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DARTMOOR NEWS 200



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A stone row and burial chamber (cist) in Believer Forest, on Lakehead Hill

Max Piper

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Editor

Paul Rendell
www.paulrendelldartmoor.co.uk
paul.dartmoor@gmail.com

Sub Editor

Chris Walpole

Assistant Reporter

Max Piper

Publishers

The Dartmoor Company, Dartmoor News Office, The Coach House, Tramlines, Station Road, Okehampton, EX20 1EH 01837 54727
www.dartmoornews.co.uk
Facebook: www.facebook.com/dartmoornews

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01822 614466
dartmoornews@dartprint.co.uk

Designer

Max Piper

Advertising

Zara Media & Design, Mount Pleasant House, Clyst Honiton, Exeter, EX5 2NE
Director: Grant Harrison
01392 201227
grant@zaramedia.co.uk

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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, Wonderful Wildlife and short articles for publication.

Contributors to this issue include; Tania Crosse, Steve Davison, James Daymond, Simon Dell, Simon Forty, Stephen Szytko, Lucy Williams, Caitlin Pharoah, Steve Grigg, Pauline Greenwood, Chris Leathlean, Peter Hamilton-Leggett, Tim Jenkinson, Eleanor Ludgate, Roy Page, Max Piper, Bill Radcliffe, Kristy Turner and Chris Walpole. All the above have written articles or supplied the Editor with news items or photographs.

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FRONT COVER

Windy Post Cross,
also known as
Feather Tor or
Beckamoor Cross
Steve Davison



NEWS DESK

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

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

From the Editor: Celebrating the 200th Issue

Well, when I started *The Dartmoor Newsletter*, as it was called back in 1991, I would never have thought it would run to 100 issues, let alone 200 issues. This baby has grown and grown, it has not always been an easy journey and the magazine would not be as good as it is without a big thanks to my partner, Pauline Greenwood, who has helped and pushed me along this journey.

The Dartmoor Newsletter was not my first adventure into writing a publication. That started in 1982, you can read about it in the article in this issue called *Divide News to the Dartmoor News*.

The 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.' It ended 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.'

These A4 sheets lasted for twelve issues plus the one-off *Christmas Cracker*. They were produced at my home address in Plymouth, under the name of The Old Dartmoor Company. I even managed to get the late Lady Sayer to write a piece in issue number 3. Issue 13 was in A5 format, contained 22 pages and had a card cover. It just grew after that, with a name change as 'the newsletter' had now become a magazine.

Thank you readers who had faith in the publication over the years, I know there are some of you who were there from the beginning. Will there be another 200 issues after this one, who knows, but I do know I will not be the Editor then.

Happy reading and I welcome your feedback – and maybe you would like to write an article for a future issue.



The Editor taking a photo of a beetle

Pauline Greenwood

Pioneering Tree Planting Approach Aims to Boost Flood Resilience

An exciting partnership project helping to re-establish Dartmoor's ancient woodland pastures and temperate rainforests is underway. Around 8.5 hectares of native trees will be planted in small plots within a carefully selected area of Harford Moor helping to reconnect existing woodlands so nature can thrive and habitats become more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

Native Devon trees including oak, downy birch, hawthorn and willow will be planted in small plots across the site. The plots will have different densities of native trees with some plots fenced off to exclude livestock and walkers. Monitoring and research by the University of Plymouth aims to better understand what techniques work best for natural regeneration and, in the longer term, increase temperate rainforests in the valleys while reducing the peak flow of water during floods.

DNPA is leading the work through its Dartmoor Headwaters project, a natural flood management programme funded by the Environment Agency and Devon County Council.

Spanning more than 700 hectares, Harford Moor lies to the east of the River Erme near Ivybridge. Rich in archaeology and shaped through thousands of years of farming practices and other uses, the upper reaches are rich carbon stores of peat. The ancient and special woodland of nearby Piles Copse is filled with rare lichens, mosses and liverworts.

Groups of volunteers will plant the trees throughout February and March using native saplings grown in their community tree nurseries from locally collected seed.



Planting trees

DNPA

Replanting Steward Wood

As part of a gradual broadleaf conversion process, a hectare of conifers were felled at Steward Wood, near Moretonhampstead last year (not replanted as stated in the last issue of *Dartmoor News*).

The Steward Community Woodland group have started restocking with a mixture of trees and techniques – some by natural regeneration, some by replanting. They were hoping to plant about 900 trees in the cleared area. The work started during the first weekend of March when just over 200 trees were planted with the help of the community. Trees planted were mostly hazel, but also willow, field maple, hornbeam and wild cherry. More oak and other trees will be planted in the lower section next winter. At the end of autumn 2025 or in spring 2026 it is planned to open up a permissive footpath through the replanting area.



Nicky Ashwood and Peter Cow planting a tree



Some of the planted area

Clifford Permissive Path Closed

Report by Max Piper

The north end of the permissive path at Clifford, which formed part of the circular five-mile walk from Steps Bridge, has closed indefinitely. The notice continues: 'The National Trust has provided an alternative route which will become active after the bird breeding season has ended (1st August 2025). During the bird breeding season, access into Cod Wood and to Steps Bridge is available at the Coleridge Car Park at the top of Small Ridge Hill.' The diversion necessitates walking up a very steep lane, fraught with potholes.

Road Signs Replaced

Devon County Council have been busy erecting new road signs across Dartmoor this spring, including a new one at Hockmoor Head, just outside Buckfast. The sign points the way to Cross Furzes and the main road to Scorrison. There is also a new sign on Holne Moor warning of a sharp bend and animals crossing.



The new finger post at Hockmoor Head



One of the signs on Holne Moor

Buckfast Welcome Sign

The sign at Buckfast on the south moor has recently been replaced with a new 'Welcome to Buckfast' one made of metal. It also has the DNPA logo on it as it is just inside the National Park boundary.



The new metal sign

Beware of Cattle

A few months ago a new sign was placed beside the cattle grid at Sticklepath on the road leading towards Belstone. It warns walkers about cattle and how to pass them safely.



The bright yellow sign

Replacement Garages at the Forest Inn, Hexworthy

Work has recently been completed at the old stables below the Forest Inn at Hexworthy. These buildings were used to keep horses when there were riding stables here. They have been completely done up and it looks like they will be used as garages. The area around them has been cleared and made into car parking, with lots of notices saying it is private parking only.



The garages at the Forest Inn

James Daymond

Buckfastleigh Wool Industry Sculpture

Report by Stephen Szytko

A new sculpture of a sheep, commemorating Buckfastleigh's historic wool industry, has been placed at the junction of Strode Road and Plymouth Road. What began in the town as a cottage industry was transformed in the industrial revolution by mechanisation. In the 19th century there were five working wool mills, the last closing in 1975.



The new sculpture

Stephen Szytko

Resurfacing Work on Steps Bridge Bridleway

Report by Max Piper

Towards the end of February and into early March, engineering works were carried out, on behalf of DNPA, on the bridleway between Steps Bridge and Clifford Bridge, where it passes through Meadhaydown and Dunsford Wood. The bridleway surface has been greatly improved, particularly at the Steps Bridge end, by using compacted gravel. This new surface means that access is more suitable for trampers, but all users benefit, from horse riders and cyclists to walkers. The work was helped out with funding from the Teignbridge District Council Connectivity Fund.

Trees Planted at Two Bridges

A small clump of trees has been planted on the grass verge at Two Bridges. The trees, with their surrounding plastic tubes, can be seen beside the B3212 road leading from Two Bridges to Postbridge.



Some of the new trees

Ladder Stiles Replaced Around Merrivale Newtake

The ladder stiles around the newtake below Over Tor, Merrivale, have recently been replaced as the old ones had rotten out. The old stiles were erected about 20 years ago by the then DNPA Ranger Paul Glanville, with the Editor helping with at least two of them.



One of the new stiles near the road, with Great Mis Tor behind

Damage to Medieval Village

On 16th February a group of people lit a fire within one of the longhouses at Hound Tor Medieval Village. The family group had a dog running around while they built and lit the fire. Stones had been taken from the walls of the building to be used as seating beside the fire pit. The damage has been reported to DNPA and Historic England, and, as it was a criminal activity, to the police.



The fire in the longhouse

The Milestone Society Award

Last March Max Piper and Paul Rendell were presented with the Milestone Society Award by Tim Jenkinson and Ian Thompson. Max received his award for 'Research, reinstatement and maintenance of milestones in Devon', while Paul was given his award for 'Publicity for milestones and help with their restoration and maintenance in Devon.'

In 2023 a new award was instigated for groups or individuals; '*For an outstanding contribution to preserving and promoting the milestones and other roadside heritage features of the British Isles*'. The Milestone Society was formed in 2001 and has over 400 members who enthusiastically look after the thousands of milestones throughout the UK.

The awards were hosted by DNPA at Parke, where DNPA staff and Milestone Society members thanked Max and Paul for their efforts in looking after the milestones mainly on Dartmoor but also in other areas of Devon. Some of this work has been reported in the pages of this magazine over the years.



Ian Thompson, Andy Crabb, Max Piper, Tim Jenkinson, Paul Rendell, Richard Drysdale

Lucy Williams, DNPA

The Newnham Solar Community Fund

The Newnham Solar Community Fund is totally focussed on making the community a better place for all by supporting local community projects, groups and organisations who operate for the benefit of residents living within the parishes of Sparkwell and Shaugh Prior.

Grants have been made to Shaugh Prior Parish Council for improvements to the Lee Moor Play Area, to Shaugh Prior Hall to refurbish their floor, Sparkwell Parish Hall for replacement doors and for many more projects. The fund welcomes applications from constituted not-for-profit community groups, voluntary groups, societies, clubs and non-publicly-funded charities. In the first instance please email info@newnhamsolarfunds.co.uk who will be able to advise whether your proposed project will meet the criteria to benefit. The Newnham Solar Community Fund is managed by the Sparkwell & Shaugh Prior Community Interest Company.

Diggers at Tor Royal Bog

During February and March low-ground-pressure diggers were working on Tor Royal Bog, south of Princetown. They were working with experienced contractors to prevent further erosion of, and restore the hydrological function to, the carbon-rich peatland areas whilst conserving the historic environment on 57 hectares at Tor Royal.

Some of the site is a good example of peat bog, a raised mire formed by several metres of peat. This raised mire – something that is rare to find now in the South West – has a great variation of bog-plant species including the rare *Sphagnum Magellanicum*. Bordered by the Devonport Leat, the site has however had extensive peat cutting, some as recently as during the Second World War, tin streaming remains and drainage ditch creation, leaving areas where the peat is dry, hydrophobic, and dominated by *Molinia Caerulea* (Purple Moor Grass).

Driving Across Dartmoor

South Dartmoor has seen an increase in illegal off-road driving both on two and four wheels. Driving on the Common is an offence under the Road Traffic Act and so has potentially serious consequences when perpetrators are caught. Areas that have been damaged include Grenofen Bridge, Cadover Bridge, Shaugh Moor, Penn Moor and Roborough Down, areas which include Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The DNPA Ranger team along with the police and land owners are working hard to combat this issue. If you have any information, please report it to the police via 101 or online.

Common Wood, Horndon

Recently the Dartmoor Preservation Association (DPA) carried out work at Common Wood, Horndon, near Mary Tavy, during which they were joined by some first-year BSc occupational therapy students from Plymouth University.

For their community engagement module the students were required to make site visits, and Common Wood gave them the opportunity to explore the benefits of volunteering, and to consider the different reasons why people decide to volunteer across their lifespans. They were cutting back vegetation to improve the habitat for the marsh fritillary butterfly. At Common Wood, willow, gorse, hazel and bramble are encroaching on the culm grassland where devil's bit scabious, the food plant of the marsh fritillary, needs to be encouraged. So the aim was to push back the vegetation. Derek Collins brought the DPA's wagon to Hillbridge; there were ten volunteers from the DPA and eight students with two tutors, making a grand total of twenty workers.



A new public access sign at Common Wood

Sheep Rustling Increases on West Dartmoor

'It's beginning to feel like the Wild West up here when it comes to sheep crime – it's soul-destroying', says farmer Colin Abel. Last winter, like most years, Mr Abel is missing more than 400 ewes. He says in the last decade he has lost nearly £500,000 worth of livestock to sheep rustling, which is pushing some farmers to the brink of quitting or bringing their flocks off the moors.

Devon and Cornwall Police say livestock theft is challenging to police but its officers are 'pursuing every line of inquiry through forensics, surveillance, tracking and more'. Dartmoor's remote landscape makes livestock vulnerable to theft, while also making it challenging to police. Martin Beck, who was appointed in 2024 as the UK's first national livestock theft specialist police officer, says more than 1300 sheep were reported stolen in Devon and Cornwall in 2024, with about 62% relating to West Dartmoor.

New Community Woodland for South Brent

Report by Stephen Szytko

In January, Hope Wood, a new community woodland in South Brent, was started. The aim was to plant 25,000 native trees across 20 hectares of land, including a community garden and orchard. Tree planting sessions took place from January to March 2025 and will resume again in November 2025. The woodland is located just inside the Dartmoor National Park near Portford Lane, close to the A38. It was designed as a partnership between South Hams District Council, which owns the land, and the Woodland Trust. The local community and local schools have been actively involved in the creation of the new woodland. On Saturday 8th February 2025, local volunteers were joined by Liberal Democrat leader Sir Ed Davey, MP for South Devon Caroline Voaden, leader of South Hams District Council Cllr Julian Brazil, and a party of students from the University of Plymouth.



Tree planting by local volunteers and University of Plymouth students
Stephen Szytko



Hope Wood information board

Stephen Szytko

New Access to Wray Valley Trail

Report by Stephen Szytko

The Wray Valley Trail will be soon be accessed from Hingston View, the Station Road housing development that is sited on what was originally the Moretonhampstead railway station.

The permissive path goes through the Moretonhampstead community orchard before joining the trail.



The new gate to the trail

Stephen Szytko

Mary Tavy New Road Sign

Devon County Council's Highways section have replaced the road sign near the Mary Tavy Inn with a new sign pointing the way to Horndon and St Mary's Church, the parish church of Mary Tavy.



The new road sign

Tree Planting near Harford Bridge

During the winter months a large area of a field near Harford Bridge has been planted with trees. The field is beside the A386 on Wringworthy Hill, two miles from Tavistock. Some of the field has been left unplanted.



Part of the planted field

For all the Latest and Best News, get the *Dartmoor News* bi-monthly Magazine to Stay up to Date!

New Signs at Parke

A number of new signs have been erected this spring at Parke, the National Trust property at Bovey Tracey. These signs are aimed at dog walkers, turning different areas into colour coded zones. Green is effective control, orange is for keeping your dog on the path and red areas are where dogs should be on leads.



One of the new signs

Ashburton Milestone

On the road from Ashburton to the A38 near Linhay Quarry is a milestone which has seen better days.

The Editor cleared the stone recently but it was still difficult to read the inscription and it seemed to be in the wrong place. Tim Jenkinson from the Milestone Society was asked and he said, 'It is 'From/Ash/burton/II /Miles' but is in the wrong place. It seems to have been mixed up with the one milestone that stands at Caton Cross two miles from the town. The theory is that both stones were salvaged by Devon County Council in the 1970s when the A38 was improved and then put back in the wrong places. That is the only feasible explanation'.



The cleared milestone

Some Events Taking Place in 2025

Bovey Craft Festival – 6th-8th June, over 200 craft makers, workshops over three days

Moretonhampstead Flag Festival – tbc, usually last two weeks in June

Moreton Music Day – 6th July, day of free music (noon till midnight) at several locations around the town in aid of local charities

Bovey Tracey Carnival – starts last Saturday in July ending with the parade the following Saturday

Dartmoor Folk Festival – 8th-10th August, South Zeal

Manaton Show and Fair – 9th August, traditional village fair

Okehampton Show – 14th August

Moretonhampstead Carnival Food Festival – first day of carnival week on 16th August

Chagford Show – 21st August

Moreton Carnival – a week of fun with a parade of floats on 21st August

Lustleigh Show – August Bank Holiday Monday 27th August

Dartmoor Outdoor Festival – 29th August to 5th September, celebrating community and the best of what Dartmoor has to offer

Bovey Festival – Food & Drink – tbc, normally first Saturday in September

Widcombe Fair – 9th September (always the second Tuesday)

Devon Open Studios – 6th-22nd September

Lustleigh Boxing Day Duck Dash – 26th December

Work near Pin Tor

A lesser-known tor called Pin Tor (SX 755 887) on the eastern side of Dartmoor, above Willingstone Farm, is open access land but there is only one way in and out of the land around the tor. Recently the stone wall beside the road has been rebuilt and trees have been planted below the tor and above Willingstone Farm.



The rebuilt stone wall

More Rubbish Dumped on Ramshorn Down

Ramshorn Down is not a well-known place within the National Park so it is targetted by antisocial people who often fly tip rubbish there. Ramshorn Down is within the parish of Ilsington. This area is often used by fly tippers and off road vehicles but the authorities are looking at ways to overcome the problems.



Fly tipping on the Down

Dartmoor Headwaters Project in Yarner Wood

By Max Piper

DNPA's Dartmoor Headwaters Natural Flood Management team have been busy in Yarner Wood, helping to lay tree trunks across the stream that flows past the Woodland Centre. With the aim of reducing downstream flooding, this initiative is also good for wildlife and is reshaping the bed of the stream.

Golden Lion at Ashburton

The Golden Lion Hotel in Ashburton used to be the home of The Official Monster Raving Loony Party when Alan 'Howling Laud' Hope owned the building. The party was established in 1982 by the musician David Sutch, better known as Screaming Lord Sutch, 3rd Earl of Harrow or simply Lord Sutch. I was a member of the party for a number of years and at our annual conference in September we would say a prayer below the carving of a Golden Lion on the building before we started the business.

Many years ago the building ceased to be used as a hotel and today it is a family home. The carved lion had seen better days and in 2020 it was decided to give it a lick of gold paint but this was not to be – the wooden lion needed a lot more work. When it was taken down, the globe on which the lion's paw rests broke in half and inside was a time capsule dating back to 1999 when it was last restored.

The wooden lion was sodden with decades of rain leaking into the cracks in the paintwork and filler that had been used over the years. Now the lion has had all its old paint removed, the cracks filled with filler, and, with 15 layers of new paint, has been put back looking a lot better, with the hope that it will last for another 20 years.



The restored Golden Lion

Hisley Wood Footpath Collapse

By Max Piper

Part of the public footpath between Hisley Bridge and Boveycombe, in Hisley Wood, has collapsed, taking a tree with it.



The fallen tree and the collapsed path

Max Piper

The Lustleigh Society Meeting

Wednesday 28th May – The Three Hares: A Curiosity Worth Regarding

A talk by Susan Andrews. Medieval roof bosses of three hares running in a circle, joined by their ears to form a triangle appear in 17 Devon churches.

Lustleigh Village Hall, meeting starts at 7.30pm.

New Tarmac Path to Parke House

By Max Piper

The pedestrian pathway leading down from the Parke car park to the DNPA Headquarters at Parke House (and local walks) has been resurfaced. This work also includes part of the access drive to the back of the building.



The resurfaced driveway

Max Piper

Access to Southbrook Rocks Restored

By Max Piper

Within the Parke Estate, Southbrook Rocks is a small non-granite outcrop situated below the old railway track (Wray Valley Trail). In autumn 2020 the local footbridge and footpath around the base of the rocks became unsafe, so public access was barred. However, as of winter 2025, access has been restored, with a new footbridge constructed and a new handrail attached to the rocks.



The new footbridge

Max Piper

Eroded Path at Holwell Lawn

There is a path coming from Holwell Lawn near Greater Rocks to Becka Brook which has become very eroded over the last year or so due to people using the route; now water comes gushing down the hillside causing a gully in the middle of the path.



Part of the eroded path

Spotted at Grimspound

In February a cat was seen at the Bronze Age village of Grimspound – it wasn't a wild cat or The Beast but a domestic cat which possibly came from a nearby farm. The cat was playing hide and seek with visitors amongst the stone buildings. Sometimes it would come to people and walk off again. Not what you would expect to see at Grimspound.



The cat

Is Dartmoor Dying?

'A Shroud For Mother Nature – Is Dartmoor Dying?' is a new exhibition currently at the Museum of Dartmoor Life in Okehampton. We all know that Dartmoor is a special place and its beautiful landscape has been loved by generations of people who have existed off its riches. Currently, as in much of the UK, there are ongoing and future threats to the landscape and its biodiversity, with some reports suggesting that nearly 80 per cent of Dartmoor's Sites of Special Scientific Interest have 'unfavourable status'.

2025 marks 30 years since the UK published its first biodiversity action plan working with government agencies and NGOs to start a more unified process to conserve species and their habitats. These vital works are carried out on Dartmoor by many individuals, associations, landowners, commoners, charities, trusts and national bodies.

The Museum of Dartmoor Life, thanks to funding from The Royal Society's Places of Science project, has created a neutral space where community partners, working on Dartmoor, can comment on changes to the moor, its people, traditions and its biodiversity and showcase their ongoing works to protect and regenerate the landscape, flora and fauna.

Community partners were invited to answer the same three questions:

- 1. Is Dartmoor dying?**
- 2. What are you doing to save it?**
- 3. How can the public help?**

Some of these replies are displayed on boards around the exhibition room while others are displayed as letters.

The Dartmoor Diner

Report by James Daymond

The Dartmoor Diner, formerly known as the Green Cafe, on the A386 Plymouth to Yelverton road, has just had its car park tarmacked – this had been gravel with potholes for over 40 years.



The new surface on the car park

James Daymond

Okehampton Interchange will be a New Purpose-Built Station

The new railway station for Okehampton is to be called Okehampton Interchange although many local people wanted it to be called Okehampton Parkway. The station is planned to open in summer 2026 thanks to £15 million funding, made up from the Government (£13.4m), Devon County Council (£1.4m), West Devon Borough Council (£120,000) and Network Rail (£25,000). The new station will complement the existing Okehampton Station, which will remain open.

Sylvia Sayer Walk

The Dartmoor Preservation Association have produced a walk leaflet for visiting the site of Swincombe Reservoir. This printable leaflet includes both written instructions and a map of the Princetown circular walk route. The walk commemorates Sylvia Sayer's successful campaign to stop the Swincombe Valley and Foxtor Mire being lost under a reservoir. The entire loop is 13.82km and it is recommended you allow four hours to complete it. By including tors, a communications tower subject to a failed campaign, Geoff Sayer's memorial gate, the 'Crock of Gold' cist and spectacular views of the Swincombe Valley, this walk connects Lady Sayer's campaigning to tangible results.

Physical copies are available in the Princetown Visitor Centre, or there's a printable PDF version free to download from the website <https://dartmoorpreservation.co.uk/walks-on-dartmoor/>.

Gutter Tor Trees

For a number of years there has been a row of conifer trees beside the track leading from the car park below Gutter Tor, at Burcombe Ford. Last year three of these old trees were blown over and are now laying beside the track leading to Gutter Tor Refuge, also known as the Scout Hut.



The fallen trees

James Daymond

Harefoot Cross Signpost Replaced

Report by Max Piper

Thanks to the efforts of Widecombe Parish Council, the signpost arms at Harefoot Cross, some of which had been missing, have been replaced by Highways. This includes directions to Hound Tor and Manaton, as well as the addition of Chagford and Moretonhampstead at eight miles each. Similar signs at Cold East Cross and Hemsworthy Gate have also been replaced.



The new sign at Harefoot Cross

Max Piper

Major Fire in Drewsteignton

In March a fire started in a thatched cottage in the centre of Drewsteignton and soon spread to the cottages either side. Everyone was evacuated unharmed and fire appliances raced to the scene. At the height of the blaze fourteen appliances were there trying to put out the fire; they came from Okehampton, Hatherleigh, North Tawton, Chagford, Moretonhampstead, Bovey Tracey, Totnes, Crediton, Ivybridge, Exeter and Plympton.

The fire was in the cottages across the square from the Drewe Arms Community Pub. The pub's owners were concerned for the safety of their own building, also thatched, but the fire service quickly sprayed it with fire guard to try to protect it. In return the pub stayed open all night to provide tea and refreshments to over 100 firefighters. The fire was brought under control in the morning after about eleven hours. The fire service had to lay a pipe over a mile long to take water from the River Teign. Castle Drogo was closed as the fire engines had used all their water supply so they had none left to open the restaurant or toilets! The village was saved except for the terrace of three cottages which burnt to the ground. These cottages date back to the 1450s.



The burnt out cottages



Eleanor Ludgate

Work at Double Waters, Princetown

In the middle of March there were diggers on the open moorland at Double Waters, above the main road near Princetown. They were putting in dams to hold back the water as part of the re-wetting programme that is going on everywhere on Dartmoor. This was at the time when the public were asked to keep dogs on leads due to nesting birds.



Carrying more wood to build more dams

Clearing the Dressing Floor at Golden Dagger

The dressing floor of the old Golden Dagger Mine was recently cleared of vegetation. Over the years the site had become overgrown with gorse, brambles, trees and bracken. A small team of volunteers under the leadership of Paul Rendell cleared the two buddles, the dressing floor and Dinah's House – a 19th century building which was used as the mine captain's house, possibly the home of Moses Bawden when he took over the lease in 1879.

The earliest mention of Golden Dagger Mine was in 1851 and it was worked until about 1914. After the First World War only surface work was resumed, reworking the alluvial deposits along the valley bottom.

The team worked with a brush cutter, loppers and bow saws and the area around the ruined buildings and the two buddles, one of which had been hidden for years, is now clearer. Trees growing in the ruins of Dinah's House have not been removed.



The dressing floor before work

Paul Rendell



Some of the work team

Bill Radcliffe



The two buddles after clearing

Simon Forty

Trees Thinned Out at Ball Hill Woods

Last October and again this March conservation woodland management has been carried out in Ball Hill Woods, Okehampton. Larch trees have been thinned out and some beech trees felled to increase sunlight through the woods which will improve biodiversity over the coming years. The heavy work of hauling the felled trees to wood stacks at either end of the Okehampton to Fatherford footpath was carried out in traditional style by horses Beeno and Polly. The work was undertaken by White Wood Management and Dartmoor Horse Loggers on behalf of Okehampton United Charities.



Beeno at work

Roy Page

Stepping Stones on Benamoor Common

In March the final stepping stones were added to those laid last year to complete a path across a boggy part of Brenamoor Common, near Belstone car park. The work was undertaken by Richard Norrish for Belstone Commoners.



The completed path

Chris Walpole

More Trees on Pepperdon

More trees have been planted on Pepperdon, near Moretonhampstead. They are near Rose Cottage Rocks (SX 778 847).



Some of the new trees

New Sign at Grenofen Bridge

Maristow Estate have erected a new sign on the old Grenofen Bridge across the River Walkham saying it is a private river and private fishing and, for health and safety reasons, do not enter the river. Well, there is a sewage works up river near Bedford Bridge.



The new sign

Big Widecombe Barn Dance

On Saturday 28th June 2025 between 6.30pm and 11.00pm at Sharland Barn, Dartmoor, there will be a barn dance in aid of fundraising to build a new Widecombe Community Hall. Music by 'Banned From The Moor'. Tickets £20, or £10 for children aged 5-16. Under 5s free. All tickets include hot food and pudding, and camping if desired! More info and advance booking (essential) at www.widecombecommunityhall.org.



Digging the turf for the start of the building work
Widecombe Community Hall

Abbots Way Walk Across Dartmoor

This year's annual Abbots Way Walk will take place on Sunday 5th October. This will be the 63rd year the walk has taken place. It will start from Buckfast Abbey and will finish in Tavistock over 23 miles (37 kms) away. It will be run by Tavistock & District Outdoor Education Forum. Booking and further information from Peter Challiss on 01822 852157 or 07870 536150 or challissps@tiscali.co.uk.

History Talks at Guildhall Heritage Centre

The following talks are taking place at the Guildhall Heritage Centre in Tavistock during the year. Starting at 7pm, all on a Friday evening, free entry. All the talks are by Simon Dell, further details see www.tavistockguildhall.org.

23rd May – The History of Ten Tors

13th June – The History of the Quakers

4th July – Lundy Island

8th August – Cornish Rebellions

5th September – The Dartmoor Tyrwhitts Tramway

17th October – Policing the Peninsula

21st November – Devon Murders

19th December – Dartmoor Sett Makers' Bankers

Okehampton Castle

Okehampton Castle looks set to be another casualty of English Heritage's cutbacks as plans have been revealed to close it to all visitors other than pre-booked guided groups. In the past the castle has been open every day over the summer months but things are to change this year. This comes as news that Totnes Castle is due to suffer the same fate.

Okehampton Castle dates back to the Norman period, being originally constructed soon after the Norman Conquest of 1066. Initially built as a motte-and-bailey castle, it was later transformed into a grand fortress by the de Courtenay family in the 13th century. The de Courtenays, powerful barons of

the time, expanded the castle into one of the largest fortifications in Devon, enhancing its defensive capabilities and adding impressive residential quarters.

In 1911 Sydney Simmons bought the castle ruins and its medieval deer park, then renovated the remains and improved the site with new paths and seating for visitors. He gave the castle to the people of Okehampton in 1917. Today, Okehampton Castle is managed by English Heritage who open it to local people once a year free of charge.



The castle in 2025

Search for Wildflower Meadow ‘Hidden Gems’ across Devon

A Devon meadow conservation group is encouraging anyone who looks after wildflower-rich land to discover more about the flowering plants in their meadows this summer. The Big Devon Meadows Count is a partnership between Moor Meadows – whose 600 members manage more than 2700 acres (1093 hectares) of species-rich grassland on Dartmoor and beyond – and the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre (DBRC), which holds over 10 million records of Devon’s plants and animals.

From mini-meadows in town or village gardens to traditionally managed farmland and other large land-holdings, a meadow of any size, anywhere in Devon, can be included in the survey. And you don’t need to be a plant expert to take part. With funding from the Devon Environment Foundation, Moor Meadows and the DBRC have produced short videos covering all the wildflower and grass species you’re likely to find in a Devon meadow to make plant identification as easy as possible.

By creating a more detailed record of the flowering plants on land in Devon outside of nature reserves, the Big Devon Meadows Count will help to spread knowledge on how to manage meadows to help wildlife. Results will also lead to better protection of these ‘hidden gems’; important wildlife sites that might currently be known only to the landowners themselves.

Last summer, the project ran a pilot year with Moor Meadows members on Dartmoor taking part in surveys. Of the 24 sites surveyed, four had such a diverse range of flowering plants that they were given the important designation of County Wildlife Site. Another seven sites are due to be further surveyed by ecologists as potential County Wildlife Sites this year; this designation means that planning authorities must consider the impact of potential development on protected species on such sites.

The survey season runs from 1st June to 31st August, when meadow owners select one day to carry out their survey. One owner describes the early part of this period as the ‘highlight



Flowers in a hay meadow

months when, as well as the necessary yellow rattle and a fair amount of self-heal, we are thrilled by the numerous orchids; a mix of southern marsh and heath spotted orchids, plus a few rare butterfly orchids.’

The Big Devon Meadows Count is open to anyone with a meadow in Devon and registration to take part runs from 31st March to 30th May on the Moor Meadows website; <https://moormeadows.org.uk/big-devon-meadows-count-2025/>.

Belstone Swaling

On 28th March, just before the 31st March deadline for such activities, Belstone Commoners carried out a controlled burn (swaling) of gorse over several hectares of common between the Nine Maidens stone circle and the track to Cullever Steps. With the dry March there were lots of places on the moor where swaling took place.



Michael Ash during the burn

Chris Walpole

Rave at Cadover Bridge

Just after 7am on Sunday 30th March, the police were called to a rave at Cadover Bridge. They then closed the road from the bridge leading to Blackaton Cross. When the police arrived around 50 people and about 35 vehicles were still there. Each car was stopped as it tried to leave; five people were arrested and taken to Charles Cross Police Station in Plymouth for a mixture of offences including drunk driving, possession of drugs and possession of a knife. A quantity of other drugs was also seized. The rave had been going on all night.

Rugglestone Rock Almost Lost

Rugglestone Rock is a place most lovers of Dartmoor do not visit as it is not easy to reach – the only way to the tor is from the east, surrounded by a boggy lane. Once you get there the tor is almost hidden in vegetation with trees and ivy growing out of it. Best to see it in the winter but then it is often too boggy to visit.



Rugglestone Rock in winter

Hidden Figures of the South West

The project 'Hidden Figures of the South West' is a series of exhibitions and a book by Caitlin Pharoah. The first exhibition of photographs takes place at Barnstaple Library from 1st April to 31st July. The exhibition is freely available throughout the first two floors of the library. Other portraits from the project will be exhibited in Exeter Library (1st May to 31st May) and Bristol Library (7th July to 20th July). More venues and events are in the process of being confirmed. The book features over two hundred individuals – including Emma Cunis (Dartmoor's Daughter) and Paul Rendell (Dartmoor Paul) – and aims to showcase those who work in unsung professions through a collection of portraits.

Secrets of Taw Marsh – A Guided Walk

Last year the world was amazed to learn that two late-Neolithic period stone circles had been newly discovered 'hiding in plain sight' at Taw Marsh. Alan Endacott, the local archaeologist who found them, will join a 'Secrets of Taw Marsh' guided walk on Saturday 21st June which will visit the site of one of the circles near the Irishman's Wall on Belstone Tor and the nearby 'Fallen Brother' dolmen. Alan will explain how he made his discoveries and how they fit into his 'Sacred Arc' theory of ancient monuments on north Dartmoor.

The walk will also consider other questions such as ... Where did the 'Irishmen' who built the ill-fated wall actually live? Who carved the letter 'B' on the side of the Parson's Nose/Walrus Rock/Whale Rock? Who put out the second-oldest letterbox on the moor in the 1880s, and where is it still hiding? What can be seen of Thomas Takfield's 16th century tin mill? What's the story of the underground waterworks complex at Taw Marsh? Why is a near-perfect granite field roller lying abandoned on the side of Belstone Tor?

Led by Chris Walpole, the two-hour walk leaves Belstone Village Hall at 1.30pm – please note the early afternoon start as we want to be back in good time for cream teas and cakes in the hall. Dogs welcome but they must be on leads as it is still the lambing and bird nesting season; walking boots advised as there will be some rough sections; donations invited for Hall funds (suggested donation for the walk £5; for the walk and refreshments £10).

You can contribute to Alan's continuing research through his crowdfunding campaign at www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/prehistoric-ritual-landscapes-of-ne-dartmoor-phd and for more information visit his Facebook page www.facebook.com/dartmoor.archaeology1.



Alan Endacott at the Irishman's Wall Circle

Chris Walpole

Dartmeet Toilets Closed

DNPA have decided not to renew the lease on the toilets in the car park at Dartmeet after it ran out at the end of March. The Dartmeet toilets cost around £18,000 per year and need upgrading which would cost over £30,000 over the next five years. They did consider charging users but there were problems with machines and vandalism at other locations.

Other public toilets on the moor at Haytor, Meldon and Venford, which are run by DNPA, are to be refurbished, and they have also just taken over the one at Lydford from West Devon Borough Council. Neither DNPA or local authorities have to provide public lavatories.

Cranmere Pool Letterbox Moved

The letterbox at Cranmere Pool has been moved by the South West Peatland Partnership as part of re-wetting the area. The new wooden box which now holds the visitors book and stamps is high on the peat bank above the 'pool' and can be seen from miles away. It is an eyesore. The old stone box is still there, but by damming up the lower end of the 'pool' they are hoping the 'pool' will be reformed again and this may flood the old letterbox. Two cameras have also been installed to watch the 'pool'. So this remote spot on Dartmoor is no longer remote – 'Big Brother' is watching you even at Cranmere Pool. After heavy rain on 15th April, the pool filled up and on the following day Fiona Rothwell, Bev Dickinson and Chris Leathlean were shocked to see the main letterbox half under water. A few days later the water in the pool had drained away again.



The new 'Cranmere Pool'

Chris Leathlean



One of the cameras



The wooden box

Rocks at Dartmeet

Rocks have been placed beside the gate at the bottom of Dartmeet Hill. This gate allowed riders and livestock to get around the cattle grid but the rocks have been packed to block the gate so riders cannot get through. This will also stop vehicles parking so close to the gate.



Some of the rocks at the bottom of Dartmeet Hill

Trout ‘n’ Tipple Reopens

The Trout ‘n’ Tipple pub just outside Tavistock has reopened after being closed for a couple of years. The pub and its large car park are still owned by the Tavistock Trout fishery and leased to Mr Billy Harris. It is open every day of the week.



The pub

South West Lakes Trust

South West Lakes Trust, the region’s largest combined environmental and recreational charity, is marking its 25th anniversary this year with a series of special events and activities designed to engage communities and celebrate a quarter-century of conserving the region’s lakes (reservoirs) and landscapes.

Established in 2000, the charity manages 50 inland waters across Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, and Dorset, covering an area ranging from 1 to 900 acres (0.4 to 364 hectares). The anniversary celebrations, running from 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026, will feature a variety of public events, including public open days at key lake sites, including Roadford, Wimbleball on Exmoor, Stithians in West Cornwall, Burrator on Dartmoor, and Longham in Dorset.

The annual photographic competition was launched at Easter, with a new historic photo category celebrating the lakes’ past.

Four Winds

There is a car park near Merrivale which has an odd name and sometimes people wonder where did that name come from. The car park, which has trees around it, was once the site of an old school. After the school closed down, the school house was leased and the occupant named it Four Winds and that is how we get the name today. Thanks to Paul Glanville, Simon Dell and Steve Grigg for the information.

Widcombe History Group's Talks

Widcombe History Group hold monthly meetings and here are the details of those coming up in the next few months. They meet at 7.30pm in the historic Church House.

7th May; Peatland Restoration and the Historic Environment by Martin Gillard from DNPA

4th June; Land Army Girls by Tony Gale

2nd July; Sermons Inscribed in Stone by Simon Dell

6th Aug; The film *Dartmoor Calling*

3rd Sept; Military on Dartmoor by Paul Rendell

Is it Time to Sit Down?

Found in a field with horses, beside a footpath near Moretonhampstead. If the horses get tired, do they sit down on the sofa?



The sofa in the field

Hidden Figures of the South West

By Caitlin Pharoah

The pandemic highlighted the essential roles of many overlooked professions and individuals vital to society. With people confined to their homes, I began to reflect on the occupations and individuals who have suffered due to society's tendency to overlook those who don't fit neatly into conventional definitions of employment. This realisation motivated me to take action, leading to the creation of the project '*Hidden Figures of the South West*'. The project features portraits of over two hundred individuals and aims to showcase people working in under-recognised professions. These professions include conservationists, traditional artisans, artists, and more.

I have navigated through moorland brush to capture photographs of enchanting Hedge Witches, scrambled over barnacle-covered rocks to document the seaweed harvesting process, and explored the mysterious worlds of mycelium at futuristic mushroom farms. Moreover, I have learnt how crucial it is to incorporate heritage processes in our efforts to build a sustainable future. Every step of this photographic journey has enlightened me with new curiosities and knowledge, which I intend to pass on using as many avenues as possible.

For more information, please get in contact via www.hummingbirdspartography.com and follow @hiddenfiguresofthesouthwest on Instagram.

These portraits will be compiled in a book and showcased in a series of exhibitions from 1st April 2025. A number of Dartmoor people feature in the book including Emma Cunis – Dartmoor Guide; Jenny – a Herbalist from Okehampton; and Paul Rendell – local historian and Dartmoor Guide.

The exhibitions and events will take place at various locations, including:

Barnstaple Library: 1st April to 31st July

Exeter Library: 1st May to 31st May

Bristol Library: 7th July to 20th July



Jenny – Herbalist, Okehampton

Caitlin Pharoah

Beating the Bounds

A number of parishes are planning to beat their bounds this year including Gidleigh, Okehampton Hamlets (20th August) and Lustleigh.

New Bridge Postbox TQ13 Repainted

The postbox at New Bridge beside the River Dart has been repainted.



Before

Tim Jenkinson



After

Tim Jenkinson

New Signs at Two Bridges

A number of new signs have been erected by the Duchy of Cornwall on access land saying that this is private land and that you are not permitted to canoe or kayak on the River Dart or its tributaries above Dartmeet Bridge. Below Dartmeet Bridge you need the landowners' consent. Note that 'Darmet Bridge' is a typo on the sign.



One of the new signs

50 Years Open to the Public

Castle Drogo opened to the public for the first time on 28th March 1975 and this year the National Trust are planning a number of events to mark the occasion.



Castle Drogo

Max Piper

Dartmoor Summer Bus Services

By Max Piper

This summer sees the return of three popular bus routes across Dartmoor; 171 Newton Abbot to Tavistock, 172 Tavistock to Newton Abbot, and 271 Haytor Hoppa from Newton Abbot. All operated by Country Bus, these services will enable people who may not drive, or who chose not to drive, to access the National Park.

The 171 and 172 services run from **5th May** until **27th September** 2025. The 271 seasonal service runs from **19th April** until **1st November** 2025.

These bus services allow for linear walks from one bus stop to another. With the added bonus of the £3 price cap for a single fare, these buses are also more affordable than driving.

Timetables for the routes are available on the Country Bus website.

New Defibrillator at Stowford, Ivybridge

A new defibrillator has been installed at Stowford Farm Cottage, above Stowford Bridge, Ivybridge, on the Two Moors Way and bridleway onto the moor.



The defibrillator

James Daymond

More Trees in the Challacombe Valley

In the last few months, an old gully beside the road in the Challacombe Valley has been fenced off and trees planted there. The area is part of Challacombe Farm.



Some of the new trees

Impact of Peat Restoration Project at Tavy Head and West Dart Head

By Steve Grigg

Following a visit (April 2025) to this very remote area of north Dartmoor, which the author has been visiting for decades, he noted remarkable changes. Aside the large number of new pools created, there is now very intrusive fencing (which one hopes is very temporary) leading away from each of the river head peat banks and the ground is criss-crossed by a very large number of track marks. There are also many small 'plastic flags' associated with the works strewn across the surrounding area, as far away as Cowsic Head, which have been separated from their poles and is now litter. Coupled with this the peat banks at the West Dart Head appear to have been virtually destroyed. The height of Tavy Head peat bank appears to have reduced from that which the author recalls, but this is a little subjective. One hopes these areas will somehow recover and will once again return to the majesty that is remote Dartmoor.



Tavy Head in April 2025

Steve Grigg



West Dart Head in April 2025

Steve Grigg

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THE *DIVIDE* NEWS TO THE DARTMOOR NEWS

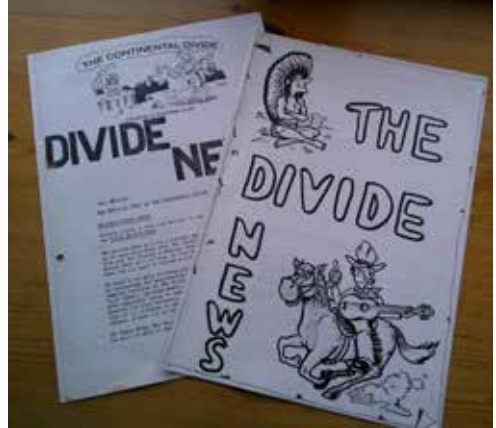
Paul Rendell explains about the many publications he has been involved with over the years

I have always been interesting in writing, even though at school I had problems reading and writing and my teachers said I was lazy. My English teacher said I would never write an essay or a book – I was useless. My parents asked if I could have extra English lessons, but were told it would be a waste of time.

In the early 1980s I helped set up a Country & Western Club in Plymouth based at the Continental Hotel, we called it The Continental Divide. The hotel was totally behind this idea and the owners backed us up in all we wanted to do. In fact we started a newsletter in January 1982 with one of the owners, Carol Morton, as the first editor, with me supplying news and contents for the four pages of the A4 newsletter. I was also writing poems and writing lyrics for local country music bands. We had a slot on the local Radio Station – Plymouth Sound – giving all the latest on the Country Music scene in Plymouth and often I was presenting the ten minute slot each week.

The newsletter was coming out monthly and by the end of 1982 I was writing three quarters of the content under my nickname 'Skippy'. I got the name 'Skippy' after the way I danced, like Skippy the kangaroo. In February 1983 I became the editor of *The Divide News* and this continued for about four years. We stopped doing a newsletter for members because the owners of the hotel sold up and we had to find another meeting place for the country music bands and singers.

In early 1985, I was sitting around a table with two of my friends who also loved



The Divide News



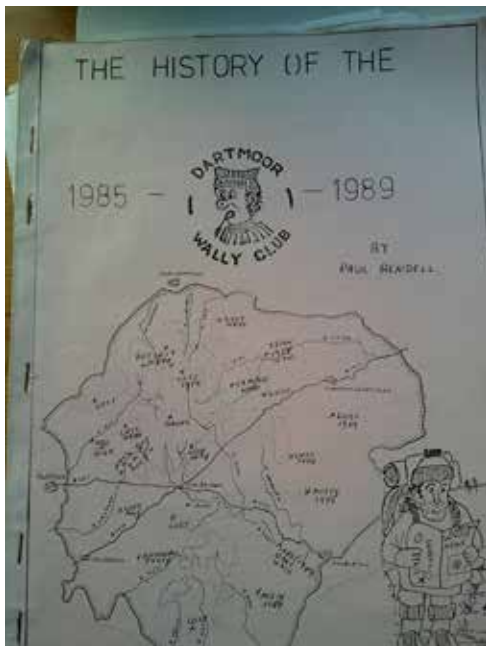
The Dartmoor Wally News, Issue No 3



An issue of the Dartmoor Wally News

Dartmoor and we said Dartmoor needs a magazine to inform walkers and other lovers of the moor. So we set about planning it – what articles we would have, the layout of the magazine etc – and we came up with a name, a simple name – *Dartmoor Magazine*. But we were shocked when, in December 1985, a magazine hit the newsagents called the *Dartmoor Magazine* and it covered the very things we were talking about. Oh well, someone got there first. So we put the idea on the shelf.

The following year I started a walking club called the Dartmoor Wally Club, where we did wacky things like walk to Great Mis Tor with table, chairs and tablecloth and took real wine glasses and a couple of bottles of wine and sat on the tor. Or we walked the Abbot’s Way in nuns’ outfits, or placed a bid to buy Brent Tor with a large number of used walking boots and other things.



The history of the Dartmoor Wally Club

Very few copies now exist of the *Dartmoor Wally News* which was a precursor to what has now become essential Dartmoor reading. The *Dartmoor Wally News* ran to twelve issues and finally ended in August 1989. 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’. It ended, ‘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.’

These A4 sheets lasted for twelve issues plus the one off *Christmas Cracker*. They were produced at my home address in Plymouth, under the name of The Old Dartmoor Company. I even managed to get that great Dartmoor campaigner, the late Lady Sayer, to write a piece in Issue No 3. Issue No 13 was in A5 format,



Some covers of the *Dartmoor Railway Newsletter*

contained 22 pages and had a card cover. The covers up to Issue No 30 were now illustrated with line drawings either by Eric Spicer of Exeter or myself. On its fifth anniversary (Issue No 31) a colour photograph of Peek Hill replaced the drawings and from the same issue the cover changed from black and white to a full colour photo. From Issue No 48 the name changed to *Dartmoor News* as it had become more than a newsletter by then.

In 2005 I started a new publication as well as doing the ‘News’, it was called *Dartmoor Railway Newsletter* and was for members of Friends of the Dartmoor Railway based in Okehampton and was of course railway related. I was the editor for at least 11 issues.

Over the years *Dartmoor News* has grown so that in 2025 it contains 72 pages, in full colour, and just under 1000 copies are now printed. When it first started only 50 copies were printed at home. I think the baby has grown up now.



The Dartmoor Newsletter, Issue No 13



The Dartmoor Newsletter, Issue No 24



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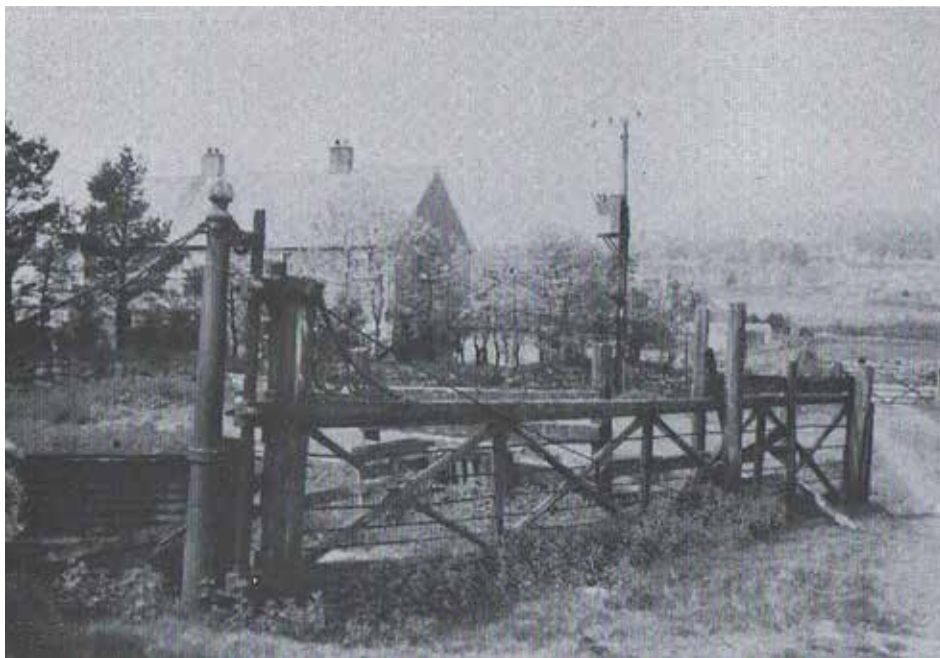


HM PRISON SERVICE

AN INTERESTING GATE AT PRINCETOWN

In the last edition of Dartmoor News an invitation was offered for information or stories about gates – how about this fascinating conundrum by Simon Dell

Situated on the public bridlepath leading from Sunnyside House on the outskirts of Princetown on the Two Bridges road there is a curiosity and a repurposed railway crossing gate (SX 59268 73671).



Animal Crush

Dave Brewer Collection

The bridlepath leads down to Bachelor's Hall and Bull Park in order to avoid the private lane at Tor Royal if you plan to visit Conchies Road over Royal Hill and onwards to Hexworthy.

Many people have, over the years, conjectured that this curious iron construction might have come from the horse-drawn Tyrwhitt's Tramway at Lowery. Others think that it is part of the crossing gate at Prowse's Crossing at Dousland so this little article sets the story right! In Princetown lived two men who were responsible, in 1957, for relocating the crossing gate from Dousland to Princetown. In fact Dave Brewer in one of his books has a photograph of this four sectioned gate just a few years after it arrived in Princetown. The gate had come from the level crossing at Dousland and can be seen in the snow in 1948 with its distinctive four sections. Another image taken from the Princetown-bound train shows part of the gate at Dousland level crossing.



Dousland level crossing

Unknown

The oft-seen image by Taylor of Prowse's Crossing at the foot of Iron Mine Lane shows that gate has three sections and is narrower than the Dousland crossing gate, so it is certainly not from there. With the image of the children in the snow and the oral history of first-hand involvement of relocating the gate there you have the answer!



Prowse's Crossing

The Taylor Collection, Dartmoor Trust



Sunnyside Cattle Crush

Simon Dell

TAVISTOCK IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

By *Tania Crosse*

When we think of Dartmoor during the Second World War the Okehampton Training Camp immediately springs to mind. However, in addition to this, the moor played a most important part in other ways.

An elderly gentleman, who had lived his whole life in the prison settlement of Princetown, once told me of his memories of the war as a young boy. Because of all the evacuees the village had accepted the school wasn't large enough to accommodate both local and evacuee children for a full day. Hence the children attended either morning or afternoon school. This would have been true of towns and villages all over the country.

At the start of the war, Tavistock had accepted over 400 evacuees from cities deemed at risk from bombing, although some would have returned home during the so-called phoney war; that is to say, the period early in the war before the Blitz began, when people were starting to think the bombings would never happen and were lulled into a false sense of security. As a town, though, Tavistock really came into its own as a refuge in 1941.

Plymouth had suffered sporadic air raids from July 1940, some more deadly than others. Because of the proximity of the Royal Naval Dockyard at Devonport, clearly a major target for the Luftwaffe, the local authorities repeatedly requested a full-scale evacuation for those unable to make private arrangements. For some reason better known to themselves, central government refused. One school that was able to make the move, however, was Mount Tavy, a private preparatory school, that took over Mount Tavy House in Tavistock in 1940. It remains there to this day, having merged some years ago with Kelly College senior school. During the First World War, the house had become a hospital for soldiers, featuring in my novel *Wheels of Grace*, republished a few years ago as *The Wheelwright Girl*. It now features in my latest release, *The Butterfly Girl*, as the school that moved there during the Second World War.



Mount Tavy House

Tania Crosse

It was in the spring of 1941, however, that Plymouth suffered the most horrific raids which became known as the Plymouth Blitz. Following two consecutive nights of horrendous bombing in March, the terrified people of Plymouth evacuated the city as best they could each night, crowding into the backs of lorries, taking the train, cycling or even walking as far as they could, often up onto the moor. Many swelled the number of evacuees already in Tavistock, the townspeople opening their doors to strangers even further, while other refugees were accommodated in schools, cinemas, churches and halls, or camped out in the recreational area of The Meadows. An elderly lady once told me how she and her mother left Plymouth to live with an uncle in Tavistock. Pupil numbers again rose, and two British Restaurants were opened in the town to help feed all the extra residents, with locals and the Women's Voluntary Service volunteering to help run them. *The Butterfly Girl* is set partly in Plymouth and partly in Tavistock during the war, and in it, I depict how the townsfolk greeted their displaced Plymothians with open arms.

In those two March raids, the centre of Plymouth was completely destroyed. A month later, it was the turn of the Devonport end of the city. It was only after these new nights of hell that evacuation was granted in May, mostly to Cornwall, some schools moving en masse, while evacuation for others was voluntary. Approximately 12,000 children left the city, though many returned by 1943 when the worst of the bombings seemed to be over.

It was in 1943 that Tavistock assumed an even greater role in the war. All over the South West, mainly American but also other Commonwealth troops were amassing in the build up to D-Day. There were smaller camps all around Tavistock, but the town was especially important for the massive US hospital camp up on Plaster Down. It had two fully operational theatres, shops including a barbers' and tailors', recreational rooms and even a cinema, and accommodation for 1500 patients as well as all necessary personnel. The result of all this was that Tavistock was heaving with US troops, jeeps, tanks and lorries. In addition, Abbotsfield Hall, a mansion on the edge of the town, acted as the headquarters of the 29th Infantry Division of the US Army. It was here that several conferences were held between General Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe, and Field Marshal Lord Montgomery of Alamein, immediately prior to the invasion of Normandy.

It is hard to imagine now that the peaceful yet bustling town of Tavistock was once at the heart of wartime activity. Indeed, many are unaware of its importance during those devastating times and the liberation of France, which led eventually to the end of the war. Visit the town's museum, however, and you will find a special exhibition to commemorate the eighty years since those brave young men left Tavistock in 1944 to fight on the beaches of France, many never to return. Among those who did, however, quite a few returned to their girlfriends in the town who then became GI brides.

The Butterfly Girl is set against this wartime background, and thankfully we see how Tavistock celebrated VE Day in May 1945. I am grateful to the local historians who wrote about the war, and whose books I used for my research. I only hope my story does justice to their work, and also to the people of Tavistock and the courageous soldiers who found themselves there during those dark days.



American jeeps

Tania Crosse

CLEARBROOK – THE VERY EARLY DAYS

By Peter Hamilton-Leggett

Looking at the 1842 Tithe Map of Buckland Monachorum one will find no sign of Clearbrook, Crapstone or Yelverton – they simply did not exist!



Figure 1: The 1842 Tithe Map showing Parson's Field

In 1840 Richard Chappel was farming at Ham Tenement, the fifteen acre smallholding that he rented from John Holsworthy. Three years later the *Western Times* included an auction advertisement (29 July 1843); Lot Three comprised 'A Freehold Estate, called Ham's Tenement' and Lot Four, 'A Freehold field, called Parson's Field, situate on the north side of the road leading from Roborough Down to Hoo Meavy Bridge, being the first inclosure adjoining the Down.' As can be seen from the above Tithe Map, Parson's Field was isolated from the rest of Ham Tenement. To the south and west of the field was moorland and to the north and east was land belonging to Maber Farm (later called Mabor). Why John Holsworthy decided to sell Parson's Field separately is unknown but could well have been as a building site. We do know that the field was purchased by a syndicate which included George Frean, a miller and mayor of Plymouth, and six miners. A year later Frean went on to build Powder Mills gunpowder factory and later still, with his son George Hender Frean, joined forces with James Peek to form the biscuit company Peek Frean & Co.

The first houses were built around 1846. By 1851 fourteen properties had been built, all very different to each other. A total of twelve tin miners now lived in these properties along with a mine labourer and a farm labourer. Yeoland tin mine had recently re-opened, covering a large area of Roborough Down (where the golf course is) and these miners were kept busy extracting the ore. By 1857 the mine became unproductive and on Tuesday 9th June the majority of the mining equipment was put up for auction. This included a 36 inch rotary double action steam engine with an 11 ton flywheel, a drawing engine with a 10 ton boiler, along with rods, buddles, dressing racks etc. With no mine the miners left Clearbrook and in 1861 there was a

complete change of ownership. The occupations now included ten farm labourers, eight granite quarry workers (working at the Dewerstone Granite Co), six copper miners, two railway workers, a sawyer, house carpenter, blacksmith, journeyman miller and a gardener. Two people were receiving pay from the parish, By 1871 the copper miners and the granite quarry workers were also gone.



Figure 2: Painting of Clearbrook dated 1870

Much has been written about the Skylark Inn and much is inaccurate. Tripadvisor suggests it dates back to the 17th century whilst other sources, including Lillian Lethbridge's account of Clearbrook, suggest it began in 1780. A glance at the above Tithe Map shows that no buildings existed in Parson's Field up to 1842! The first mention is in the 1861 census when it was occupied by George Rolston(e) and his wife Elizabeth. George had been born in Bridford, near Exeter, in 1816. In 1851 he was a servant to a wood merchant at Jump (now called Roborough). Working alongside him was Elizabeth Elford, a house maid. Romance obviously blossomed for in 1852 the pair were married at Plympton St Mary – he was 35 and Elizabeth 28. Their first three girls were born at Plympton St Mary. Their fourth child, a son named James, was born at Clearbrook in 1861. This would suggest that they arrived at Clearbrook between 1858, when their third daughter was born, and 1861. Despite living at the Skylark Inn, the 1861 census gives his occupation as wood dealer – obviously at this time the inn was a sideline. The *Western Daily Mercury* (17th June 1862) carried an interesting auction sale; '*Desirable Property, of Mr George Hamlyn, going abroad. LOT 2 – the fee simple and inheritances of all the newly erected premises at Clearbrook, in the Parish of Buckland Monachorum, and well-known as the 'SKYLARK INN' in the occupation of Mr Rolstone, with Stables, Pig's House, Coal and Wash-houses, &c, &c altogether occupying about 3,500 feet of land.*' From this it would seem that Rolston(e) was only renting the property but as he continued to live there it must be presumed that he purchased it. The advertisement continued; '*The House contains Four Rooms, besides Tap-Room, Kitchen, Bakehouse and Shop, together with all requisite Fixtures. The above premises are situate in a good Agricultural, Sporting, and Mining District, Near the Dewerstone Granite Works, about one and a half mile from Bickleigh Station; and being a Free House, renders it a most desirable opportunity for Investment.*'



Figure 3: Skylark Inn taken from a 1907 postcard

From March 1861 Mr Trelawny’s Hounds met at the Skylark, and continued to do so monthly for many years. In 1870 a wine & spirit licence was applied for but refused. In 1871 George Rolston’s occupation was given as a farmer farming 25 acres, having rented Clearbrook Farm. By 1881 he was also renting Hoo Meavy Farm, thereby increasing his acreage to 40. Helped by his wife and son George, he also continued to run the beer house. In 1882 he once again applied for a wine & spirit licence and this time it was granted. A few months later the publican and farmer was dead leaving a personal estate worth £450. In June 1883 his livestock was auctioned by Glanville & Sons. The lots included numerous sheep, bullocks, pigs and horses along with 10 tons of prime clover hay. A little later a few fields of corn and potatoes were sold. The inn was now run by his widow, Elizabeth. Twice in 1883 she was fined for allowing drinking after hours. In 1907 Elizabeth sold the inn to CW Blundell (Plymouth) Ltd. Her son George moved to farm at Hoo Meavy Farm where Elizabeth died in 1909.

One final mystery – why the name Clearbrook? Behind Parson’s Field are a few springs that form a small stream that flows into the Meavy. The Meavy was often murky due to peat staining or white due to miners washing out the clay. However the Parson’s Field stream was clear. Well, that’s the most popular theory to date!



Figure 4: Clearbrook in the 1880s, from the 25” OS map

★ ★ ★ ★

the rock inn

Haytor Vale - Dartmoor National Park

The Rock Inn
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 Telephone: 01364 661305
info@rock-inn.co.uk
www.rock-inn.co.uk

Like everything else at The Rock Inn, our restaurant is built upon reputation. Our numerous eating areas throughout the building provide an intimate, yet friendly atmosphere for your lunch or dinner on Dartmoor, just below Haytor Rocks.

1 AA Rosette Award for Culinary Excellence received every year 1996-2015, subsequently awarded 2AA Rosettes since 2016. Restaurant open to non-residents from Wednesday to Sunday for Lunch and Wednesday to Saturday for Dinner. Booking is always advisable.

The Inn has nine very comfortable ensuite guest bedrooms each well-appointed with quality furnishings and decor, in keeping with ambience and historical period of the Inn.



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BELSTONE IN THE 1920s

PART ONE – DAYS OF PROTEST

By Chris Walpole

Ever since the final years of the 19th century Belstone had become increasingly popular as a place to visit, thanks at first to the coming of the railway and by the 1920s, thanks also to the charabanc and motor car. By 1939 at least 23 out of the 102 houses in the parish had taken in paying guests at some point. Small wonder then that in April 1925 the *Western Morning News* (WMN) reported; *There are persistent rumours that a very large hotel is to be erected at Belstone by one of the best known London catering firms.* Perhaps the only surprise is that this hotel was never built.



Belstone Cleave on a hand-tinted Valentine postcard from before the quarry opened

Belstone Community Archive

Early in the decade two proposals arose that threatened the very landscape that visitors were coming to see. In January 1920, Belstone, along with many other communities, fought successfully against the proposed Dartmoor Hydro-Electric Power Bill. The episode was recalled in his 1927 memoir by Belstone's Rev Milner: *a great upset in village life was caused by the idea to build a great dam across the entrance to Taw Marsh and turn the valley into a great reservoir. Parish meetings were many and hot. There was obviously the threatened loss of much useful pasture land and also of the nearer peat beds: others saw in their imagination a great lake which would be crowded with trippers in rowing boats. At one meeting a lady suggested the promoters ought to be forced to dig out all the peat from the Marsh and stack it in*

Belstone for the use of the inhabitants. Excitement was so strong that anyone who did not speak in vituperation about the scheme was denounced as a traitor.

Secondly, in 1921 controversy reigned and local communities were divided by Devon County Council's (DCC) decision to open a quarry in Belstone Cleave to extract 20,000 tons of very hard blue elvan stone annually, to be used as roadstone. At first Ivy Tor was to be the site but eventually the quarry opened on the other side of the River Taw valley, with a tramline laid to take stone to the Belstone-Sticklepath lane. Strong words for and against were expressed; *the parishioners of Belstone view with alarm the proposals. Residents and visitors cherish the quiet and beauty of Belstone Cleave as one of the most beautiful spots in the county. As the inhabitants of Belstone and Sticklepath depend largely on letting apartments to visitors they feel they will be seriously injured by any works that will spoil the natural character of the valley* (Belstone Parish Meeting); *Sir, We deny the right of your Belstone correspondent to be the patron saint of Sticklepath. Why does Belstone, by their insane and selfish policy refuse work to the heroes who have fought and bled for us that we might be free from the tyranny of Germany? For the future, Belstone, please speak for yourself, as we at Sticklepath do not subscribe to your narrow views* (letter to the WMN). Well-known Dartmoor artist Frederick Widgery lent his support to the opposition, producing a special painting of the unspoilt view up Belstone Cleave.

By autumn 1921 work had begun but feelings continued to run high with legal actions in Okehampton and Exeter courts. Belstone Commoners now called it an *outrageous scheme* and sought an injunction to stop the *huge quarry*, claiming that their rights to graze 1700 sheep, 425 bullocks and 100 horses in the Cleave would be severely compromised. *Stuff and nonsense* said the letter writers; *are the Belstone animals fed on stone? Germany is not the only place where high explosives are needed.*



Elizabeth Reddaway (left), her son Jack (far right) and John Endacott (centre) collecting peat, Taw Marsh, late 1920s
Belstone Community Archive

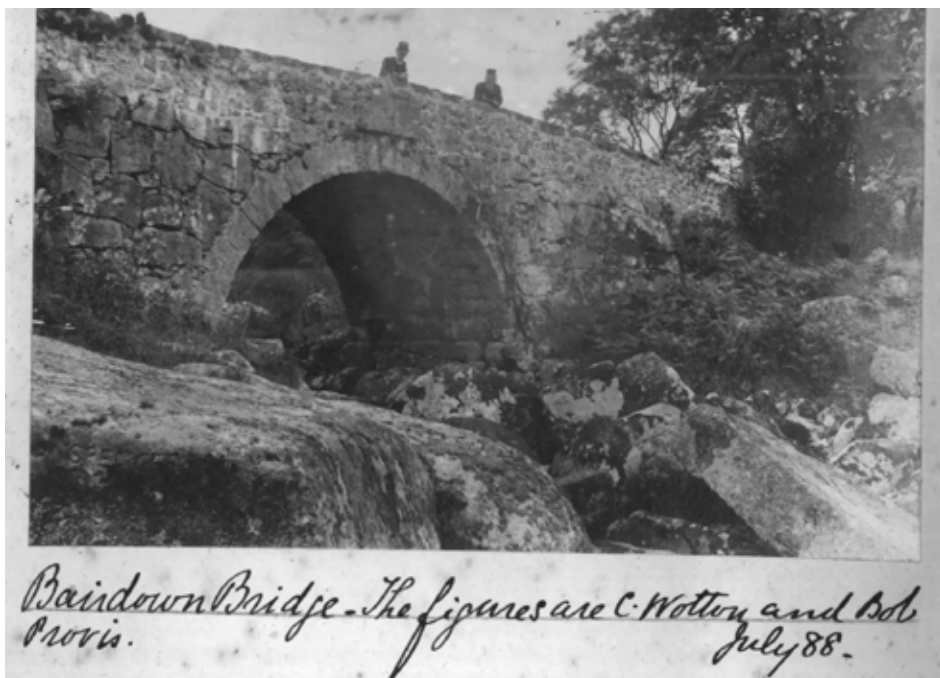
A year later around 2000 tons of stone had been extracted. Belstone folk were still protesting – *enough stone had been taken from Belstone to cover the roads three times over* – and passed another resolution – *the people of Belstone wanted to know how much longer this was going on*. Not long was the answer – as DCC had found better quality stone one mile away, at what became Tor Hayes Quarry, beside the old A30 just north-west of Sticklepath.

In summer 1922 Belstone Commoners were up in arms again, this time over a Duchy of Cornwall order prohibiting the cutting of peat for fuel. On 8th June 16 villagers marched to Taw Marsh with their turf irons to symbolically assert a right they had enjoyed *for donkey's years*. They were expecting to confront Duchy officials but, perhaps wisely, none showed up.

SPOTLIGHT ON DARTMOOR BRIDGES

This time Paul Rendell looks at a bridge near Princetown that was rebuilt after a great flood

BEARDOWN BRIDGE (SX 60310 75303)



The old bridge in July 1888 before being destroyed by the flood. The front left rock has "To Spencer" on it

Taken by Robert Burnard, Dartmoor Trust Collection

HOW TO FIND: On the Cowsic River above Two Bridges. Follow the footpath on the left hand side of the river going upstream from Two Bridges, this path will take you to Beardown Bridge below Beardown Farm. The bridge is at the head of the Cowsic Gorge.

HISTORY: The bridge carries the track to Beardown Farm (in the 1880s it was spelt Bairdown Bridge by Robert Burnard). The original bridge was possibly built in 1802 by Mr Edward Bray, once solicitor and manager of the Duke of Bedford Estate in Devon based in Tavistock. Mr Bray had a house built (Beardown Farm today) and acquired a huge area of land, including Beardown Tors, from the Duchy of Cornwall.

There was a big storm on the high moor on 17th July 1890; the subsequent flood destroyed the clapper bridge higher up river and Beardown Bridge. Robert Burnard arrived nine

days later and took a photograph. Beardown Bridge was rebuilt a few months afterwards – this bridge is what you see crossing the river today, a single arched bridge built of granite.

THINGS TO SEE NEARBY: There is a wonderful five span clapper bridge just a little further up river which had previously been swept away in 1793 and replaced. After the flood of 17th July 1890 it was re-erected by the Dartmoor Preservation Association. It was once on a busy packhorse route between Tavistock and Chagford but is now hidden away.

In nearby fields just below the clapper bridge and just above the Beardown Bridge you can find inscriptions with fanciful phrases dedicated to poets on a number of rocks along the Cowsic River. Many of these today reside on private land and cannot be visited without prior permission from the landowner, but look closely just yards downstream from the bridge and you will find 'To Spenser', 'To Milton' and 'To Shakespeare'. Go under the bridge and on the right hand side of the river you will find 'To Beattie' and maybe another one. They were carved by the hand of man at the behest of Mr Bray's son, the Rev Edward Bray. Today the writing is often covered in moss and from time to time the rocks are cleared by Simon Dell, Richard Ware and Paul Rendell.

OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION: Guided walks to the boulders on private land can be arranged, please contact Simon Dell or Paul Rendell. You can find a wonderful little tufted fern called maidenhair spleenwort growing on the bridge with its roots in lime mortar.

FURTHER READING ABOUT THE AREA:

Dell, Simon; Reverend Bray's Bardic Boulders; *Dartmoor News* (Issue 187, Jan/Feb 2023)

Hemery, Eric; *High Dartmoor – Land and People*; Robert Hale, London (1983)



Beardown Bridge, March 2025

Paul Rendell



Simon and Richard clearing the 'To Beattie' boulder

Paul Rendell

East Dartmoor's Lesser-Known Tors and Rocks

by Max Piper

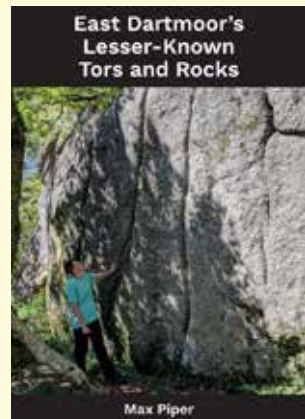
This new paperback book now out is full of photographs and has 348 pages. The tors and rocks are within an area not often visited.

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

The Coach House, Tramlines, Station Road, Okehampton, Devon, EX20 1EH

£24.00 including postage.

Also available from www.dartmoornews.co.uk or email paul.dartmoor@gmail.com and ask for bank transfer details or pay via PayPal.



GHOSTLY DARTMOOR

SQUIRE FULFORD

By Paul Rendell

On the east edge of Dartmoor there is a house called Great Fulford. Many moons ago a coach belonging to Squire Fulford was often seen being driven by the old squire around the lanes around the lanes near Dunsford in the early evening. The odd thing was that this phantom coach was pulled by four headless horses. They have not been seen for many years.

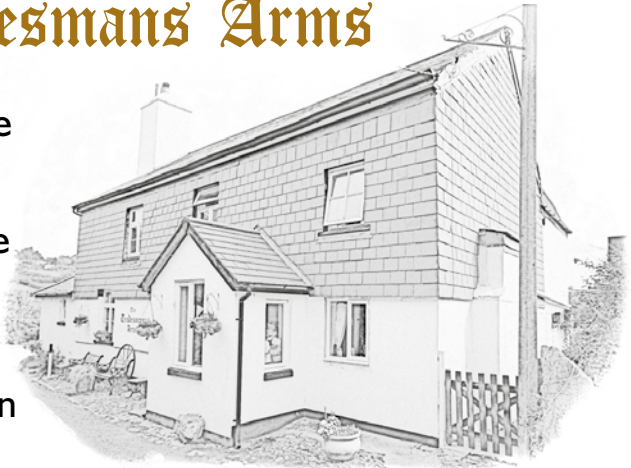


Great Fulford

Paul Rendell Collection

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OLD NEWS – DEATH AT GOLDEN DAGGER MINE

Paul Rendell looks at an underground accident that took place in 1882

In February 1882, Richard Stephens and John Webb were working together underground. They were being paid a fixed sum for every ton of ore they delivered to the surface, known as tribute work. This encouraged haste and economy on safety, which proved fatal for Mr Stephens that day. He was engaged in using gunpowder for blasting. He had drilled a hole into the rock face, inserted the gunpowder and sealed it with clay after putting in a length of safety fuse. This was done to make the blast go into the rock face. He would normally have used a wooden tamping rod but in his haste had picked up the nearest tool which happened to be an iron bar. His mate warned him against using the bar but he hit it with a mallet. There was a big explosion and Mr Stephens took the full force with really terrible consequences. The newspapers were very graphic back then – they reported '*his head was opened up so that his brains were exposed and eyes shockingly injured*'. A man was sent to Moretonhampstead for medical help but this was rejected by no less than three doctors; two said they were expecting confinements so could not come, and Mr Hunt from Chagford failed to turn up. Miner Richard Stephens died from his injuries. Maybe he could have been saved if the doctors had arrived, we shall never know. He had disobeyed written instructions from his employers not to use steel or iron tamping rods for ramming. At an Inquest held three days later the Coroner gave a verdict of 'Accidental death'.

Reference:

James, Trevor; Bodies on the Moor – A story of three lives; *Dartmoor News* Issue 81, Nov/Dec 2004

101 Squares Around Bodmin Moor

by Sheron Vowden

Explore Bodmin Moor and the surrounding areas square by square. Most people drive through without giving it a second glance but turn off the main road and straight away you are on the moor. There is so much to see, why not get your walking boots on and start ticking off the squares.

To get a copy, send a cheque payable to 'Paul Rendell' at: The Coach House, Tramlines, Station Road, Okehampton, Devon, EX20 1EH

£12.80 including postage.

Also available from www.dartmoornews.co.uk or email paul.dartmoor@gmail.com and ask for bank transfer details or pay via PayPal.



PRINCETOWN HISTORY CLUB



2025 TALKS AND EVENTS

We meet on the first Tuesday of the month at Prinetown Community Centre at 7pm for a 7.30pm start for our winter and spring indoor talks. For outdoor visits we meet at 6.30pm.

Membership is £5 per year.

Visitors and guests are welcome for a £2 donation to our events. Our next talks are also listed on our Facebook site at **Prinetown History Club Events**.

Tuesday 6th May

Join author Helen Wilson, leading authority on the Pinwill Sisters who were expert wood carvers, whose work adorns many Devon churches and beyond.

Tuesday 3rd June

Join farmer Layland Branfield from Moorlands Farm near Two Bridges for a guided walk on his farm. We will meet at 6.30pm at the Dartmoor Training Centre near the bridge over the river behind Prince Hall Hotel.

Tuesday 1st July

Meet at 6.30pm for a guided visit and stroll to the site of the former RAF Harrowbeer with local expert Steve Fryer to follow up on his talk to us in February this year. The meeting place is at the Knightstone Cafe tea rooms on the RAF Harrowbeer airfield. We will meet in the dispersay bay near the cafe.

Tuesday 5th August

Join Helen Wilson for this visit which follows on from her talk to us about the intriguing Pinwill Sisters in May this year. Meet at 6.30pm at the church. The nearest parking off the road is at Postbridge 200 meters away or the village hall nearby if it is open and available.

INDUSTRIAL SITES ON THE MOOR

In this two-part series Paul Rendell looks at some industrial sites across the moor. Part Two will appear in the next issue.

Devonport Leat (SX 608 780 – Main source), Dartmoor Forest and Walkhampton

This leat flowed for about 28 miles (45km) from the West Dart River, with intakes also from Blackabrook and the Cowsic River, to Devonport in Plymouth. Built by the Plymouth Dock Company between 1793 and 1801. Part of the course of the leat is still used today, now flowing to Burrator Reservoir.

Eylesbarrow Mine (SX 598 682), Sheepstor

A large tin mine mainly worked between 1815 and 1850. Lots to see today including wheel pits, flat rods for transmitting power, the ruins of a blast furnace and reverberatory furnace and six stamping mills.

Finch Foundry (SX 642 941), Sticklepath

A former corn and cloth mill was turned into an edge-tool factory in 1814. It was worked by the Finch Brothers until 1960, manufacturing tools like billhooks, shovels and scythes. Today the site is owned by the National Trust and has three waterwheels which drive a pair of tilt-hammers, a drop-forging hammer and metal-cutting shears.

Haytor Quarry (SX 759 774), Ilsington

Granite quarries started in 1820 by George Templer to supply stone to London. Closed in about 1860. Plenty to see today, a number of quarries, reservoirs, stables for the horse, the granite tramway.



Haytor Quarry

Max Piper

Hexworthy Mine (SX 655 710), Dartmoor Forest

The site includes two tin mines, Henroost (SX 660 711) and Hooten Wheals (SX 655 708). Today you can see the remain of an old tramway, wheel pits, an adit, mine shafts, cottages and a dressing floor.

Horndon (SX 521 801), Mary Tavy

A hamlet not far from Mary Tavy, lived in by many of the miners working at Wheal Friendship mines. Today there are cottages and a couple of chapels.

Ivybridge Viaduct (SX 636 569), Ivybridge

A curving stone-arched viaduct above Ivybridge built in 1893 when the line was doubled. The stone came from Western Beacon Quarry, high above the viaduct. The old Brunel viaduct's stone pillars, which once supported the previous wooden bridge, still stand. The line today is used, going from Exeter to Cornwall via Plymouth. There are other railway viaducts nearby including Glazebrook, Bittaford, Blackford and Slade.

Kelly Mine (SX 795 818), Bovey Tracey

Micaceous hematite or 'shiny ore' was mined here and was used in anti-corrosive paint. The latest period this mine was worked was between 1900 and 1946. The Kelly Mine Preservation Society have been busy restoring the site and have open days from time to time.

Lee Moor China Clay Works, Shaugh Prior

The biggest industrial site still working today on the edge of the National Park. It opened in 1830 and Lee Moor Village was built for the workers.

Mary Tavy Hydro-Electric Power Station (SX 509 785), Mary Tavy

Built in 1932 by the West Devon Mining & Power Company. They took water off the River Tavy in two different places, Tavy Cleave and Hill Bridge, then via a leat to Mary Tavy. Wheal Jewel Reservoir is one of two storage reservoirs, still used today, owned by South West Water and on private land.

Meldon Quarries (SX 564 922), Okehampton Hamlets

There are a number of quarries including a limestone quarry and a quarry used for railway ballast opened after 1870. Below the wonderful Meldon Viaduct was once a big industrial area where today you can see lime kilns, a flooded quarry, an old tramway and an adit into a copper mine.

Merrivale Quarry (SX 546 753), Whitchurch

This started taking out granite in 1876 and was called Tor Quarry. Worked by William Duke, it has supplied stone for Tower Bridge, New Scotland Yard, the Old Bailey, New London Bridge and West Hartlepool Docks amongst others. Last used in 1997. Today on private land.

Powder Mills (SX 628 773), Dartmoor Forest

A gunpowder mill built by George Freen between 1844 and 1846 and worked until about 1897. Remains today are a row of cottages, leats, chimneys and mill buildings.

TALES FROM THE MUSEUM

LEST WE FORGET

Another tale by Kristy Turner from the Museum of Dartmoor Life in Okehampton

At the bottom of the Museum's rear staircase hangs a large wooden plaque dedicated to the men of Okehampton Post Office who left to fight in the First World War. Eight did not return.

It was unveiled on Wednesday 28th January 1920 at the old Post Office in Okehampton and from a report in the *Western Times* there was a large gathering of workers and their families, including the families of those who were lost. Mr RH James, the Postmaster, presided and the plaque was unveiled by previous Postmaster Mr TP Hamlyn, who had lost his only son during the war and shared his sympathies with those gathered whose sons also made the ultimate sacrifice.

One of the returned men, Mr Phillips, thanked those who had taken part in creating the memorial. He said:

'Those who had come back must carry on, to be worthy of the sacrifice made by those who had fallen.'

Mr C Medland, who had been at the Post Office for 40 years added:

'They were told this was to be a land fit for heroes to live in, but it is not so at present.'

There are over 100,000 War Memorials in the UK and over two thirds of them commemorate the First World War, probably due to the sheer numbers of casualties, the fact that many men were volunteers and civilians and there was a ban on the repatriation of the dead. Many communities were driven to raise money to create their own memorials to those whose graves they could not visit. Committees were formed and money gathered from voluntary subscriptions, rather than from local or central government. Do come and have a look at this plaque. Maybe you will see a familiar name on the board and can share their story with the Museum.

It is important that these memorials are protected for future generations to see and for the names of those who died fighting for their country to continue to be remembered, lest we forget.



Post Office memorial board

COMPETITION TIME

To mark the 200th issue of Dartmoor News, we are giving away a number of prizes. Please send one entry per person via email, or postcard in the post. Send to paul.dartmoor@gmail.com. The winning names will be picked out at random.

The closing date is on **1st June 2025**.

Please answer the following questions:

- 1. In what year was the first *Dartmoor Newsletter* published?**
- 2. Where would you find the biggest complete Dartmoor rock basin?**
- 3. On what hillside would you find Figgie Daniel?**

Prizes!

Books – *Rock Idols* by Sophie Pierce and Alex Murdin,

The Butterfly Girl by Tania Crosse,

Exploring Around Burrator – A Dartmoor Reservoir – Updated Edition by Paul Rendell,

East Dartmoor's Lesser-Known Tors and Rocks by Max Piper,

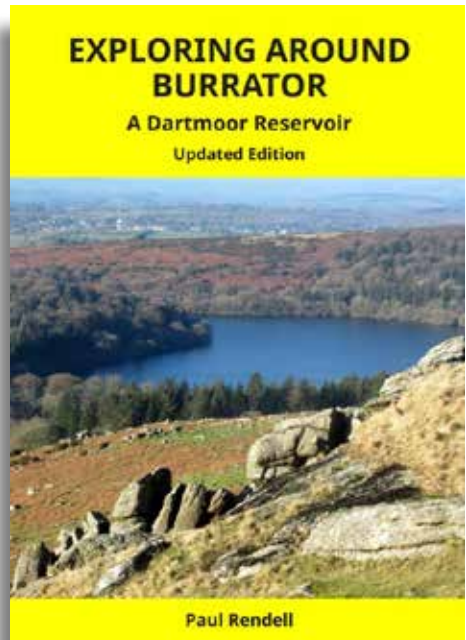
Dartmoor Air Crashes by Robert Jones,

Dartmoor's Borstal Boys by Pip Barker.

A £20 gift voucher to be used on a Paul Rendell guided walk,

2 Subscriptions to *Dartmoor News* for one year (paper copy),

5 Subscriptions to *Dartmoor News* for one year (digital copies).



COUNTY BRIDGE BOUNDARY STONES

Tim Jenkinson explains about 'C' Stones and lists the fifty-one to be found on Dartmoor. All photos by the author.

Dartmoor retains numerous boundary markers that were set either side of County Bridges in the 1840s. The bridges that we use today superseded fords and clappers as horse drawn traffic increased in medieval times with the trade and movement of wool and tin thereby necessitating the construction of sturdier crossing points over moorland rivers. Dating to at least the 14th Century and later it was a Statute of Henry VIII from 1531 that placed the responsibility for repairs to major stone bridges within the Shire or County.

Some 300 years later each bound stone inscribed with a 'C', presumably for 'County', marked the limits of responsibility for road repairs mostly but not exclusively on the old turnpike routes across the moor (note, there are examples in the wider county around Crediton and Bishop's Tawton of stones being marked with 'CB' for County Bounds).



Ponsworthy Bridge 'C' Stone, North



Lydford Bridge 'C' Stone

Dave Brewer (2002, p217) provides more detail; 'At the Michaelmas Quarter sessions of that year (1841) it was resolved that 'Bound stones' made of a durable stone – and most of those around Dartmoor are of granite – and of a height of 2ft, be set up on both sides of all bridges that were their responsibility (the County), at a distance of 300ft from such bridges, for they were responsible not only for the structure of the bridge itself, but also for the immediate approach or cause.' We also learn from the author that each stone cost 7s 6d (37½p) to erect. It seems that the markers were peculiar to Devon and Cornwall as no others have been detected across the UK.

However, following an assessment of survivors in recent years the height of the stones seems to have varied as did the size of the 'C' that was cut into the granite. Unlike the wider sprawling county of Devon, the roads on Dartmoor retain many good examples because of the comparative lack of road widening that has taken place since their erection. That said, the stones here remain at risk of neglect, sometimes becoming covered up by vegetation, and there is the ever-present threat of impact from motor cars and other vehicles that occasionally leave their mark on the very fabric of the ancient bridges themselves.

Most of the moorland survivors in the first quarter of the 21st Century are freestanding but there are examples of others being set against or even incorporated into walls thereby ensuring greater protection. Old Ordnance Survey Maps from the late 19th Century show the markers simply as 'Stone' and this has greatly helped with locating their position at the wayside. It is important that these historical artefacts are preserved as a reminder of Dartmoor's bridge and road building past.

Currently the number of stones that are still extant on Dartmoor roads stands at fifty-one. A list of those so far located is included below although some may argue whether they are all standing within the National Park boundary. They are nonetheless recorded here to highlight their existence as of 2025. I would welcome information regarding any stones that might be missing from this list.

Please note that Dave Brewer states that there are two 'C' stones still extant at Harford Bridge (on the Tavy) but these have not been found in recent years nor indeed has the second stone at Hill Bridge higher up on the same river yet been located. One at Ockery Bridge over the Blackabrook near Princetown cited by the author as being on site is still to be discovered.



Dart Bridge



Glaze Brook 'C' Stone, East and Max Piper

Dartmoor County Bridge Stones (51)

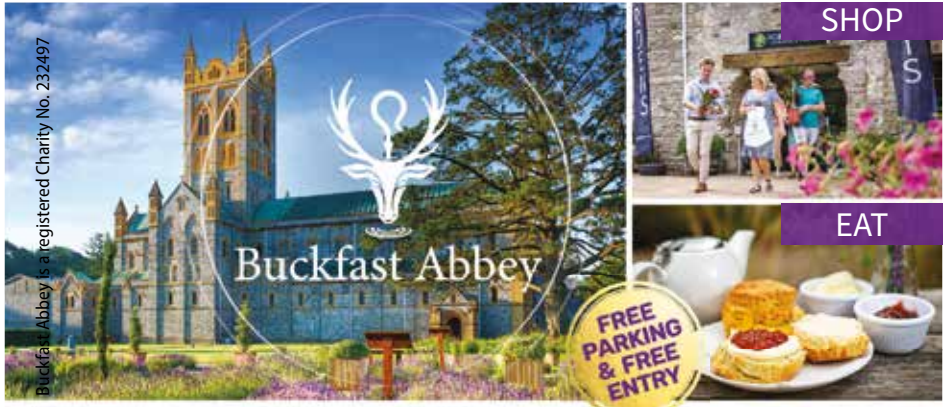
Abbey Bridge, Tavistock x1 ('C' stone in wall of Dolvin Road)	Huckworthy Bridge x2 (one in garden)
Bellever Bridge x2	Ivybridge x2
Bovey Bridge x1	Langham Bridge x2
Brent Bridge, South Brent x1	Lee Mill Bridge x1
Buckland Bridge x1	Lydford Bridge x1 (Slate)
Cadover Bridge x1	Merrivale Bridge x1
Church Bridge, Buckfastleigh x1	Norsworthy Bridge x1 (natural rock)
Clifford Bridge x1	Old Bow Bridge, Bickington x2
Cockingford Bridge x1 (natural rock)	Piall Bridge x2
Dart Bridge x1 (plaque on bridge dating rebuilds)	Plymbridge x2
Glaze Brook Bridge, South Brent x2	Ponsworthy Bridge x2 (dated stone on bridge)
Grenofen Bridge x1	Rushford Bridge, Chagford x1
Gulwell Bridge, Ashburton x1 (Coping Stone on bridge)	Shaugh Bridge x1 (natural rock)
Harbourneford Bridge x1	Shipleigh Bridge x2
Hexworthy/Huccaby Bridge x2	Spara Bridge x1 (Broken tablet on bridge 'THIS BRIDGE WAS NEW BUILDED AT THE COUNTYES CHARGES ANNO 1666'). Also known as Sparrowe Bridge in Henderson (1938, p43)
Hill Bridge x1	Sticklepath Bridge x1 (in wall of house)
Holne Bridge x2	Ward Bridge x2
Hoo Meavy Bridge x1	Wisdom Bridge x1
Horrabridge x2 (also cross head in parapet)	

References:

Brewer, Dave; *Dartmoor Boundary Markers*; Halsgrove, Devon (2002)

Henderson, Charles and Jervoise, Edwyn; *Old Devon Bridges*; Wheaton and Co Ltd, Exeter (1938)

Jenkinson, Tim; *Dartmoor Bridge Markers Part 2 – 'C' Stones*; *Dartmoor Magazine*, No 90, Spring 2008, pp8-10



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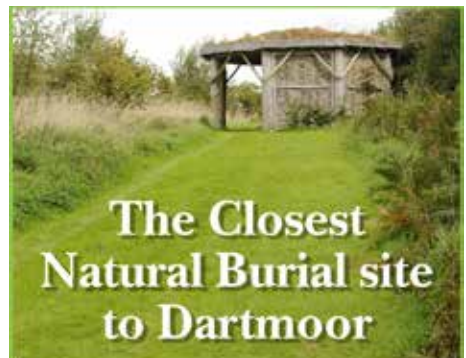


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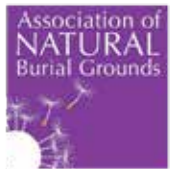


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NATURE NOTES

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

On 13th February a group of walkers saw eight roe deer on Butterdon near Moretonhampstead, a raven on Pin Tor and two snipe on Mardon.

On 20th February there was a report of two short-eared owls at Belstone, possibly at Taw Marsh. They are a rare bird for Dartmoor but can be seen as they often fly during the day.

Sylarks were heard singing for the first time this year on Headland Warren on 22nd February.

Adders were out and about early this year, they were seen in a number of locations on 24th/25th February including at Postbridge.

Two green woodpeckers were seen chasing each other on 27th February at Longstone Manor, Sheepstor.

The East Ockment River flows through the centre of Okehampton. On the last day of February the Editor saw a dipper in the river and then heard another calling. Looking around he spotted a dipper on a door handle of the riverside church; it was looking at the glass door and when seeing itself reflected it started calling and fighting with the glass. This behaviour can sometimes be seen when wagtails or blue tits see themselves in car mirrors but it was a new experience to see a dipper doing it.

On 5th March a woodcock was seen on Ramshorn Down, Ashburton. Also on the same day Andrew McAuley saw a red admiral butterfly on White Ridge, near Fernworthy, the first of the year.

On 8th March a group of walkers saw six dunlin near Yealm Head as well as a pair of red grouse.

Chris Walpole reports, 'I heard a chiffchaff several times on 8th March in the lower part of Belstone Cleave. That's the third earliest date in 42 years of my 'first hearing of the year' records, beaten only when I saw a chiffchaff in my garden on 25th February 2019 and when Mike Watson heard one in Billy Green Wood, Sticklepath, on 9th February 2006.'



Strange fungus

Chris Walpole

Chris adds, 'I took this photo of a strange trumpet-like fungus in my garden in March. I thought it might be Horn of Plenty but the Devon Fungus Group reckon it is a decayed puffball.' If anybody has any other ideas, please send your suggestions to the Editor.

James Daymond saw a red kite over Barn Hill on Whitchurch Common on the afternoon of 13th March. They are not common birds for Dartmoor and not seen before within that area.

For about two weeks in March a great grey shrike was seen around Bellever Plantation on most days. This is a rare bird for Dartmoor.

On 31st March Clare Meiklejohn had a lovely walk beside the River Teign, below Castle Drogo. She watched a tree creeper in Whiddon Old Deer Park pecking beneath a branch of an oak tree. Near the Fisherman's Bridge she saw three goosanders, two males and a female; the males were fighting over the female. Near Fingle Bridge she saw a grey wagtail.

On Saturday 5th April the Editor saw two swallows at Nun's Cross Farm, his first of the year. Also a snipe was seen at Nun's Cross Farm on the same day. Later that day two more swallows were seen at Drizzlecombe by the Editor. Lastly a large flock of dunlin was seen at White Tor by Ian and Caroline Kirkpatrick.

On 11th April three separate people heard a cuckoo in Belstone Cleave and around Birchy Lake, exactly the same date it was first heard in this area last year.

On 12th April there were three cuckoos heard near Emsworthy.



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WALKING ON DARTMOOR

BELSTONE VILLAGE, STEEPERTON TOR, OKE TOR AND BELSTONE TOR

Follow Steve Davison as he heads to picturesque Belstone for a walk on the north moor visiting several impressive tors with some great views

Starting point: Belstone village car park (SX 621 938)

Distance: 8 miles (13km) or 4 miles (6.5km)

Ascent: 350m or 190m

Time: 4 hours or 2 hours

Terrain: A long walk on tracks and paths; two stream crossings that may cause problems after heavy rainfall

Refreshments: The Tors pub and The Old School Tearoom at Belstone

Notes: Part of the long walk lies within the Okehampton Range – you must check that the range is open before walking to Steeperton Tor and Oke Tor (www.gov.uk/government/publications/dartmoor-firing-programme)

Overview: From Belstone, the walk heads south along the River Taw valley before crossing the River Taw near Steeperton Gorge and heading up Steeperton Tor. After admiring the views you soon recross the River Taw at a ford before heading to Oke Tor. The route continues northwards along the broad ridge past Higher Tor to Belstone Tor. Then it's off down to Nine Stones cairn circle before heading back to the start. A shorter walk, missing out Steeperton Tor and Oke Tor, is also described.

Details: Exit the car park, turn left along the lane and keep right at the junction to arrive at the village green in Belstone, where the lane splits along either side. Located on the green is the engraved Coronation Stone (King George V, Queen Elizabeth II, King Charles III), to the left is the old village stocks, the animal pound (now a small garden) and the Old School Tearoom.

Fork left along the left-hand side of the green and turn left at the junction; to the right is The Tors pub. Follow the lane for a third of a mile (500m) to a Y-junction, shortly after curving hard-left past some houses. Fork right uphill and go through a gate onto the open moor. Follow the track southwards along the River Taw valley for one mile (1.6km) to a track junction where you need to make a decision.

For the shorter walk (or if the military range is closed) bear right following a path steeply up to the ridge to rejoin the longer walk and turn right up to Higher Tor. To continue with the longer walk go straight on along the valley for another mile with

the conical outline of Steeperton Tor looming ahead. As the track fades, continue along a less defined path still following the valley, but staying close to the base of the slope on your right.

On nearing the entrance to Steeperton Gorge bear left and cross the River Taw (stream). Head south-east and then south up a narrow and at times indistinct path to the military hut and flagpole on the summit of Steeperton Tor (532m), passing into the Okehampton military range on the way. Views to the north include the Taw valley (along which the route came), with Oke Tor and Belstone Tor on the left and Cosdon Hill on the right, to the south is Hangingstone Hill, with High Willhays and Yes Tor to the west.



Steeperton Tor

Steve Davison

Keep ahead (south) past the outcrops of Steeperton Tor, then bear half-right (south-south-west) down to a junction with a track. Turn sharp right downhill and cross the River Taw at a ford near the former Knack Mine (a 19th century tin mine). Follow the track uphill and then keep ahead (north) to Oke Tor (466m); aiming just to the right of the tor.



View from Oke Tor looking towards Higher Tor

Steve Davison

After admiring the views, continue northwards along the ridge to Knattaborough Tor (438m) and leave the military range. Fork slightly right (north-north-east) following a path past Lower Tor and continue up to Higher Tor (471m); on the way, the shorter walk joins from the right. Keep ahead, crossing Irishman's Wall (remains of an early 19th century east-west stone wall), to Belstone Tor (479m). From here there is another great view including West Mill Tor, Yes Tor and High Willhays (west and south-west), Oke Tor and Steeperton Tor (south), and east across the valley to Cosdon Hill.

Continue along the ridge to Belstone Common Tor (460m). Then head northwards down through the clitter passing to the right of Tors End (the final tor) to a much flatter area with Watchet Hill ahead. Turn left (west) along a wide grassy path to Nine Stones; also known as the Nine Maidens, Nine Stones is the remains of a Bronze Age burial cairn circle rather than a stone circle.

Turn right (northwards), soon keeping ahead along a track (Dartmoor Way and Tarka Trail) with a wall on your left, heading downhill. Go through a gate and continue down the lane, keeping ahead at junctions; the first right leads to the 15th century Church of St Mary the Virgin, inside is a granite slab carved with a Ring Cross dating from the 7th to 9th century; the second right leads to The Tors pub. Pass the village green and retrace the outward route back to the car park.

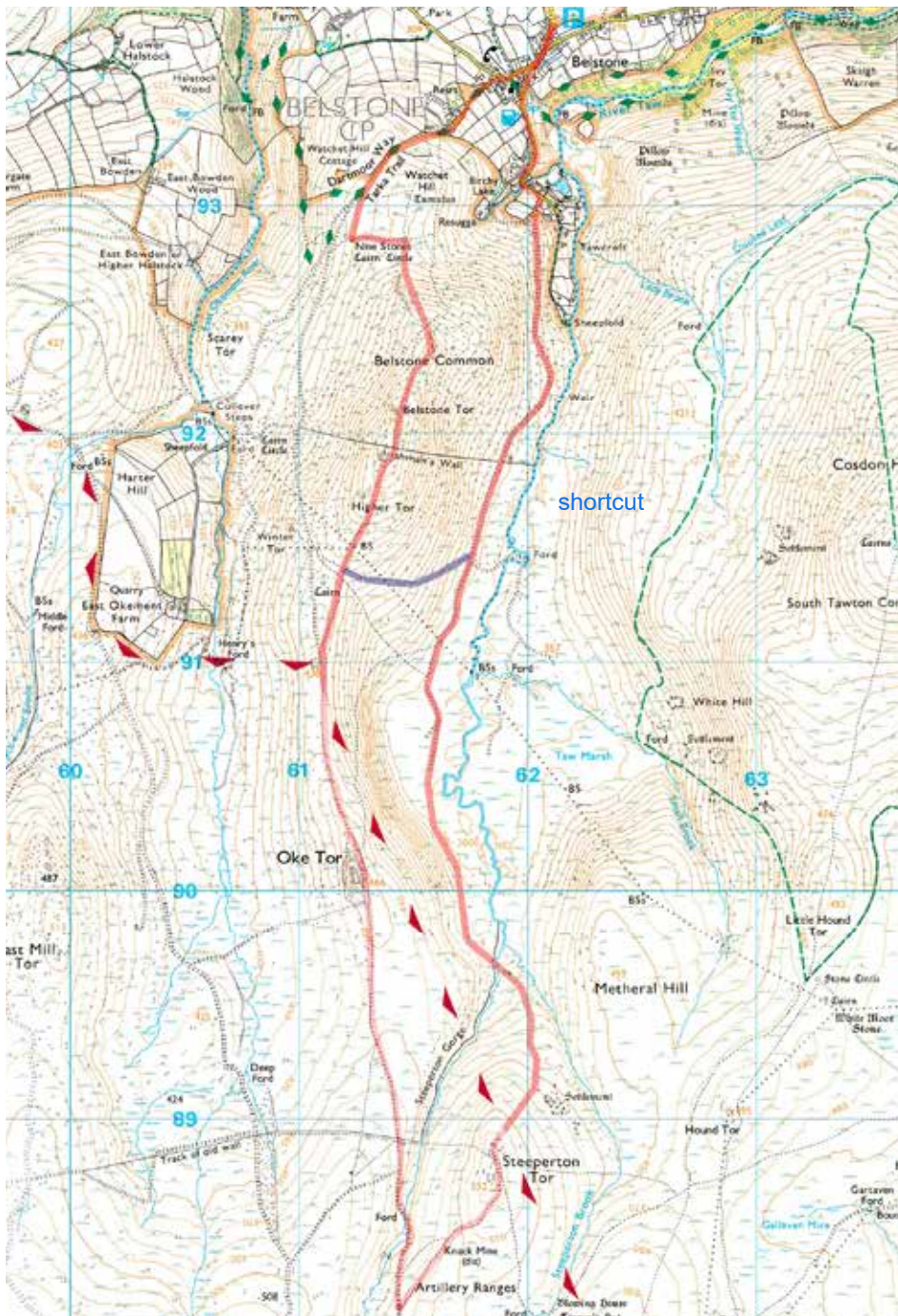
Further Information: Steve Davison has written a number of walking guidebooks, including three based on Dartmoor; visit his website for more information (www.stevedavison.co.uk).



Nine Stones or Nine Maidens

Steve Davison

Cicerone Reader Offer: *Dartmoor News* readers can get 15 per cent off all guidebooks and eBooks on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk). **Use the code 'dartmoornews' at the checkout.** The discount will not apply to products already on sale and can't be used alongside other discount codes.



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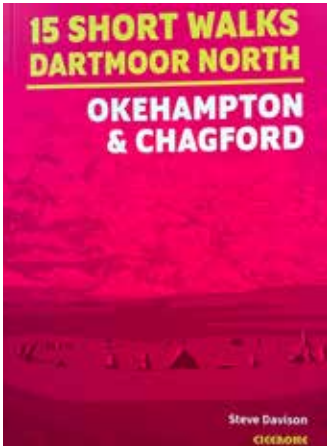


BOOK REVIEWS

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

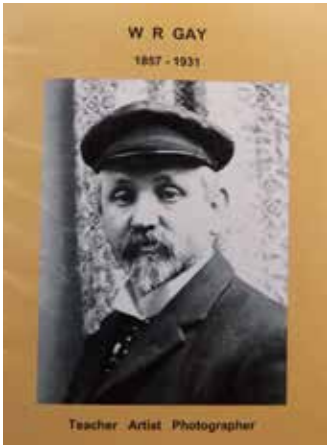
15 SHORT WALKS DARTMOOR NORTH – Okehampton & Chagford by Steve Davison. Paperback, 96 pages. Published by Cicerone, £9.95. ★★★★★

This is a pocket size book with 15 short walks in it, ranging from 3 to 6½ miles (5 to 11kms) and covering the area Haytor, Widecombe-in-the-Moor, Bellever Tor, Fernworthy Reservoir, Belstone, Yes Tor and Sourton. Each walk has an OS map with easy to follow route descriptions, facilities, parking and highlights. Lots of wonderful photographs of things to see on each route are included. The starting points for the walks are given using postcodes and what3words, not grid references. The walks are well laid out; although they are mostly well known ones the book is still a wonderful delight. Good to see the author is using some lesser-known tors like Belstone Common Tor (p38). The caption is wrong on page 44; it says Teign-e-ver Clapper Bridge, when this bridge is lower down the river. This is due to be updated when the book is reprinted. Also it says on page 45 about crossing the third bridge over the Gallaven Brook when it is in fact the Gidleigh Leat you cross.



WR GAY 1857-1931 by Andrew Leslie. Paperback, A5, 24 pages. £6 including postage. The booklet can be obtained from Cookworthy Museum, Kingsbridge. ★★★★★

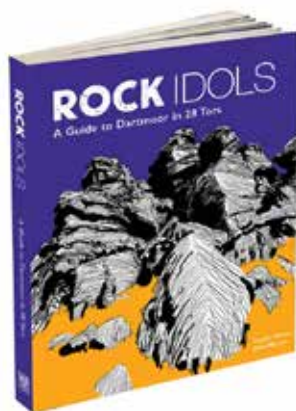
William Richard Gay was schoolmaster, artist and photographer. On Dartmoor he is best known for his postcard images of the moor. Known as WR Gay, he is recognised as a significant contributor to recording life as it was in south Devon in the early 1900s, mainly through his picture postcards. He was born in Kingsbridge in 1857 and died in South Brent in 1931. This booklet tells his life story and has many images, mainly of his postcards. He had a studio in Moorland Park, South Brent, where he did his painting. A great booklet with lots of information about this man. I have always loved his postcards and have a great number of them.



ROCK IDOLS – A GUIDE TO DARTMOOR IN 28 TORS

by Sophie Pierce and Alex Murdin. Paperback, 208 pages. Published by Wild Things Publishing, £14.99.

★★★★★



This new 208-page book, *Rock Idols – A Guide to Dartmoor in 28 Tors* is written by Sophie Pierce and Alex Murdin, with illustrations by Murdin. The book focusses on 28 tors selected by the authors; they are described in the order in which the authors visited them with a selection of their colour photographs, as well as historic images and paintings depicting the tors as they were envisioned by artists years ago. The layout of the book is very good but the OS maps could be a bit bigger. Each tor encompasses multiple page spreads and each description includes the route they took to reach that tor. Many of the tors described are well known and obvious ones to pick, but some you wonder, ‘Why that tor?’ – like Calveslake Tor, Devil’s Tor, Sittaford Tor and White Tor – however the authors do explain the reasons for picking these. The really ‘Rock Idols’ are such as Fur Tor and Luckey Tor.

The inclusion of Ordnance Survey grid references and what3words is a very good idea. This is an excellent publication and possibly will become a classic in years to come. It is a book you should have on your bookshelf, and I am very glad it is in my library now.

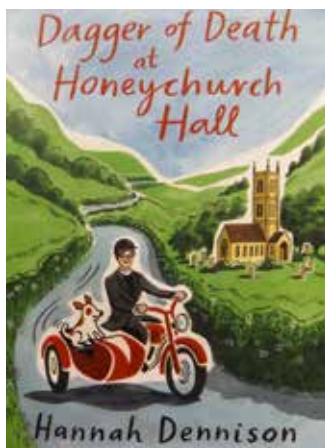
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DAGGER OF DEATH AT HONEYCHURCH HALL

by Hannah Dennison. Paperback, 312 pages. Published by Constable, £9.99.

★★★★★



At last, St Mary’s Church is going to have its own vicar! Not only that, the gorgeous Rev Pritchard is sixty, single and in need of a wife. There is a campaign to restore a derelict chapel on the Honeychurch estate but the Dowager Countess has put her foot down and said no, but no one can understand the reason why. Elsewhere, in an auction room, a bidding war is taking place over some military memorabilia and someone is murdered. It all connects to Operation Tiger, a doomed rehearsal for the D-Day landings that took place at Slapton Sands – or was it to do with something else?

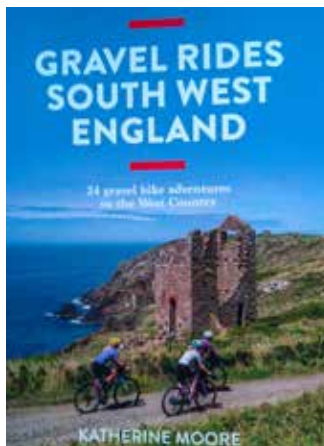
It took a long time to discover the murderer and I would like the pace to be a bit faster but overall it was a very good read – a cosy murder book without any of the swearing that lots of novels now seem to have.

GRAVEL RIDES SOUTH WEST ENGLAND by Katherine Moore. Paperback, 220 pages.

Published by Vertebrate Publishing, £25.

★★★

This book features 24 cycling routes ranging from 16 to 180 kilometres across Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. The author is an experienced route creator and loves cycling. Each route includes all the information you need to plan your ride, interesting background information about the local area, types of terrain covered and refreshment stops, with detailed route descriptions and a double-page-spread map per ride. Also some good photographs of the route and people out in the field. Downloadable GPX files of the routes also available.



On Dartmoor usual routes included are the Princetown-Eylesbarrow classic (21 miles/33km) and the Fisherman's gravel at Fingle Bridge (28 miles/45km) plus an unusual one – the Lee Moor gravel chonk (24 miles/38km). The other two in Devon are the East Devon Trail (112 miles/180km) and the North Devon Coastal Gold (29 miles/46km), this last one may be short but it is a very interesting route starting from near Braunton. All routes are circular. Get on your bike and go for a ride in the beautiful South West.

The book is well laid out and the routes are well chosen for experienced off-road riders.

BOOK NEWS

Chris Chapman is putting together a new book as a possible sequel to *Wild Goose & Riddon*. The new publication is planned for November 2025. Chris wanted to give the book the title *Dead Duck & Good Riddance* but for some strange reason his publisher isn't that keen.

Hidden Figures of the South West is a portrait collection showcasing individuals in unsung professions. With over 200 participants, the portraits will be compiled into a book alongside biographies that each participant has written themselves. This book provides a platform for individuals and organisations to showcase themselves and their craft. The portraits were taken by Caitlin Pharoah. The book is due out this summer.

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