on the moors using public transport.
- In 2004 the 150th anniversary of the first letterbox at Cranmere Pool.
- DNPA getting rid of their educational and public guided walks programme.

Thanks to the following people for suggestions: Andrew Watson (DNPA), Richard Elliott, Ian Brooker (DNPA), Richard Ware, Ian and Caroline Kirkpatrick.

DARTMOOR NEWS

A brief history of the magazine by Peter Hamilton-Leggett

In 1984 Paul Rendell, along with two other friends, saw that there was a need for a magazine about Dartmoor and so they started planning. It was to be called The Dartmoor Magazine but at the end of 1985 someone else had the same idea and published a magazine with that title. Their plans shattered, the friends parted company, but the idea remained in the back of Paul's mind.

He started his venture into journalism with a little-known typewritten newsletter in 1986. Very few copies now exist of The Dartmoor Wally News which was a precursor of what has now become essential Dartmoor reading. The Dartmoor Wally News ran to twelve issues and finally ended in August 1989. In 1990 Paul was working so it was to be a two year wait until a sample issue of The Dartmoor Newsletter appeared in April 1991. The accompanying letter read, 'It has been suggested that a Dartmoor newsletter is needed to keep walkers informed of activities that are taking place on the moor.' Paul ends with, 'The newsletter will contain up to two double sided A4 sheets, according to information available. It will be published every two months and a year's subscription will cost £3 including postage ... If there is no interest your money will be refunded in full.'

His A4 sheets lasted for twelve issues plus the one-off Christmas Cracker. These he had produced at his home address in Plymouth, under the name of The Old Dartmoor Company. He even managed to get the late Lady Sayer to write a piece in issue number three. Issue 13 was in A5 format, contained 22 pages and had a card cover. It was now printed professionally by High View of Gunnislake. I had introduced Paul to the printer a few months earlier. The covers, up to issue 30, were now illustrated with line drawings either by Eric Spicer of Exeter or Paul himself. On its fifth anniversary (No 31) a colour photograph of Peek Hill replaced the drawings and from issue number 33 the cover changed to black and white photographs. The subscription was now £9 and each issue usually ran to 44 pages.

By 1997 people began to see a change in Paul - he met Pauline Greenwood who as well as the assistant editor of the magazine became his best friend and companion. They moved to Okehampton. Over the years Pauline has contributed many articles. The July/August 1998 (No 44) issue was in full colour - a format that remains to this day.

Issue 49 brought about a name change - Dartmoor News. By now advertisers had much more confidence in the publication which had matured over the years to become an interesting and informative read - a 'must-have' for all Dartmoor aficionados. The magazine has not been without its critics and in 2002 Paul received complaints about his spelling and the need for a proof reader. Few people knew that Paul was dyslexic and had had no training in the difficult field of journalism, let alone producing the whole magazine and finding advertisers and so forth. Thankfully the response from the general readership in the next issue was overwhelming, even bringing forward volunteers to help. Paul wrote, 'is good to know how much you enjoy our efforts, warts and all.' What makes Dartmoor News so good is the 'warts and all', the amateur approach is most refreshing in this all-too-slick world of ours. The snippets of news that he ferrets out are just amazing and who cares if he spells it wrongly - we know what he means. Having said that it also contains numerous learned articles from experts in their fields.

After ten years Paul parted from his old printer and used GTi Ltd of Okehampton. He was now able to use full colour throughout the magazine. This was to be reflected in the

subscription price which rose to £16. By now Dartmoor News was being stocked by a few shops as well as being available on subscription. The format has remained very similar over the last few years but the content has made great strides and is now more polished. The 100th issue (in gold) appeared in January 2008. To keep costs down Paul has needed to change printers. Next came The Printing Press in Plymouth followed by Dartprint Ltd of Tayistock who are the current printers. He has also had the help of two assistant editors in Steve Mason and currently Chris Walpole, who took over in 2018.

Recently the front cover has undergone a new design with a green masthead. Despite rising costs Paul has managed to keep the subscription as low as possible the current rate being £27 for six issues.



From No 1 to No 177

This, the 178th issue of the magazine, has now grown to 72 pages. There is now also a digital version of

Dartmoor News which is fully searchable. An index of all issues is also available. The number of subscriptions has greatly increased within the last year and the future looks good. From a one-man show the magazine has shown great spirit and moved with the times to become the 'must have' journal for any Dartmoor enthusiast and I look forward to the 200th edition sometime in 2024!

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

There were not many sightings of golden plover last winter; often flocks of up to 250 are reported. Maybe the lack of sightings relate to fewer people out on the moors due to the lockdown

On 16th January Chris Walpole saw a woodcock fly from boggy ground on the edge of Priestacott Wood, Belstone and on 1st March startled four more woodcock in the space of an hour (was it four different birds or the same bird disturbed four times?) while exploring the area between Ivy Tor Water and Ivy Tor Mine on the slopes of Cosdon. In the same area a few days later Chris took a photo of a goldcrest poking around in a low gorse bush.



Goldcrest on Cosdon

Chris Walpole

Malcolm Snelgrove saw a small flock of golden plover, usually around 30 birds, on a number of occasions at the end of January flying along Corndon Ridge above Dartmeet. The Editor saw a

flock on Woodcock Hill towards the end of January. Also on the same day a few minutes later two red grouse flew up in front of him – it was good to see them, they are not often seen nowadays.



Golden plover on Corndon Ridge

Malcolm Snelgrove

A very close sighting of a hare at the end of January was an excellent spot for the Editor. It was in a place that is normally busy but this year was very quiet due to the lockdown.

Two pairs of teal duck were seen by Mel and Emma Pike on the

large pond at Birchy Lake below Moorlands House, Belstone, on 24th January, a cold and snowy day. The only previous known record of teal in Belstone parish was when a single male was seen with a pair of mallards on the East Okement River at Fatherford in April 2008.



Roe deer at Bellever

Paul Rendell

Nigel Rendle saw a good number of skylarks in the air hovering and singing on 3rd February when walking in the Nun's Cross, Whiteworks and Fox Tor area – this was early in the year for them to be singing.

During the sub-zero February week of easterly winds Chris Walpole recorded 'highest number counts at any one time' of the following common birds at the feeding stations in his Belstone garden: 26 blue tits, 21 chaffinches, 18 blackbirds, eight magpies and eight goldfinch.

The Editor saw a woodcock at Beardown Plantation in February and later that day saw a snipe while working at Bellever.

On 15th February Nigel Rendle and Paul Glanville were out walking when they saw and heard five snipe in the Walkham Head area and saw five golden plover on Standon Hill.



Mallard ducks

Paul Rendell

The Editor got very close to a roe deer at Bellever Plantation on 18th February. On the same day the East Dart River was very high after a night of heavy rain and two mallard ducks were having problems trying to swim – they were seen in a small stream in the Bellever Bridge car Park.

On the 20th February around 300 golden plover were seen near Penn Beacon circling around for about 20 minutes. This was one of the biggest flocks recorded last winter.

Malcolm Snelgrove was walking with the Editor on 25th

February when they spotted a single golden plover and later saw a flock of five on Wapsworthy Common behind Lynch Tor towards Eastern Redlake. They were feeding on the area recently burnt during an extensive moorland fire on 11th February. In the same area they saw around a dozen dunlin flying over and a lot of singing skylarks.

The Editor saw 12 roe deer following each other through Easton Woods in March.

 $Barry\ and\ Tania\ Welch\ saw\ three\ roe\ deer\ while\ working\ at\ Bellever\ at\ the\ beginning\ of\ March.$





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FOXGLOVE WALK

Eleanor Ludgate takes you for a short walk and if you time it right you should see a lot of foxgloves

START POINT: Castle Drogo car park, Drewsteignton, grid ref SX 725 902. This is a fee paying car park, free if you are a National Trust member.



Following the Hunters' Path down to the river

Eleanor Ludgate



Hydro turbine building

Eleanor Ludgate



Approaching Fingle Bridge

Eleanor Ludgate

LENGTH OF WALK: approximately 4 miles (6.4km) and takes about two and a half hours.

NOTES: this walk is best undertaken in mid June when the foxgloves are at their best.

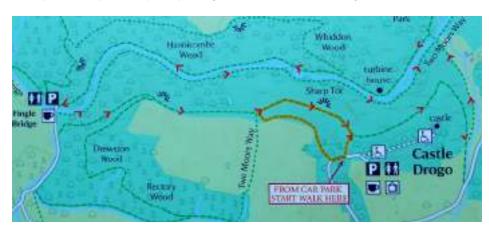
From the castle head down the steps to the Hunters' Path, turning right at the bottom to follow this track south with spectacular views towards Dartmoor and Chagford and below to your left the deep valley of the Teign Gorge. The path winds down to the River Teign at the bottom of the valley. Here you cross the river on the suspension bridge with lovely views of the salmon pool beneath.

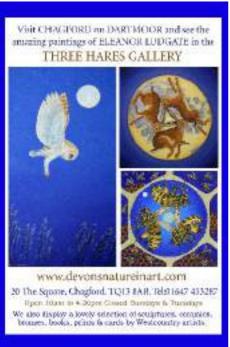
Climb over the large granite steps on the other side of the river, turn left following the ancient wall of the Whiddon Deer Park and then go through the gate to follow the Foresters' Track along the river. You will pass the hydro turbine building designed by Lutyens and restored in 2017 to provide electricity to the castle above.

Follow this path which has lovely views of the river until you reach the beautiful 17th century Fingle Bridge and the wonderful Fingle Bridge Inn. High above the inn is the Iron Age hillfort, Prestonbury Castle. You can either return along the Fisherman's Path which will bring you back to the suspension bridge where you turn right to retrace your route back to the Hunters' Path, or climb the steep path up through the woods which takes you back up to the Hunters' Path at the top, then turn left and continue along the path till you get to Sharp Tor with its

wonderful views over the gorge. Here you head up the steps on your right to return to Castle Drogo.

High above the inn is the Iron Age hillfort, Prestonbury Castle. You can either return along the Fisherman's Path which will bring you back to the suspension bridge where you turn right to retrace your route back to the Hunters' Path, or climb the steep path up through the woods which takes you back up to the Hunters' Path at the top, then turn left and continue along the path till you get to Sharp Tor with its wonderful views over the gorge. Here you head up the steps on your right to return to Castle Drogo.







IN PRAISE OF DARTMOOR CHURCHES

A personal glimpse into the parish churches and graveyards of Dartmoor by Kathy Tipping

All photos by Kathy Tipping

This series of articles will be centred on my exploration and description of many of the local Dartmoor parish churches and churchyards. From the quiet and humble parish churches, tucked away on the fringes of the moor, to the more dramatically outstanding and imposing landmarks of Dartmoor's Christian worship, I will endeavour to bring a glimpse of what makes them special in so many ways. I am no expert in architecture, theology or anything ecclesiastic, and I do not follow any organised faith system, but if I can convey some of the fondness I have for the beauty, interest and precious nuggets of Devon life, past and present, found within these quiet walls and silent churchyards, then perhaps on your future visits to the moor you may decide to not pass by, but venture inside and discover these charming rural delights for yourselves.

THE PARISH CHURCH OF SHAUGH PRIOR



Many visitors, I am certain, will be very familiar with the bucolic beauty spot at Shaugh Bridge, tucked away near the south-western limit of the National Park. A bewitching place, where the Rivers Plym and Meavy combine, their turbulent waters cascading over mossy, granite boulders, in glorious, oak, bird-song filled woodland, all nestled below the rather foreboding Dewerstone Rock. But how many folk venture back eastward up the steep winding lane, a quarter of a mile or so, into the little moorland village of Shaugh Prior itself?

Perhaps a few drop in to The White Thorn Inn for a well-earned rest and refreshment? But how many will think to take a quiet moment to explore the Grade 1 Listed Parish Church of St Edward, King and Martyr? There is usually something of cultural, social, spiritual or historical interest to find in such a place as this, and these old Dartmoor parish churches are as important as the famously celebrated moorland granite crosses that mark their ancient parish boundaries. The church, whose origins lie in the 11th century, is Perpendicular in style, with chancel, nave, south porch and granite tower with a complement of six bells.

Etymology of the original church of 'Shaugh Prior' tells us its name derives in part from the Old English 'sceaga', a meaning a 'wooded copse'; and secondly, that the manor belonged

to Plympton Priory. Indeed, Shaugh Prior was presented to the monks of Plympton Priory by Roger de Nonant in 1133.

The church is dedicated to King Edward, whose coronation was in 975, he being only 14 years old at that time. Edward the Martyr's reign was cruelly ended with his murder in 978, an act instigated by his stepmother. He was succeeded by her son, his half-brother, Æthelred the Unready.

This church possesses an historically significant and remarkable late medieval, 15th century octagonal font cover, carved in solid oak, with panels of foliage and fruit. The structure consists of three distinct tiers and is crowned with a mitred bishop, dressed in full pontifical, offering an act of benediction. Standing 2.6 metres (approx 8½ feet) high, atop the 14th century granite font base, this artefact had nearly been cast aside and left to rot away in old farm buildings. A church notice reads...

'During the partial church restoration 1867/68, Mr Edward Christian had the cover removed to the barn of a local farm. For years, the font cover lay neglected, indeed, several times, the farmer's wife suggested to her husband that the 'Rotten old thing should be burnt!'

Fortunately, in 1871, the font cover was recovered and sent to Exeter to be restored by Mr Harry Hems, whose craftsmen were responsible for much fine work around the world, including St Albans Abbey, Hertfordshire and Christchurch Cathedral, Missouri, America.'

Looking towards the east window – dedicated to William Langdon Martin (1892) one of the Martin Brothers, known locally for his role in the further development of the local china clay industry and for the construction of the tramway which connected Lee Moor clay works to Plymouth.

On the southern side, not too far from the porch, the eye is drawn to a large, granite altar tomb, carved with two intertwining hearts. It is said to house the remains of two sisters who passed away within days of each other – through either infectious malady or broken heart? We will never know.

For details of forthcoming church services and Covid-19 online service details, please visit the website https://www.roborough.org.uk/churches/







MEMORIES OF A JUNIOR PORTER AT OKEHAMPTON STATION 1943-1946

William Mortimore recalls life at the railway station

Okehampton Station was open 24 hours a day. Staffing was: Station Master (Mr Pengelly), Station Foreman (Arthur Causley), two clerks, three signalmen, three shunters, three head shunters. They each used to work 8-hour shifts to cover the 24 hours. Seven junior porters, in seniority order: Godfrey Gale, Bernard Raymond, Bill Mortimore, David Evans, John Madge, Bill Lavis and Miss Pam Towel. Goods shed: two clerks, one checker, one porter. The station also had a guards' depot: five guards, one porter guard – who used to work the Meldon Quarry trains. They had their own coach to travel to work. The station also had their own locomotive depot, with engine sheds, call depot and turntable. I'm not sure the number of men they had.

Out the front of the station was a Nissen hut, the Army TSO (Travel Service Office). Up platform they had a fully licensed buffet. Over in the goods yard was a carriage and wagon department with four men who carried out small repairs to wagons and re-railing vehicles, wheel tap and test for hot axle boxes on passenger trains.

The signal and telegraph department had a hut at the military siding. Two men were responsible for signal box maintenance and telephones. We had a phone box inside the parcel office with five phones and two on the wall beside it. We could contact all stations and signal boxes west of Exeter. Only two post office phones: one in the booking office and one in the station master's office. There was an area inspector (Jim Walters) covering all stations west of Okehampton for security and regulation. He would test signalmen to approve them to work the boxes.



On the left holding the wagon is Bernard Raymond, on the right (with no hat on, he was waiting for it to be delivered!) is Bill Mortimore. Photo taken in 1943.

William Mortimore Collection

I joined the railway in 1943. My first job was travelling porter on the 11 o'clock Waterloo to Padstow, 1555 to Okehampton, to operate the front vans. When we met the 1800 Padstow to Okehampton train we changed over and worked on the vans in the rear with the guard. One egg van, two rabbit vans and a general van ('The rabbits used to be terrific. Crates and crates of the bleddy things. They was heavy to lift.'). To connect up with the mail train at Okehampton, Pam took over that job from me. I went back to station work. We had an early turn, late turn, two middle turns. Early and late turns were responsible for

keeping the station tidy, meeting all passenger trains, dealing with the front van and looking after passengers and their luggage.

Middle turn on the platform was mainly ticket collecting and staying by the entrance door for security. He also had a very important job counting the wheels of the trains and phoning train control in Exeter to order the 'banking engines' from Exeter St Davids to Exeter Central (banking engines were small engines to assist up the back, at the rear. Normally you'd have two at the rear and one up the front on big trains). All trains with over 24 wheels needed to have 'bankers'.

The other middle turn would be both booking boy and 'lampy'. He would take the wagon numbers in the yard that came in overnight and book out what went out loaded or empty – a very important job. The rest of the day was: collecting lamps from the signals, cleaning them and refilling them with oil. He was not allowed to climb the doublearm down starting signal – you had to be 21 to climb that one. I don't know why, probably because of insurance!

We had to go to the nearby military sidings quite a lot because all of our container traffic was shunted up there for the crane. It was the only crane we had. We were up there working twelve hour days just before the D-day landings, securing army vehicles and guns on the trucks. Many special trains left that week. They had ammunition lined up under the trees all the way down from Bridestowe station to the village.

I was asked if I would do the parcel officer's job until the man ('Sprag') came back from the war. I took it on – no adding machines or mobile phones in



Okehampton Station Master Mr Pengelly, photographed in 1943

William Mortimore Collection

those days! It was terrible, everything had to be done in your head! There was a stamp box with all different priced stamps to stick on parcels; before handing over at the end of a shift to the leading parcel porter (he worked opposite me) your cash book and accounts book had to balance with your stamp book. Very often you'd have to have someone to help you out! The early turn started at 3am – to meet the 3.15am mail train. The postmen used to meet that train to take off the letter mail. I used to deal with the parcel mail and the rail parcels. Most mornings it was dark and with the blackout lights and hand oil lamps to carry it wasn't easy. In the winter my next job was to clean out the central heating boiler fire and refill it with coke. It was in the cellar below the parcel office. Then I would start to sheet up the parcels ready for delivery by the first station bus at 7.30am. The driver was called Reg Parsons and the Plume of Feathers owned the bus.

Passmore & Sons used to deliver the goods shed parcels and container work. I think the container lorry could go to a ten mile radius but the other was only five.

My next train was the down paper train. WH Smith had a man on that train bundling up the papers for towns and villages in Devon and North Cornwall. He would get off at Okehampton so we had to pick up his table and spare papers. He would return on the first up train. He couldn't go any further otherwise he wouldn't get back in time. Then the station staff would start to work. I would remain, most of my time, in the parcel office. I would have to meet all passenger trains to meet the guard. I would hand over letters and registered parcels which had to be signed for and pick up his letters and parcels. Sometimes they would be transfers for the Bude and North Cornwall trains. This letter service was used quite a lot by the Western Morning News in the evening for late editions because the post office wasn't quick enough and the phone lines were unreliable – they'd get bombed out and things. So, the fastest way to exchange information was the letter mail on trains.



The town bus

Paul Rendell Collection

There was a warning bell on the up platform over the parcel office door rung by the signalman. One ring for up trains, two rings for down trains, three rings for a fast non-stopping train. Usually about five minutes before the train arrived.

Egg dealers would send off eggs and rabbits most evenings. Most would go on the perishable train in the evening (1800 from Okehampton) and the rest would go on the mail train at 2115. At certain times the

office would get quite busy. Sterling Poultry farm would send off hundreds of boxes of day old chicks. Also, several boxes of eggs coming in for them. Upcott Girls School would send all their trunks and tuck boxes by rail – luggage in advance; it was collected and delivered for 2/4d; collected only for 1/2d; delivered only also for 1/2d. A lot of passengers would use this offer as well.

Blackout: after dark, all outside windows had to be shuttered in the station where there was no overhead cover. The light bulbs on the platform lights were blue and they'd only be switched on as the train approached the platform. Goods traffic: the petrol was rationed, so lorries could only travel a five mile or ten mile radius from their depots, so most of the town's goods were sent by rail.

On market days Ginger Hawkins would drive his cattle to the station with two dogs (Holsworthy and Halwill Junction used to run special cattle trains every week).

When the parcel porter returned to his job they used me as a relief porter west of Exeter. In February 1946 they posted me to Calstock on my 18th birthday to help open up the flower and fruit trade after the war.

THE TALE OF THE SHEEPSTOR PIXIE

By Paul Rendell

As a child my parents used to take me to Sheepstor every Sunday and often we would end up at Pixie's Cave. In the 1970s there were two rooms inside the cave with a shelf and I used to leave pins and coins for the little folk on this shelf. A few times I left extra coins hoping I would see a pixie but I never did. I know pixies live there because when I came back next time, the pins and money were gone. I always wondered what I had to do to see a pixie.

Fast forward to March 2021, Peter Freeman and son Drew decided to go to Pixie's Cave on Sheepstor via Joey's Lane. They wanted to go on a pixie hunt and it was a perfect day. They approached the cave with the camera ready, and thought to glimpse a pixie in the distance.

Peter takes up the story, 'By the time we reached the rocks there was nothing to be seen, so we approached closer and produced our bait, a black pudding Scotch egg, a morsel surely too tempting to be ignored. Sure enough, within a couple of minutes a pixie emerged. She was very wary, but clearly interested in the Scotch egg.

I then gave Drew the Scotch egg in the hope of tempting her further out, which worked, and we got one perfect shot before she grabbed the delicacy and ran back into the cave.'

I had said before they went that they would not be able to get into the entrance of Pixie's Cave like I did as a child. Peter confirmed this, 'As you rightly predicted, neither of us could possibly fit inside, and she couldn't be tempted back out, so that's that.'

When I ask Peter why she was not wearing the usual pixie hat, he said he believed it is only the boys who wear them! Now I know why I have never seen a pixie – because I hate Scotch eggs.



Sheepstor

Peter and Drew Freeman



Pixie's Cave

Peter and Drew Freeman



Peter tempting the pixie Peter and Drew Freeman



The pixie about to snatch the Scotch egg before going back into the depths of the cave, where no human can follow?

EXPLORING THE TORS AROUND THE THREE RESERVOIRS

Max Piper takes a look at some of the tors and rocks around the three reservoirs near Hennock: Trenchford, Tottiford and Kennick

All photos by Max Piper unless otherwise stated

References:

www.torsofdartmoor.co.uk; this website is run by Paul Buck, Tim Jenkinson and Max Piper. www.moorlandwalks.co.uk; this website is run by Paul Buck.

Jenkinson, Tim; East Dartmoor: The Hidden Landscape: Rocks and Tors.

Hollowpark Rock (SX 8082 8476)

This is a very large outcrop which was once named on OS maps until after their 1945-1965 edition when it mysteriously 'vanished'. It was re-discovered by Max Piper in April 2018 and visited with Paul Buck thereafter. The rock, which can be accessed by use of a public footpath, resembles a giant mushroom, but the best view of it is from across the field to the south, by a ford at SX 80843 84555.



Max beside Hollowpark Rock

Paul Buck

Laployd Rock (SX 8056 8460)

Spotted by Paul Buck in April 2018 from the public footpath below, this small, overgrown outcrop can be found on the edge of Laployd Plantation, which was felled soon before. At the time of discovery, the rock had great views of Kennick Reservoir but this changed as a subsequent visit in December 2019 revealed that new saplings had been planted making the rock impossible to reach. It is hoped that as the trees begin to gain some height the area will become accessible again.



Kennick East Tor (SX 8058 8442)

This impressive small tor was first described by Tim Jenkinson and, whilst it sits on private land, can be accessed from the bracken-infested hillside above to the east. It features several granite outcrops above the left bank of a small stream and is hidden in woodland below the hilltop.



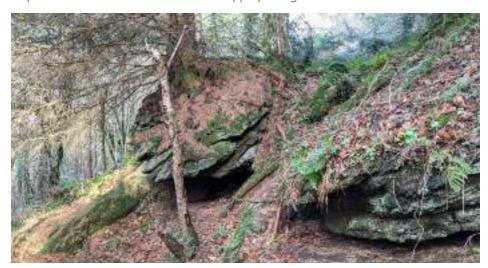
Slade Rocks (SX 8039 8378)

A large area of exposed granite can be found to the south-west of Kennick Reservoir above the old, disused car park. Given the name 'Kennick Rocks' by Max Piper as it resides in Kennick Copse, Tithe maps mark the area as 'Slade Rocks' and there is a quarry to the east hinting at the former industry seen throughout Dartmoor. The most prominent outcrop can be found on the south side and the area was re-discovered by Max in December 2017.



Trenchford Tor (SX 80284 82965)

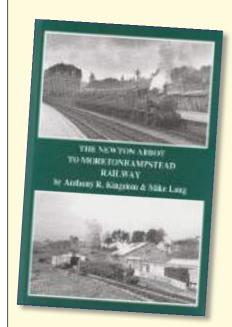
This deceptively large outcrop is located just off the public footpath by the footbridge at the north-west end of Trenchford Reservoir. The lowest part of the main outcrop culminates in a cave resembling a 'lion's paw' which is topped with a tree. It extends uphill into the woodland carpet for some distance. The name seems appropriate given Trenchford Stream flows below.



Little Trenchford Tor (SX 80195 83040)

Sat about 100 metres to the north-west of Trenchford Tor, there is a smaller outcrop warranting a closer look that is so easily visible from the public footpath. Repeat visits have seen tree branches piled up in front of this characteristic pile which hides its overall size; hopefully these will be removed one day so we can appreciate the outcrop for what it is.





THE NEWTON ABBOT TO MORETONHAMPSTEAD RAILWAY

Reprinted 2019 to mark the closure of the passenger line 60 years ago. 320 pages full of photos and history of the line

To get a copy, send a cheque payable to 'Paul Rendell' at:

The Coach House, Tramlines, Okehampton, Devonshire EX20 1EH

Price £12.95 including postage.

Also available from www.paulrendelldartmoor.co.uk

THE REDLAKE TRAMWAY AND CHINA CLAY WORKS

By Steve Grigg

Part One - Clay Extraction at Redlake

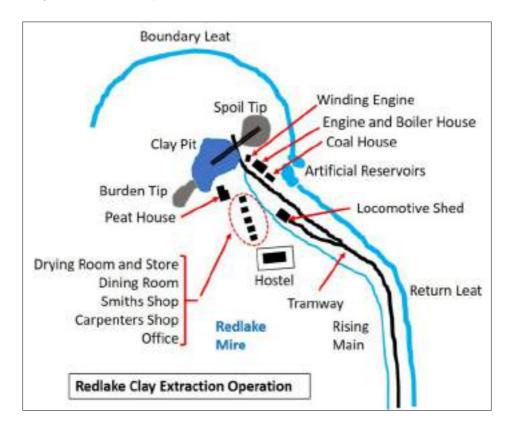
In the early 1970s the author was introduced to the 'Puffing Billy' track as it was known, as part of sponsored walks he undertook for his local cub and scout group (3rd Plympton). The track of course was the Redlake Tramway, built to support clay extraction in the early 20th century, which runs from Cantrell near Ivybridge to Redlake deep into the south moor, a distance of over eight miles. For the sponsored walk the cubs would walk from Cantrell to Spurrell's Cross and back, whereas the scouts would walk from Cantrell to Redlake and back. Supervision was minimal and we were told to 'just keep to the track and you'll be okay'. So, from those humble beginnings began a lifelong love of Dartmoor, especially its industrial archaeology, with the firm favourite always being Redlake and its environs.

This article is the first of a series of five relating to the Redlake China Clay exploitations. The series of five are: Redlake Clay Extraction; Greenhill Micas; Leftlake Clay Extraction; The Tramway; The end of the line and Cantrell. Reference is made to the excellent EA Wade publications from 1982 and 2004 (*The Redlake Tramway & China Clay Works*) and the assistance of Colin Yelland, who provided Wade ('Ted') with much of the material for his publications.

The story of Redlake China Clay begins in mid-1904, when the first approaches to the Duchy of Cornwall were made regarding the mineral rights in the Redlake area. In 1905, a mineralogist was commissioned by Charles Edward Cottier (a Plymouth businessman) to search for a new area for clay extraction on the moor. The mineralogist was none other than Richard Hansford Worth, who will be remembered as an antiquarian, author and historian. Worth found clay beds at Redlake which had been exposed by earlier peat cutters and tin streamers. He estimated the area of the clay beds to be 'six hundred yards by 200 yards, with a proven depth of at least sixty feet'.

Cottier had a bit of a bumpy ride to get a lease to extract clay, especially as there were concerns about the proximity of the proposed workings to both the Erme catchment (via Redlake) and the Avon catchment (via Heng Lake). Cottier was finally successful in obtaining his lease from the Duchy in 1908. In 1910 he set about forming a company to work the clay, called China Clay Corporation Limited. At that time the estimates (based on a survey of less than 100 acres) for the readily available clay were 2.25 million tons, with a value of £3.15 million. This valuation seemed sufficient for prospective shareholders, and clay extraction started at the end of 1913. The story of the infrastructure needed to get clay and materials between Redlake and Cantrell will be covered in future articles.

At Redlake today the three most prominent features are the spoil tip (also known as the 'Sky Tip'), the flooded pit and two artificial reservoirs. That said, with a little exploration and imagination, the whole operation reveals itself to the observer.



The three key resources required at the Redlake Clay Extraction Operation were water, power and labour. The water was needed to operate the monitors, which washed the clay away from the face of the pit. This was supplied by two artificial reservoirs, one of which was fed from a boundary leat, which arcs in a semi-circle to the north of the operation, and the other from a return leat from the initial clay processing plant at Greenhill Micas (a form of recycling). The boundary leat also served to prevent flooding of the main pit area. In addition to this drinking water was carried on the train for use at Redlake and other water (eg for washing) was pumped from Redlake (brook) using a waterwheel.

Power came in the form of coal, electricity (from a water wheel) and diesel for the pumping and winding engines.

The labour workforce in the main worked Monday to Friday, catching the 6am train from Cantrell on a Monday, staying at the hostel in the week and returning to Cantrell the following Saturday morning. There were two hostels constructed, the first of which was demolished to supply materials for the First World War and the second whose foundations







Winding Engine foundations, flooded pit and 'Sky Tip'



Foundations of the Hostel/Barracks



Coal House at end of Engine and Boiler House

we see today. They were heated using a combination of peat and coal burnt together on a stove. Meals were served in a separate dining room (see sketch of the site).

Work started each day at 8am. In winter, work would stop when it got dark. However, in the summer, work continued until 8.45pm. Key to the success of the operation was keeping the pumping engines maintained and running which would require them being tended to virtually seven days per week. This task fell to Billy Gould although the daily inspection was the responsibility of Bill Warren (from Scorriton).

We can only imagine what a typical daily scene from the operation might have looked like with between 30 to 40 men working there. The pit in its heyday was around 100ft (30m) deep (the pumping engine shaft was 130ft (40m) deep). It must have been very dirty and noisy with clay monitors in operation, diesel generators running, wagons trundling up and down on a double tracked incline from the extraction pit to the top of the 'Sky Tip' as well as the steam engines on the tramway itself.

Clay from the extraction point was pumped to a pre-processing plant at Greenhill Micas, approx 1 mile (1.6km) to the south (after which it was sent by gravity down a pipe to Cantrell for the main processing). It is at Greenhill Micas where the second in this series of articles will pick up the Redlake Tramway and China Clay Works story once more.

DARTMOOR INSCRIBED STONES - REVISITED

By Mark Fenlon and Tim Jenkinson

Butterdon (Butter Brook) Rifle Range

In the mid 19th century, when the primary weapons of the British infantry changed from muskets to rifles, the Board of Ordnance required areas of land that could be used as ranges, to train personnel in the use of these new firearms.

Following correspondence between the War Office, agents for the Duchy of Cornwall and Sir Walter Carew (Lord of the Manor of Ugborough), an agreement was reached that permitted the construction of the rifle range, with its accompanying camp facilities, on Ugborough Moor.

The Butterdon Rifle Range was laid out on the lower north-west slopes of Butterdon Hill, to the south of Piles Hill and above the headwaters of the Butter Brook. It consisted of four butts, aligned east to west, each with an observation pit 100yds (91m) to the south and a double line of distance markers extending southwards. There were two pairs of butts and pits on either side of the Butterdon stone row which forms the boundary between the parishes of Harford and Ugborough.

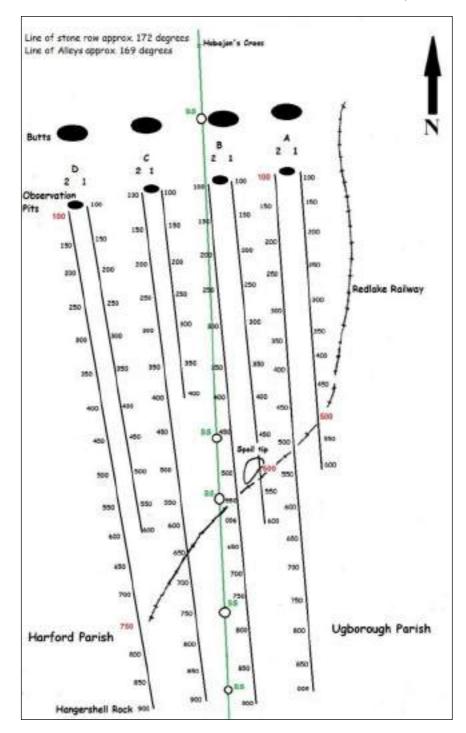
Realising that the War Office had encroached into Harford Moor, the owner of those lands, WHB Rivers of Stowford, complained to both the War Office and Duchy of Cornwall. Local residents added their voices to the opposition, complaining that the soldiers camped in the area were an annoyance to them. The range first saw service in May 1861 but was abandoned a few weeks later, in July of that year.

For Tim and I, interest in the Butterdon Rifle Range was the result of a joint venture with the Ivybridge Heritage and Archive Group (IHAAG). In August 2016, as members of the Milestone Society, we assisted in the raising and rescue of three boundary stones and provided funding for the repainting of two cast iron mileposts along a section of the old A38.

Whilst discussing the military presence in and around Ivybridge with members of the IHAAG, mention was made of the distance markers on the Butterdon Rifle Range. Tim and I are always keen to locate and record inscribed markers that neither of us have previously visited, so volunteered our services. In total, seven field trips were undertaken between 11 Aug 2016 and 29 August 2017.

Unusually, on this occasion *Dartmoor Boundary Markers* by Dave Brewer (DB) was of little use. Instead, reference was made to his article, entitled *The Butterdon Rifle Range*, which appeared in *Dartmoor Magazine* Issue 45. The sketched plan of the range that accompanied the article was of particular interest.

However, a search on the internet revealed a more in-depth account of the Rifle Range, entitled An Archaeological Assessment of the Victorian Military Rifle Range at Butter Brook, Dartmoor (2014) by Nigel Stainer (NS). Not only did NS's research increase the number of distance markers found from 87 (DB) to 102, it also corrected DB's interpretation



of the layout of the range. Instead of being fan-shaped, the four Alleys run parallel to each other on a bearing of 169° from the butts. In addition, NS complements his work with very useful 10 figure grid references for each of the markers, using a state of the art global positioning system (GPS) that the author describes as follows: 'The perimeter lines of stones were plotted using the survey grade GPS equipment of Saltash Heritage Group. The internal lines have been plotted using navigation grade GPS equipment accurate to within a metre. A list of those (markers) located, to date, have been plotted using Arc GIS software.'

In most instances, when using our handheld Garmin Etrex 10 GPS units, the grid references provided by NS proved extremely useful. However, for a few of the markers the difference between NS's and our grid references was up to eight metres.

A total of 79 markers were located by Tim and I during our first four field trips. Determined to find the 23 markers that had so far eluded us, a 50 metre tape measure was added to our 'stone hunting' tool kit.

Measuring the distance from known markers, we were able to locate the remaining markers during our fifth and sixth field trips. Even with the tape measure, those last few markers were not easy to find amongst the gorse and long grass. A surprisingly thick layer of vegetation had built up over the markers since NS had revealed them.

The remains of the range are not that obvious - time has almost absorbed them into the moorland landscape. Early Ordnance Survey maps, dated 1887-1906, indicate the positions of the *Old Rifle Butts* at the northern end of the range. Resembling 'pillow mounds', these are easily found, as are the four observation pits that are positioned 100yds (91m) to the south of them. The diagram accompanying this article shows the layout of the Rifle Range. The range is divided into four Alleys, identified from east to west as A, B, C and D. Each Alley has two shooting lanes, numbered 1 and 2, again east to west. Each lane is marked by distance markers embedded in the ground. From the 100yds (91m) markers, on either side of the Observation Pits, the distance markers extend on a bearing of 169° and increase in 50yds (46m) increments thereafter. The first Lane (1) of each Alley extends up to 600yds (549m), the second Lane (2) extends up to 900yds (823m).

Each of the distance markers is a roughly hewn piece of granite, embedded in the ground, so that their inscribed surface is just above ground level and readable when facing the target butts. On some of the markers the 4's have been cut in reverse, these can be found







A2 - 200 B1 - 450 reversed 4

A2 - 900 (009)

in lanes B1 and D1. Also, a 600yds (549m) and 900yds (823m) marker, which have been put in the wrong positions, have been placed upside down in an effort to rectify the error.

Following the conclusion of our field trips Tim and I were advised not to publish our findings, because it was feared that the markers would become vulnerable to thieves. Perhaps this is why DB did not describe their whereabouts in any great detail and NS's research is not readily available. Therefore, in the list that follows, I have refrained from including grid references for these markers.

The markers that were located are in black, those not found are in red and those with reversed numbers or positioned incorrectly are <u>underlined</u>.

Alley A1 = 100 / 150 / 200 / 250 / 300 / 350 / 400 / 450 / 500 / 550 / 600

Alley A2 = 100 / 150 / 200 / 250 / 300 / 350 / 400 / 450 / 500 / 550 / 600 / 650 / 700 / 750 / 800 / 850 / 009

Alley B1 = 100 / 150 / 200 / 250 / 300 / 350 / 400 / 450 / 500 / 550 / 600

Alley B2 = 100 / 150 / 200 / 250 / 300 / 350 / 400 / 450 / 500 / 550 / <u>006</u> / 650 / 700 / 750 / 800 / 850 / 900

Alley C1 = 100 / 150 / 200 / 250 / 300 / 350 / 400

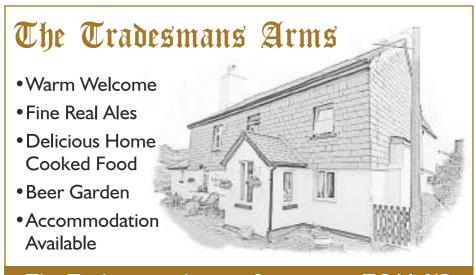
Alley C2 = 100 / 150 / 200 / 250 / 300 / 350 / 400 / 450 / 500 / 550 / 600 / 650 / 700 / 750 / 800 / 850 / 900

Alley D1 = 100 / 150 / 200 / 250 / 300 / 350 / 400 / 450 / 500 / 550 / 600

Alley D2 = 100 / 150 / 200 / 250 / 300 / 350 / 400 / 450 / 500 / 550 / 600 / 650 / 700 / 750 / 800 / 850 / 900

References:

Brewer, Dave; The Butterdon Rifle Range, Dartmoor Magazine, Issue 45, Winter, pp10-11 (1996). Brewer, Dave; Rifle Ranges on the Moor, Dartmoor News, Issue 133, pp48-51 (2013). Hankin, CF; Rifle Butts on Harford Moor (Worksheet) (1977-80). Historic Environment



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DARTMOOR QUIZ

Compiled by Richard Elliott

Try this quiz and see how much you know about Dartmoor

- 1. Which datum post can be found near Dinger Pool?
- 2. Whose mill can be found on the River Plym opposite Giant's Basin?
- 3. What is the alternative name for The Tristis Rock?
- 4. Whose tomb is supposed to be on the northern slope of Cosdon?
- 5. The 'lan Mercer Inscription Stone' is at the head of which brook?
- 6. Half Ring overlooks which brook?
- 7. Hemstone Rocks is in which forest?
- 8. What was the previous name of The Mary Tavy Inn?
- 9. What is the alternative name for Bellever Combe Lake?
- 10. Which is the nearest church to Bullaven?
- 11. Which marsh is at the foot of Zeal Gully?
- 12 Crooked Oak lies on the banks of which river?
- 13. Which hill was known as Gnattleshill in 1608?
- 14. Which of the following is the highest? Cosdon, Great Links Tor, Hangingstone Hill. Amicombe Hill.
- 15. Where would you find the inscription V? T.
- 16. We all know where Two Bridges is but where is Three Bridges?
- 17. Where would you find a stone inscribed CB 1809?
- 18. What shape was the original Calveslake Tor letterbox stamp?
- 19. Which brook starts its journey on the eastern flank of Wildbanks Hill?
- 20. What would you find at the southern end of Dartmoor's longest stone row?
- 21. Without looking at a map which of these grid references would be correct for Lints Tor? 579875 646811 550843 617862
- 22. In feet what is the height of Yes Tor? 2010ft, 2030ft, 2050ft, 2070ft
- 23. Where would you find HWB4 stone?
- 24. Biller's Pound overlooks which river?
- 25 What is Hoax Tor better known as?
- 26. Where would you find the Three Fishes Stone?
- 27. Where would you find an area called Flatters?
- 28. Name the tributary between Red Lake and the River Aune?
- 29. On which hill would you find Luxton Tor?
- 30. Four prisoners escaped from Dartmoor Prison, Princetown. Prisoner A was recaptured in Okehampton, prisoner B in Bovey Tracey, prisoner C in Ivybridge and prisoner D in Callington. Which prisoner got the furthest away from Princetown?

Answers on page 72

THE VALUE OF BIRDS' NESTS

Rob Hubble and Stella Tracey talk about their work on Dartmoor

Occasionally news media run stories about how well or badly our birds are doing. Their information often comes from charities such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) or the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) but how do *they* get their information?

One source is the RSPB's annual January Big Garden Birdwatch but valuable as that is much more detailed scientific information is needed in order to understand the reasons for the increases and declines of bird populations and more generally for informing government environmental policy. Much of this comes from the BTO which is essentially a scientific organisation. They in turn rely on a vast cohort of volunteers throughout the UK to obtain the raw data through ringing studies, the nest record scheme, breeding bird surveys and other annual and ad hoc surveys.

This article describes how my wife and I, two Dartmoor based birders, have been able to contribute to this work and gained enjoyment and some fascinating experiences at the same time, especially through our work for the Nest Record Scheme (NRS).

We are not new to this long running survey. We have been contributing records since the 1980s but due to work and other commitments we rarely managed more than 20 nests a year before I retired. We had been on day courses about this before but in 2012 we joined a BTO residential long-weekend course in Surrey to update and improve both our skills in nest finding and our knowledge of the relevant law and the 'do's and don'ts' of this sensitive subject – the welfare of the birds always comes first.

Dartmoor is of course not just open moorland. There are various habitats with their own bird species but the BTO had a particular need for more records of the ground nesting birds, such as Meadow Pipit, Skylark, Stonechat, Whinchat, Wheatear, Reed Bunting, Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff and indeed Cuckoo (which on Dartmoor mainly parasitize the nests of Meadow Pipits).



Skylark eggs

Rob Hubble and Stella Tracey

Our 2012 course had been held at the end of May so the nesting season for these birds was already well advanced but we had some exciting days which in fact included nests of most of these species.

Nest finding requires patience. You can watch a pair of birds from a distance for an hour or more trying to tie down exactly where the nest is – it is essential to do that so as not to disturb the birds more than necessary. More than once a long stake-out came to nothing when my cover was blown by someone clumping up behind me bellowing out 'Found anything

interesting mate?' But most people we meet on the moor are genuinely interested to hear what we are doing and why.

One of the most numerous Dartmoor breeders is the Meadow Pipit which, like the Skylark, tends to return to its nest by landing some distance away and then walking in under cover by a circuitous route. The nests are normally well hidden under grass or bilberry and their eggs are a cryptic dark brown. They are one of the more successful of the Dartmoor breeders. Covid lockdowns greatly reduced our surveying in 2020 but over the previous seven years our anecdotal evidence suggested that their numbers were fairly stable.

The same applies to Stonechats which have the advantage of having multiple broods, often three broods each season. Like Meadow Pipits they are residents so they can start quite early, weather permitting.

However their close relatives, Whinchats, have been declining for some years. The Dartmoor Study Group carried out a survey of Whinchats and Stonechats in 2005 and then repeated it in 2015. That showed that while Stonechats were holding their own Whinchats had significantly reduced their breeding sites on Dartmoor, concentrating on a few favoured areas.

Talk of Meadow Pipits and Whinchats brings us neatly to Cuckoos. They parasitize a number of different species including those two birds. However any particular Cuckoo will specialize in just one species, so for example most Dartmoor birds are 'Meadow Pipit' Cuckoos and they mimic that bird's dark brown eggs. 'Whinchat' Cuckoos are more frequently found in Germany where they mimic the Whinchat's sky blue eggs. A few years ago we found the nest shown here:

This is a Whinchat nest parasitized by a 'Meadow Pipit' Cuckoo but because of that it could only lay brown eggs! Cuckoos will watch several nests and when the host has laid its last or penultimate egg the Cuckoo



Rob camouflaged as mossy rock



Whinchat eggs

Rob Hubble and Stella Tracey



Cuckoo egg in Whinchat's nest

Rob Hubble and Stella Tracey

will nip in and lay its own egg before removing one of the host's eggs. In this case we guess that none of the watched Pipit nests had reached the right stage and 'when you've gotta lay, you've gotta lay!' so this one dumped its egg in the nearest convenient nest which happened to be a Whinchat's. The hosts abandoned their nest but built again about 30 metres away and eventually fledged five young Whinchats, so it was Whinchats 5 Cuckoos 0!



Cuckoo chick

Rob Hubble and Stella Tracev

These photos are of a Meadow Pipit nest where the Cuckoo got it right and the young Cuckoo was eventually ringed. Nationally Cuckoos are in serious decline but because the Dartmoor Meadow Pipits are doing well Cuckoos are still fairly common on parts of the moor.

Another unusual sight was this Reed Bunting nest. A normal clutch size is 4-5 eggs so nine eggs are unprecedented. It's possible that another Reed Bunting made use of a readymade nest to dump its own eggs in - it's not just Cuckoos who sometimes do this. Six of the eggs hatched but not all fledged probably because the clutch was too big for

the adults to supply enough food. This is another resident bird that seems to be holding its own in favoured areas



Reed Bunting's nest

Rob Hubble and Stella Tracey

Willow Warblers are becoming scarcer in the south of England, moving north perhaps because of climatic change, but they are still quite widespread in Devon especially around the fringes of Dartmoor and in favoured more central sites like the Redwater (Vitifer) valley. Their well-hidden domed nests are always a delight to find.

The open moor isn't all bogs and bracken; there are many places where gorse, brambles and small trees abound. So we find plenty of thrushes and finches most of which seem to be maintaining their populations on Dartmoor

even though some are being squeezed out of more agricultural areas. It is particularly important for Linnets who favour gorse and Chaffinches, Dunnocks and Blackcaps seem to do well there as well.

One problem for all these birds, especially the ground nesters, is free running dogs. Most dog owners do seem to abide by the requirement to keep dogs under 'Close Control' during the bird breeding season when sheep and lambs are also present but there are enough who don't to cause damage.

I would like to end with an amusing and exciting incident that occurred in 2016. Stella and I were tucked down in the bracken on one side of a valley trying to work out where a

particular Whinchat pair was nesting when she said 'A huge bird just landed in that fir tree across the valley'. I was intent on keeping my bins on the Whinchats so I said. 'It's probably a buzzard'. After a short pause she said, 'No, it's much bigger, you really ought to look.' Me: 'Yeah, yeah in a minute.' But she was insistent so to keep the peace I glanced up and it was the Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier) which had been seen around Dartmoor over the past couple of weeks. We watched it for 10 minutes then it casually began circling upwards, higher and higher until even with good bins I could barely see it - as Jane Austen might have written, 'It's a truth universally acknowledged that you should always listen to your wife.'

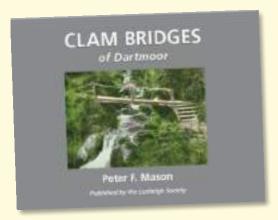


Willow Warbler's nest

Rob Hubble and Stella Tracey

All birds are protected in some form but some receive additional protection under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. A list of these birds can be found on the BTO website and no nest of these birds should be approached for any reason without a licence which can in special circumstances be issued by the BTO. The nests of other birds can be visited but for both ethical and scientific reasons this should only be done in accordance with the detailed code of conduct issued by the BTO. To see this Google 'BTO NRS Code of Conduct'.

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MEMORIES FROM 30 YEARS AGO

Sub editor Chris Walpole looks back and remembers Falling Dreams

When *Dartmoor News* was first published in 1991 I had already been living in Belstone for 28 uneventful years. I can't say I noticed the appearance of a new magazine dedicated to all things Dartmoor – I had always walked a fair bit on the northern moor but I had no particular interest in anywhere further afield or in the people and history of the area. 1991 would be the year all that began to change.

A few items from my diary in the early part of the year;

New Year's Day; a diabolical day of rain and wind. Rode my bike up to Watchet and leaned 30 degrees backwards into the wind without falling over.

13 January; a cold and beautiful day. Pedalled the bike all round the artillery road and walked to Cranmere Pool – my first visit in years. Saw four buzzards and lots of people and a stamp of Yuri Gagarin in the Cranmere visitors' book.



The author and his stunt man dummy on Belstone Tor

Lorna Sheppard

2 February; it is many years since Dartmoor had such snow – a covering of a few inches which shows no sign of thawing. My friend Andy is down for the winter sports. He has brought his crosscountry skis – not ideal ones for someone like me who has never skied before as they are longer and thinner than usual but I'm giving it a go.

11 February; Andy left me the skis and a top up of snow has kept the conditions excellent. I shuffled to the

top of Cosdon with the skis strapped to my back and looked south over a snowy waste to the horizon – beautiful. Two red grouse the only sign of life. Then made slow progress skiing down to Taw Marsh.

2 March; one of those rare mornings where mist hangs in Taw Marsh and you can climb above it to Belstone Tor. Thick at 8am, it was gone by 8.45am. Cows stand like surreal statues in the half-light.

In the succeeding months of 1991 my life changed forever – first my mother died suddenly on the day she should have been going on holiday to Paris and then I fell in love for the first and only time.

Until then my main interest had always been making amateur films and the one in production at the start of the year was called Falling Dreams. The plot ended with the distraught hero (me) jumping off the top of a mountain at the same spot where his girlfriend had accidentally fallen to her death. We filmed some of this on the top of Stac Pollaidh, that wonderfully spiky little peak in the North West Highlands of Scotland but poor weather curtailed proceedings.



The author on the upper slopes of Cosdon Beacon, looking south to Steeperton Tor

Chris Walpole

Belstone Tor then had to stand in for Stac Pollaidh. So it was that I came to be carrying a mattress to the top of the tor, throwing a very unconvincing dummy man over the edge and trying to film its fall with a camera tied on the end of some rope. The film was never finished, but not because of this sequence; more because it seemed unimportant after I received the news that my mother had died at the very moment we were filming the girlfriend's graveyard scene in front of Port Talbot steelworks ... but that's another story.





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DARTMOOR WILD CAMPING

Shamus McCaffery explains 'wild camping', also known as backpacking

My interest in wild camping started a long time ago as a small child when my father would encourage me to pitch my tent in our garden. As a young teenager I began to explore the uplands of Dartmoor with the encouragement of the late Jim Shapter, an advocate of adventurous activities for young people in the south-west and author of *Dartmoor for Gold*.

I was extremely fortunate to join an RAF training establishment, RAF Locking, where participation in the annual Ten Tors event was encouraged; I was able to undertake the 55 mile event twice, which is quite a rarity. So from an early age my relationship with Dartmoor and wild camping was forged.

What is Wild Camping?

Camping is generally defined as the activity of sleeping outdoors in a tent or other portable structure. For many people this goes as far as transporting a little 'home-from-home' with your car to a campsite somewhere that offers a range of facilities. Wild camping, on the other hand, means being self reliant, without transport or facilities other than those that

you carry with you on your back.



Night-time camping

Shamus McCaffery

Is it Legal?

All land is owned by someone; this includes common land, and the Dartmoor Commons are no exception. Although rights of access exist in 'open country' for England and Wales, you do not have the right to pitch a tent, hammock, tarp or bivvy without the landowner's consent. However, through the establishment of bylaws created for the Dartmoor Commons, permission is granted to wild camp in certain areas.

provided you follow some simple rules. The extent of wild camping areas can be found on a detailed map available on the DNPA website.

Essentially the rules are:

Do not camp in large groups.

Do not light open fires (take a portable stove).

Stay out of sight and more than 100m from a road.

Do not stay for more than two consecutive nights at the same place.

Be respectful to wildlife.

Protect water sources.

LEAVE NO TRACE - Take litter home with you.

Safety: Military Training Areas: Dartmoor has a number of live firing areas where access is restricted in some areas at times. The times of firing are published on a Government website (details included below) - just search for 'Dartmoor Live Firing Times' and you will find the schedule. The ranges will also hoist red flags and display red lamps at prominent points when the areas are in use.

Weather: They say there is no such thing as bad weather, just the wrong clothing. Getting the weather right, or rather 'getting yourself right for the weather' on Dartmoor is crucial to the enjoyment of any wild camping adventure. Snow on Dartmoor at Easter is not unheard of. I was covering the annual Ten Tors event for the Exeter Express & Echo in May 1996 when driving rain and snow resulted in a mass evacuation of the event on the second day.

Our weather tends to approach from the west, gathering water as air moves across the expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. When the prevailing southwesterly weather systems push air up over Dartmoor it cools and condenses to form low cloud and fog/mist over the moors - consequently Dartmoor can be a wet place, with poor visibility at times! There are numerous sources of weather forecast; the Met Office, the BBC Weather Service and the Mountain Weather Information System (MWIS Southern Uplands) are a few reliable sources that spring to mind.



Shamus and Petra

Shamus McCaffery

Navigation: Although Dartmoor doesn't present the precipitous heights of other mountainous regions in the United Kingdom, in many respects it brings its own navigational issues because of undulating contours and lack of ridgelines. Couple this with poor visibility, bad weather conditions or nightfall and your navigation skills will be tested to the limit. Many apps and devices to aid navigation are available, however I would always advocate carrying a map and compass and knowing how to use them proficiently. If your navigation skills aren't particularly well honed, then cut your cloth accordingly and stay within range of paths and tracks that can lead you to safety quickly in the event of an emergency.

Equipment: I'll try to be brief, but it is difficult to avoid lengthy debate in any area concerning wild camping equipment since there is so much available on the market these days. I have been a scrutineer for the annual Ten Tors event for over 12 years now and have experienced a vastly diverse set of opinions on what constitutes 'suitable equipment'. In terms of suitability, one really needs to consider potential and probable circumstances that you will encounter; duration of trip, weather forecast, temperature, number in the group, fitness and experience all play a part in deciding what to carry.

Outdoor and camping equipment has come a long way, in terms of its availability to hikers, over the past thirty or forty years. The first Ten Tors event that I did as a young man was with a cotton flysheet, Vango Force Ten tent and a military sleeping bag that could only be rivalled in terms of dimensions and weight by Barnes Wallis' bouncing bomb! The waterproofs of that era were as breathable as a plastic bin bag.

There is an overarching truth that dominates the selection of wild camping equipment. It goes something like this: You can have lightweight, you can have cheap, and you can have durable - but you can't have all three! But in fairness there seems to be a range of equipment available to suit most needs and budgets these days.



Small group of tents

Shamus McCaffery

I'm not going to give a definitive 'kit list'; I would suggest that if you require one then a little more research is needed. There is some great advice available online through various websites and Facebook groups. My own YouTube channel 'Outdoors Inspiration' has detailed videos on the range of equipment I carry and how I select it.

In brief though:

Tent/Shelter: Select something that is not only light to carry but compact enough to be packed with everything else. A two person tent,

when shared, reduces the load even further.

Sleeping Bag/System: Both the sleeping bag and ground mat form a sleep system that needs to be sufficient for the temperatures that you will encounter. The need for insulation from the ground is very important and shouldn't be underestimated to ensure a comfortable night's sleep.

Stove and Pans: Again the lighter and more 'stowable' the better. I personally prefer a gas stove using self-sealing gas cartridges, but many people choose methylated spirit or hexamine as a fuel source. This is down to personal preference, but what is not acceptable on Dartmoor is an open fire. Care should always be taken to protect the moor from accidental fires, even during winter months.

Food and Water: This can take up a large space in your rucksack. You can of course take and prepare fresh food, but remember to take all waste home with you. I prefer to take freeze-dried meals, they retain more flavour and nutrition than dehydrated meals and weigh much less than fresh food or pre-packaged 'wet meals'.

You will need to carry drinking water, and it is important to consider treating, filtering or boiling water that you take from Dartmoor rivers (on the way or at your camp site). The water may appear clean, but there may be harmful bacteria or viruses present from such things as animal faeces; these are undetectable to the human eye.

Waterproofs and Clothing: Whatever the weather forecast, be prepared to carry a set of waterproofs for your trip on Dartmoor – as previously discussed it can be very wet. Gaiters for the lower legs can be useful in wet peaty conditions. Tents can appear warm and inviting on the internet or pitched in a camping shop, but although they stop the wind and rain you still need to carry sufficient insulating layers to ensure that your wild camping experience is an enjoyable one.

Rucksack and Liner: Obviously you have to carry all of this 'stuff', and your choice and size of rucksack will depend on the type of equipment you carry; a bivvy is smaller than a tent, a down sleeping bag more compact than synthetic insulation, dehydrated food takes up less space than fresh food ... so there is no answer to 'what is an ideal size of rucksack?' However, do ensure that, whatever you choose, it is comfortable and has a structure to support the load. Make sure that the contents of your rucksack are independently wrapped in a waterproof liner; this can range from a bespoke waterproof rucksack liner through to a rubble sack – but it is essential.

Don't forget that if Fido, your furry friend, is accompanying you, then you (or the dog) will have to carry additional food and bedding.

Dogs and Grazing Animals: Be mindful that sheep, ponies and cattle graze the moorland. None of them are 'wild' and they represent somebody's livelihood. Dogs are great company on a wild camp - mine always accompany me - but ensure that they are kept under close control or on a lead if they are unsafe around stock.

Selecting Your Wild Camp site:

Before you head out, check the DNPA wild camping map and Ministry of Defence firing range timetable for a 'permissible' area that is suitable for your hiking activities.

Look for a place/pitch that gives you shelter from prevailing conditions and has access to water. Be mindful not to camp too close to rivers when rain is forecast - Dartmoor rivers are 'spate rivers' and can rise rapidly with great ferocity after heavy rainfall! Protect water sources from pollution and ensure that your toilet area is at least 30 metres away (bury any 'solid' waste matter).



The wonderful sky

Shamus McCaffery

Try and find dry, flat ground that isn't

too stony. Stones and undulations will not only give you an uncomfortable night's sleep and damage your equipment, but make setting tent pegs into the ground a real problem.

Next on the list is ... The View. That's why we are out there isn't it? There is nothing more satisfying than settling down to the beautiful night-time sights and sounds that Dartmoor's landscape has to offer, with the exception of waking up with a mug of coffee as the sun rises over a lofty granite tor the next morning. So pitch your tent where you can enjoy this fantastic experience!

Enjoy the views, the peace, and the landscape that has been walked over and camped on since Neolithic people first hunted here.

Useful websites:

www.dartmoor.gov.uk www.gov.uk/government/publications/dartmoor-firing-programme www.metoffice.gov.uk

www.outdoorsinspiration.com - YouTube - Outdoors Inspiration or find me on Facebook

USING SATELLITE NAVIGATION ON DARTMOOR

By Eleanor Ludgate

Yes, satnavs are wonderful in some ways, especially if you are driving alone and needing to find places you have never been to before. However, I don't think people who rely entirely on them realise just how much they are missing!

I just love looking at maps and have a huge collection of them. They are just so interesting and informative. I always have one of anywhere I am going to, especially on holiday, as I like to look up all the places of interest, ancient antiquities, viewpoints, historical sites, beauty spots etc, etc. However so many people these days just rely on the satnay to get them from A to B with hardly even knowing where they are going!

I have an art gallery in Chagford and I am asked so often by tourists how to get to different places that I always have a map in the gallery to show them. Hardly any of them have maps themselves or have any idea of the countryside around, and it no longer surprises me when they ask how to get to Dartmoor when they are actually on it already!



Vehicle crossing Chagford Bridge

Eleanor Ludgate

I was being driven by my son recently, going in search of a new second-hand car, and instead of asking for the address he just asked for the postcode and after following directions on screen of his mobile phone we ended up in the wrong place! I thought, if only I had a map and the address I could have easily found the right place! But that is considered old fashioned and frowned upon!

When my daughter and son in law came to

visit and drove up from Plymouth, they had wanted to come via Tavistock and drive across the moor, but without a map and only satnav they missed this entirely as it took them by the fastest route!

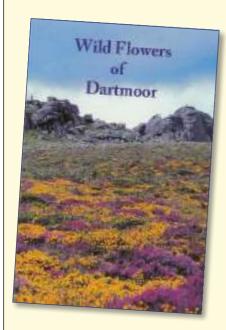
I have also noticed a dramatic increase in cars and vans using the tiny road that comes into Chagford via the ancient and very narrow Chagford Bridge which is quite unsuitable for heavy traffic. Being a walker this makes it very difficult as the roads are so narrow you have to keep constantly stopping and standing with your toes tucked in as the cars squeeze past. Having spoken to a few of the drivers I realise they have been sent this way to Chagford by their satnav as it is apparently the quickest route, although in reality is quite unsuitable, but without maps these drivers do not realise that there is a better and slightly wider route into the town just a little further along the road.

And this must happen all over the place, not just here. So, what used to be quiet country lanes are now awash with traffic all trying to squeeze down them and then having to reverse back when they meet another vehicle, which most of them are not used to doing, causing general chaos and misery.

There is also the matter of what happens to people relying on satnavs when the signal goes, as it so often does in the deep folds of Devon. I have met people who are nearly in tears with frustration when this happens and they are completely lost!

As a shopkeeper and one who relies mainly on tourists or day trippers I am sure the use of satnavs has made a huge difference to the number of visitors we get, and this must be the case all over the country.

I don't think the satnav generation will ever know or care what they are missing as they zoom down the motorway quite unaware of the pretty villages and lovely landscapes they are passing and this makes me sad.



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THE MINE

A short story by Clive Darke

Sally and her brother had been walking on the moor most of the day. John insisted they finish their walk by way of the old mine with its open adits and pits, its buildings long since reduced to outlines. In true Dartmoor style it was drizzling, gloom hung around the hillside obscuring the view.

'Are you sure we have time?' said Sally.

'Yeh, only take a few mins' came the reply.

The muddy path was intermittent and disappeared into the bracken. Wet fronds pulled at their legs. As the path became steeper Sally hesitated, then went for it. She slid, then tripped and fell into the bracken, but her descent did not slow. Hidden by the wet stalks was an open pit which started to crumble the more she struggled and desperately grabbed at reluctant plants.

Blackness.

She fell into water, not deep but enough to soak her through. She looked up and could barely see any sky, just a slightly less dark patch where a voice was calling.

'You ok?' came the faint sound. 'Sally!'

She groaned and realised she wasn't at all ok. Her arms hurt like hell, and as she tried to stand she saw her foot was at a stupid angle to her leg. A sharp pain washed from her ankle then up through the rest of her body.

'Bust my ankle!'

'What?'

'I said I've bust my ankle.'

'What? I found your sack.'

Only then did she realise her rucksack had been torn off her back in the fall, slowing her down.

'That's good, can you throw it down?'

'What?'

'I said...' Hopeless. 'Never mind.'

'I'll get the rescue out, but there's no signal here.'

'Ok'

The image got slightly lighter as John's head moved away. She assessed her situation. She slid out of the worst of the water and pulled herself onto a ledge. As her eyes grew accustomed to the gloom she realised she was in some sort of tunnel. She could just make out old pit props, with darkness beyond. She knew that the light, such as there was, would not last long, and that rescue was many hours away. She fervently hoped that John could get through on his phone and, just as important, could remember the spot where she fell. 'God, he was a prat sometimes' she thought. But then again he wasn't the one down here.

As she tried to relax the pain became worse, not just from her ankle but from her arms too. She wanted to wake-up from this nightmare.

The drip of water seemed to get louder. From a drip to a tapping sound, then a clanging. She thought she could see a faint light dancing in the tunnel with the smell of chip fat. That couldn't be right.

Ahead of the light there appeared a huge black deformed monster racing across the wall of the tunnel. Sally gasped and pushed her back against the rock.

'Wat you doin' yer?' came a voice from a more diminutive figure as the shadow shrank. He pulled a tallow candle from a bunch on his belt, lit it, and a thin wisp of animal-fat smoke drifted up. He placed the candle on a holder in the wall. This was no monster, but a grandad dressed in an old jacket like her dad wore, with a dirty smock stuck in his trousers tied with string below each knee. A broad brimmed hat sat squarely over the face, which she now saw was much younger than she had first thought. 'Baint no place fur a young lad.'

'I'm a girl' Sally protested.

'Dunt look like no girl wot I've seen', said the figure, and chuckled

'My ankle hurts.'

'Let me av a look'. He placed his hands around her lower leg. She winced and held her breath for the anticipated pain as she saw him straighten it. The pain never came.



The cold flooded mine

Dartmoor Chris

He ran his hands down her

arms and she looked into those kind eyes. A warm tiredness overwhelmed her as she felt herself being gently lifted and carried.

'Sally, Sally!' A bright light burned into her eyes. 'She's waking up.'

'Sally, I'm Mike from the Dartmoor Rescue Group, tell me where it hurts.'

Dazed, her conscience checked each part of her body, there was not even an ache anywhere. She noticed she was in the open, lying on wet grass.

'I'm ok' she said. Other lights illuminated the rescuer's concerned face and helmet. 'How's your ankle?' Mike asked. 'I think I'm fine' Sally replied. 'We'll check you out anyway' said Mike.

Then another serious face took over, this time a woman. Sally felt the firm probing around her neck, down her spine and every limb. An uncomfortable clip was attached to her finger.

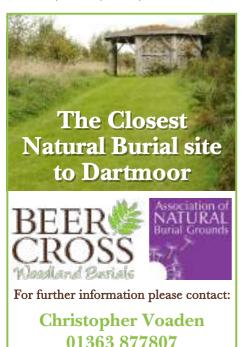
'Dart six zero from Dart six two, message, over.' A crackle. 'Cas seems ok but we'll stretcher her down to be safe.' Mike turned to Sally. 'We'll just get you warm and give you a ride back down.' The warm cocoon of the casualty bag wrapped around her as it was inflated. She felt a sway as she was lifted onto the stretcher. The gentle rocking during the carry woke a vague memory. Arriving at the waiting ambulance she was helped from the stretcher. The NHS paramedics gave her another lengthy and thorough check. She was fine.

Sally thanked her rescuers as they gave her a lift in their Land Rover. 'Didn't you feel spooky in that tunnel?' asked Mike, 'you did well to find your way out.' He turned to a younger man behind him. 'Paul, you know a bit about the mine don't you?'

Paul leaned forward, 'yes, sad tale'. Sally was suddenly interested. Paul continued, 'in 1896 the roof of a tunnel collapsed, burying some miners, one bloke was killed.' Sally felt faint.

They arrived at her brother's car. 'You ok?' asked John. He sniffed her jacket. "Ere, did they take you to the chippy? Could 'ave got me some.'

(This story was inspired by Paul Rendell)



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THE WORLD CUP OF DARTMOOR TORS

By Neil Armstrong

About five years ago a few things happened on the internet that interested me. Geoff Marshall, a Twitter user I follow (@geofftech), launched the World Cup of Tube Lines and Richard Osman, co-host of BBC One's *Pointless*, launched the World Cup of Crisps. Both competitions were run in a similar manner. In order for this type of competition to work the creator needs to pick either 32 or 16 entrants. Played a bit like a sporting tournament the entrants randomly go head to head for a vote. The winner progresses to the following rounds until eventually an overall winner is declared. If you're interested, the Jubilee Line and Pickled Onion Monster Munch won overall respectively.

Around this time I joined a Facebook (FB) group run by Max Piper called Tors of Dartmoor. It's a group that discusses different tors and posts photographs. In late 2018 I floated the idea of holding a World Cup of Tors to Max and members of the group. The idea was met with enthusiasm and the competition was launched in 2019 and currently runs during January of each year.

The entrants are selected during a live stream. All the tors marked on the OS map go into a bucket and 32 are drawn out. It's a basic knockout tournament where we start with 16 head to head competitions and end with a final head to head match and just like the football World Cup we also have a deciding match for third and fourth place!

Before I talk about this year's tournament I'll just let you know the 2019 and 2020 results.

2019
1st Great Mis Tor
2nd Oke Tor
3rd Watern Tor

2020

1st Steeperton Tor 2nd Great Links Tor 3rd Beardown Tors

In 2021 the 32 tors were randomly selected and it's worth emphasising the word randomly. The reason being is that some people were posting 'I don't think that's a fair contest' or 'it's like David and Goliath' etc. Well, I can assure you it was completely random. The 16 fixtures which opened the tournament were as follows (the winners of each match are in bold type and were voted for by members of the FB group Tors of Dartmoor):

Littaford Tor v Rook Tor Sourton Tors v Down Tor Hunt Tor v Crockern Tor Higher White Tor v Vixen Tor Raven's Tor v Great Staple Tor Sittaford Tor v Little Trowlesworthy Tor Hare Tor v Little Links Tor
Middle Staple Tor v Bellever Tor
Ger Tor v Little Mis Tor
King Tor v Hound Tor (Remote)
Hound Tor (Manaton) v Great Links Tor
Bell Tor v Aish Tor
Devil's Tor v Longaford Tor
Higher Tor v Roos Tor
Yar Tor v Hockinston Tor
Bag Tor v Haytor

What makes a great tor is up to much debate and during each fixture each tor receives praise and criticism in equal measure. I didn't vote for Vixen Tor throughout the competition because it's not accessible to the public. Probably the stand out match of this round was Hound Tor (Manaton) v Great Links Tor. Both are mammoth tors with real popularity. The other fixture that probably stands out is the 'Giant Killing' of Bag Tor beating the mighty Haytor.

In the next round the eight fixtures were as follows. As before bold type denotes the winners.

Littaford Tor v Sourton Tors
Hunt Tor v Vixen Tor
Great Staple Tor v Sittaford Tor
Hare Tor v Bellever Tor
Ger Tor v Hound Tor (Remote)
Great Links Tor v Bell Tor
Longaford Tor v Roos Tor
Yar Tor v Bag Tor

The biggest casualty of the last-16 round for me was Hare Tor but it was a tough fixture with Bellever Tor remaining very popular in the FB group.

So the quarter finalists were as follows:

Sourton Tors v Vixen Tor Great Staple Tor v Bellever Tor Ger Tor v Great Links Tor Longaford Tor v Yar Tor

So the four semi finalists were chosen and I think you'll agree four strong tors remained.

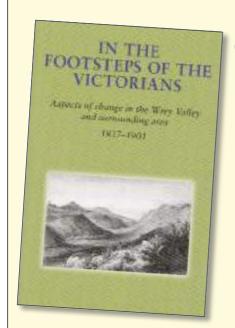
Great Staple overcame Sourton Tors and **Great Links** beat Longaford Tor, thus cementing their place in the final and the match for third and fourth place respectively.

The FINAL was ... Great Links Tor v Great Staple Tor. The winner of The World Cup of Tors 2021 was: **Great Links Tor**!

1st Great Links Tor 2nd Great Staple Tor 3rd Longaford Tor If you want to have a say in the 2022 World Cup of Tors in January next year join the FB group Tors of Dartmoor.



Great Links Tor Paul Rendell



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DARTMOOR BOGS - WHAT ARE THEY?

A stinking report by Paul Rendell

Anybody who walks on Dartmoor will be familiar with bogs and mires on the high moor. Many people are afraid of the bogs thanks to Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* story. Yes the bogs can be dangerous but if you understand them they are a wonderful living place. Some walkers wonder why it is so wet in the valley, why it is so wet on the side of the hill (surely the water will drain away) and why it is even wet on top of the hill as well. In fact many people ask, 'Why is Dartmoor so wet?'

It is certainly understandable that people worry about bogs. When I was sixteen I was crossing Raybarrow Pool, a valley mire below Cosdon Beacon, when I got stuck up to my chest. The smell was terrible – but with hundreds of years of decaying vegetation involved I was not surprised. It took me a long time to get out of that mire. I was on my own at the time and very scared but I soon learnt what to look for.

There are five types of wet areas – Blanket Bog, Raised Bog, Valley Mire, Rhos Pasture and Wet Woodlands

BLANKET BOG



Blanket bog near the head of the River Lyd

Paul Rende

There are two main blanket bog areas on Dartmoor, the north moor around Cranmere Pool and the south moor near Aune Head, covering about 120 square kilometres in Blanket bog is a comparatively habitat worldwide, and is very important Britain Dartmoor being the southerly most example in this country. What is a blanket bog and how will you tell if you are in one? In short, very

often the area you are standing on will move under your feet and will shake for many metres around you. After all, these peat bogs can be up to 85% water – and that is seriously wet.

Another way of telling if you are standing on a blanket bog is by looking at the plant life. Many metres below you will be granite and on top of that is a chocolate coloured mass of

dead sphagnum fragments, nearly always waterlogged, known as peat, which can be metres thick or as little as 30cm thick. Above that, usually no more than 30cm deep, will be the top layer or skin which is the 'live' area with upright stems of sphagnum moss and other plants like sundew, bog asphodel, cross-leaved heath, deer grass and hare's-tail cottongrass. Birds that live and nest in these bogs include golden plover, snipe, dunlin and curlew.

These areas started to form over 8000 years ago when there were trees on the moor. Over time these were cut down or burned by man and their remains rotted down to form peat. In some places the peat is nearly two metres deep (at Rattlebrook Head for instance). It has taken many years to form and can be destroyed very easilv. Uncontrolled burning especially in the summer can kill off the live plants of the bog. Military firing of live shells into the peat



Sphagnum Moss

Paul Rendell

(which no longer occurs), placing letterboxes in the peat hags, mountain biking, even walking can all cause damage, as can erosion caused by heavy rain.

RAISED BOG

Raised bog, where the peat forms a dome, occurs at Tor Royal Bog and covers about eight hectares. It is the only raised bog in Devon or Cornwall so is very rare indeed.

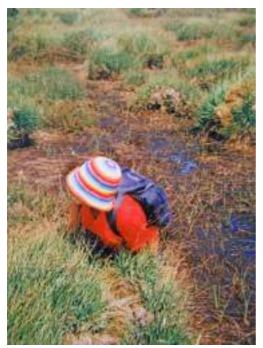
VALLEY MIRE

Valley mires are areas of waterlogged deep peat in valley bottoms, with characteristic acid wetland plants. Often these are found beside rivers and streams including Fox Tor Mires beside the Nun's Cross Brook, Raybarrow Pool (Blackaton Brook), Aune Head (Avon River), Vixen Mire (Beckamoor Brook) and Walkham Head (River Walkham). Nearly every river valley has a number of these mires, some so small they are not named. Yet not all valley mires are in valleys – some are found on hillsides like the spring on the side of the hill at High House Waste, Cornwood.

These valley mires of Dartmoor are unparalleled in upland Britain, with Bodmin Moor being the second best place to find them. Thus they are internationally important. Species you are likely to find in a valley mire are cotton grass, cross-leaved heath, bog asphodel, sundew, pale butterwort, St John's wort, bog pimpernel, marsh lousewort, sphagnum moss, snipe, common frog and golden ringed dragonfly.

RHOS PASTURE

Rhos pastures are not well known on Dartmoor because most of them are found on enclosed



This is how dangerous the bogs can be

Paul Rendell

land which the public do not usually have access to. Such areas can be found around Widecome-in-the-Moor, between Throwleigh and East Week and on the lower slopes of Cosdon Beacon at Pixies Moor. This is an internationally rare habitat with Dartmoor containing 1200 hectares which represents about 20 per cent of the English resource. These pastures are normally maintained by controlled cattle or pony grazing during the summer months.

Flora and fauna to be found include marsh plume thistle, devil's-bit scabious, heath spotted orchid, creeping willow, ivy-leaved bellflower, small pearl-bordered fritillary, snipe, reed bunting, grasshopper warbler, woodcock, barn owl, short-eared owl and roe deer.

Rhos pasture used to be in great danger of being drained but things have changed with land improvement and education. Today abandonment is the greatest threat. Scrub can easily take over if there is no grazing. DNPA offer

help for landowners to manage these rare landscapes.

WET WOODLANDS

Willow and alder woods occur frequently where the ground is waterlogged, not a common habitat in England. Within Dartmoor, wet woodlands are often found in association with oak trees or Rhos Pasture in valleys. These woods are usually small. Examples include the lower slopes of Easdon near North Bovey, the woods near Becky Falls and the Walkham valley below Merrivale. Plants found in these woods include grey willow, goat willow, alder, downy birch, ash and marsh marigold, ferns such as royal fern and diverse species of lichen. Birds can include woodcock, willow tit, redpoll and siskin.

FEATHER BED

A 'feather bed' is very special, a term not used in other parts of the UK. It is not somewhere you would want to go sleep on, as these are not restful places to be. If you should happen to walk onto one you should retrace your steps at once, if not you could sink waist deep or more. A 'feather bed' is a deep hole, often not more than five metres in diameter, filled with 'ooze' as William Crossing used to say – 'ooze' being peaty water and rotting matter with a thin layer of moss/plants. If you should try to stand on this bright green moss, it may not take your weight.

Anyway, enjoy Dartmoor, but remember when someone says it's a bit 'damp' there, just be aware, it could be a bog, mire or 'feather bed'.

This is based on an article first published in Dartmoor News, Issue 84 (May/June 2005)

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VIXEN TOR BOG

By Liz Miall

When is a Dartmoor mire not a mire? When it's a bog. For the purposes of this article I'll use 'bog', so here is my article on Vixen Tor Bog.

Why choose this area? For a start I can virtually see it from my house. I have guided numerous children to its edge and it contains everything a moorland bog should. There are boundary stones to be found and it is home to various flora and fauna, some rare and some to be expected. There is a magnificent and well known legend associated with the bog, it is overlooked by the impressive mass of Vixen Tor itself, and it is cradled at the foot of the Staple Tors at the most southerly part of the ridge of Langstone Moor.



Vixen Tor bog - looks harmless

Liz Miall

Starting with the boundary stones - congratulations Vixen Tor bog. Depending on your view, or perhaps which parish you live in, Whitchurch parish lost out to Sampford Spiney parish in claiming the area as the boundary stones show Vixen Tor bog firmly within the parish of Sampford Spiney.

Running through is the stream of Beckamoor Water as well as water

from Barn Hill and Heckwood and Feather Tors, giving rise to a small but perfectly formed boggy, marshy habitat. In spring you may be lucky enough to spot dragonfly such as the keeled skimmer zipping across looking for a mate; or a black darter or, if you're really lucky, the rare blue-tailed damselfly. You'll almost certainly see a golden-ringed dragonfly ferociously patrolling its patch. I've seen snipe here in the early morning along with stonechat, skylarks and meadow pipits. Sphagnum mosses, cotton grasses, sundew, water crowfoot, marsh St John's wort, cross-leaved heath and bog asphodel flourish, all the usual suspects for a typical moorland bog.



Vixen 'green eye'

Liz Miall

Feather beds, or 'green eyes', are present in one or two places; walking poles may disappear up to the handle and you'd have a job to get out if you sank in. Some call the bogs on the moor 'Dartmoor stables'. A well known guide always advised sagely, when crossing boggy ground, 'think light and run like hell'.

I suspect that this bog isn't as deep as some and that the legend of Vixana luring the unwary traveller to certain death in its peaty bottomless depths is rather over-egging things. Moorland ponies, cattle and sheep can

be seen grazing certain areas. As the saying goes, 'ponies go where the tussocks grow', so follow the animals and you should be ok. Of course if you're not you can blame Vixana.

AUNE OR AVON HEAD MIRE

Max Piper takes a look at a sinking oozing mire on the South Moor

Dartmoor is well-known for its mires as they impede any visitor who tries to walk through them. They act as barriers that can alter a rambler's route in an instant. When observing the great range of the southern hills from the central basin – that is, the region of the West Dart between Two Bridges and Dartmeet – you may not expect many bog-ridden lands to be found behind these eminences, but that would be far from the case.

Tucked away in a shallow hollow between the heights of Skir Hill and Ryder's Hill (Hemery often uses just 'Ryder') issues the River Avon although, and it has to be said, the preferred name used locally is actually the 'Aune' which the Ordnance Survey quite rightly display on their maps as an alternative spelling. This mire is not talked about in the same breadth as the infamous Foxtor Mires, but it deserves its place in any list as it really is quite treacherous and not for the unwary walker. The mire is a huge pan, a flat, desolate bowl where no one dares to walk into its depths for fear of becoming stuck or caught out by sinking or oozing ground.



Luckcombe Stone

Max Piper

Visit Aune Head on a warm summer's day though, and you will be rewarded with isolation, the gentle breeze wisping through the reeds in the mire and the tussocky ground on its periphery. The contrast from dark green bog grass is quite something to see, and at the transition two notable features can be found. The first is a splendid lone tinners' hut on the northernmost edge, standing testament to the lives that these men would have endured in such an exposed spot. The second feature is the Luckcombe Stone, found on the north-west side of the mire at SX 64756 69599, which



Aune Head Mire

Max Piper

William Crossing makes reference to in his *Guide to Dartmoor* (1912). It is a large boulder at the head of the mire and would have likely served as a waymarker.

The source of the Aune is skirted on its north side by the Sandy Way, an ancient route that gained moormen easy access into the heart of the South Moor from the settlements of Holne and Michelcombe to the east. John Bainbridge, writing in *Dartmoor News* Issue 86 (September/October 2005), remarks that Aune Head 'is unspoiled and not usually very crowded' and indeed it is a quiet spot set away from honeypot sites and is well worth a visit if you tread with caution.

BLACKSLADE MIRE (SX 736 756)

By Paul Ramsbottom

When asked for an article about a Dartmoor mire I immediately thought of a high moor bog with a reputation for swallowing up ponies and, dare I say it, people! Fox Tor Mire has this notoriety, being Conan Doyle's inspiration for the great Grimpen Mire in The Hound of the Baskervilles. Yes, a dangerous place for inexperienced walkers lost in the mist and recently even the occasional biker! But no, this is not my choice.

Should it be a recent real-life experience? Like walking alone and finding myself up to my knees in mud by Raybarrow Pool on the way to White Moor stone circle. Or perhaps a walk that passed the Mires Restoration Project or the spongy rainbow coloured sphagnum as you traverse the blanket bog by Tavy Head up to Fur Tor, getting tired hopping between tufts of cotton grass.



Pil Tor and Blackslade Mire

No, my choice is Blackslade Mire. This is a smaller often overlooked valley mire betwixt Hemsworthy Gate and Pil Tor, full of wildlife and flora like the carnivorous sundew. The word Blackslade conjures up an image of somewhere that highwaymen hide, but it is not as dangerous as some mires, provided you keep off bright green featherbeds bouncing beneath your feet.

It is my favourite mire because of happy memories, first as a boy and then as an Officer of the Boys' Brigade. Their expedition centre is close by

near Haytor, so 'safe' Blackslade Mire was used to assess navigation skills. A route can be set from the logan stone by Rippon Tor (no longer there) to Pil Tor. A direct bearing takes you across the mire, so we hoped boys would spot the blue grass and 'Blackslade Mire' marked on the map and skirt it. However, most ploughed a straight line through the middle. Sometimes it was inexperience, but mostly it was deliberate as they knew there was fun ahead! Common sense was unimportant to cheeky teenagers, they were risk takers as they stepped 'onto' the unknown. They knew the potential consequences, but that was the fun! Memories were made when the inevitable happened and someone sank up to their chest. Everyone laughed until they realised help was needed to get him out. The 1st Exeter built a reputation for enjoying mires, even creating a letterbox stamp, 'The BB Bog Bashers'. It was indeed fun, but also a learning experience on the care and attention required around those deep, dangerous Dartmoor mires.



BOOK REVIEWS

**** BEST BUY

*** VERY GOOD

** GOOD

** OKAY

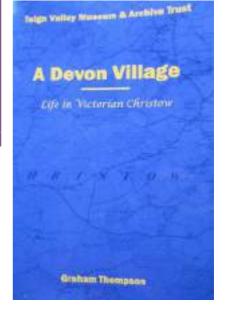
* NOT WORTH BUYING

A DEVON VILLAGE – Life in Victorian Christow by Graham Thompson. Published by Teign Valley Museum & Archive Trust, £17.99, 180 pages, paperback, ISBN 978 1838179809. Available from

qdthompson@btinternet.com

This book looks at life in Christow during the 19th century. The village was, and still is, an isolated spot in the Teign Valley, not an easy place to reach, even the railway never arrived due to the difficult terrain. This book studies the population, the poor people and how they coped with living in a rural setting.

One chapter examines the births, marriages, deaths and health of people in the valley. What work did they do? Crime is also covered, including William Sercombe, probably the most



infamous criminal from Christow. Born in Dunsford, he was a lead miner in 1861 but in 1870 was sentenced to five years in prison for setting fire to a rick of wheat worth £50.

In 1875 he was back at the Assizes for stealing a pair of boots. At the same hearing he was convicted of stealing some leather leggings from someone else. He was sentenced to four weeks hard labour for the first offence and seven years prison for the second.

He finished his sentence in 1883 but the following year was given another five years for stealing a horse worth £42. Over the next few years he was in and out of prison until 1888 when no further record could be found – did he settle down or die?

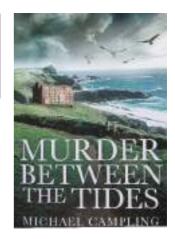
The book presents evidence gained from local sources and from documents held in the South West Heritage Trust's archives in Exeter.

MURDER BETWEEN THE TIDES (The

Devonshire Mysteries Book 3) by Michael Campling. Published by Shadowstone Books, £7.99, 295 pages, paperback.

Another mystery for amateur sleuth Dan and his friend Alan to solve, this one turns into a murder down in Cornwall at a get-together for writers in a quiet hotel in the cold winter. Will the cryptic typewritten notes solve the puzzle?

This book is a bit slow to get going, but gives clues as to who might be the murderer, all helping to build up a picture of who is who. Was it one of the other writers staying in the hotel, a member of staff or even the reporter who hangs about at the cliff-top hotel? Will Dan and Alan get to the bottom of it all before the police do? Another



well put-together book and this reviewer really enjoyed reading it. Just a shame that the book, part of the Devonshire Mysteries series, is actually based in Cornwall. The author has already started on the next book in the series which will see the duo back in Devon trying to solve another mystery – I cannot wait to read it.

WALKS WITH WINNIE by Denise Horner.

Published by Little Line Books, £12.50, 72

pages, paperback. Available from

www.walkswithwinnie.co.uk

These walks started life as a series in *Oke Links*, a magazine for the Okehampton area. Winnie, a cocker spaniel and Scooby, a rescued fox red lab, quide us through twelve beautiful walks on north



Dartmoor, taking picturesque paths through bluebell woods, over and around abundant rivers and reservoirs, walking up onto the open moorland and visiting some of the tors, including High Willhays, the highest point on Dartmoor.

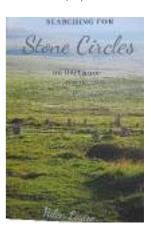
Denise Horner has been walking on the moor for over thirty years - Dartmoor is her back garden. Animals, dogs, sport and the outdoors have been her life. With a background in fitness training, she has been taking Nordic Walking groups out on the moors to explore and get fit since 2014.

Each walk has an illustrated map by Sara Nunan who has been illustrating and designing books and maps for over twenty years, together with photographs to help and inspire you along the way. It also includes a fun little flick book at each page corner, of Winnie and the author walking with you. 50p from each sale will be donated to The Labrador Rescue Trust.

These are short walks based around northern Dartmoor with simple-to-follow routes and the hand-drawn maps are just wonderful as a guide to the walk. At first I thought there was not much written about the places passed but then I reached the glossary at the end where it lists many places mentioned in the book and gives more information. I just loved the book.

SEARCHING FOR STONE CIRCLES ON DARTMOOR (NORTH) by Helen Louise. £15, 149 pages, paperback, ISBN 979 8576157488.

This book is all about visiting the many stone circles on northern Dartmoor, although it also includes some stone rows like Challacombe and the dolmen called Spinsters' Rock. It is a comprehensive guide which will help you find and explore these circles, giving details of where to start your walk, how far you'll have to go and the best way to get there safely, plus many photographs of what you will see en route. The author has a great love of the moors and Bronze Age remains, although she knows very little about Dartmoor itself, like crossing a stream when it is a leat and, when talking about Cosdon for instance ... you will see a big pile of stones



up there and a concrete post about 4 foot high, which is the beacon – actually, this is the trig point.

It also takes a while to tune in to the author's way of writing ... walk through the gate, always remembering to close it behind you so the fluffy creatures can't escape and cause havoc. To be fair, the fluffy ones seem all over Dartmoor, willy-nilly, but try not to cause even more chaos by releasing other ones.

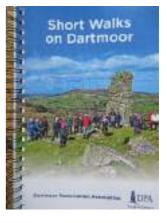
Overall an enjoyable book and very helpful in finding those stone circles on the bleak north moor. The second edition has corrected some of the mistakes noted in this review.

SHORT WALKS ON DARTMOOR by Keith

Ryan. Published by the Dartmoor Preservation Association, £12, 84 pages, spiral bound paperback, ISBN 978-1-8381905-0-7. Available from www.dartmoorpreservation.co.uk



This book includes nine short walks on Dartmoor, each taking about two hours, not including break stops. It does not give any grid references or compass or GPS instructions, but relies instead on observations as you progress. I found the text very easy to understand and it was clear where you had to go. It is clearly printed and for me the best feature is the spiral binding making it so easy to turn the pages as you go and have just one page to read instructions from, and the size fits easily into your rucksack.



Each walk has a description, where to park your car, where to start the walk and easy to follow directions. There are lots of colour photos illustrating the walks and a map for each walk although strangely these are at the end of the descriptions.

A very good guide for the novice or even the experienced walker who wants to learn more about each walk and some of the history of that area. This book would make an excellent gift for someone who wants to learn more about Dartmoor whilst walking.

Reviewed by Pauline Greenwood

OLD DARTMOOR

Camping on Dartmoor

The Editor has been 'wild camping' on Dartmoor since the late 1970s when the term meant you had to carry your tent and gear on your back to remote spots. Today lots of people think it means camping beside the road or within sight of a car park and that you can bring every last thing you might need. This old photograph shows how it used to be: the location is not known but is possibly beside Combeshead Brook.



DARTMOOR QUIZ ANSWERS

- 1. Datum R
- Coles Mill
- 3. Hall Tor or Cuckoo Rock
- 4. Black Prince
- 5. Holy Brook
- 6. Bala Brook
- 7. Fernworthy
- 8. Bullers Arms
- 9. Cranery Brook
- 10. Harford
- 11. Apton's Marsh
- 12. River Erme
- 13. Ryder's Hill
- 14. Hangingstone Hill (603m)
 15. Nun's Cross Farm

- 16. Fur Tor (South)
- 17. Uncle Ab's House
- 18. A Cross
- 19. Cherry Brook
- 20. The Dancers
- 21. SX 579875 22. 2030ft
- 23. Shavercombe Head
- 24. River Avon
- 25. Braddon Tor
- 26. On the Heathercombe Estate
- 27. Lamerton Lane
- 28. Heng Lake
- 29. Saddlesborough 30. Prisoner B (Bovey Tracey)

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