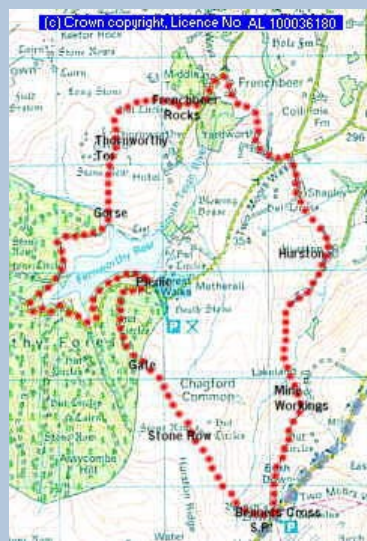


BENNETS CROSS TO FERNWORTHY AND BEYOND RETURNING VIA THE MARINERS WAY

START POINT GRID REFERENCE: 682818

With Ivan Meads leading the walk it was odds on that it would rain or blow or hail or all three since it always seems to with Ivan. As we approached Bennets Cross beyond Postbridge high up on the Mortonhamstead Road the Tors were shrouded in cloud and we feared the worst.

The car parks on the moors were all seemingly full as there were plenty out in training for the 10 Tors next month. All 23 walkers and cars managed to squeeze into the car park at 9.45 AM and once again it was decidedly cool as we got out to prepare.



The route was to Fernworthy Reservoir via part of the Two Moors Way, a walk around the reservoir and then up to the Tors north of Fernworthy for lunch before returning via the Mariners Way, a route I'd never tackled before.

The map above indicates in the route taken but this should be related to a suitable 1:25000 ordnance survey map of Dartmoor together with this brief write up to appreciate where we walked.



After a briefing from Ivan on the areas we would be visiting we were off at 10.00 AM across the road from the car park and following a muddy track on about 290 degrees following the route of the well known Two Moors Way route.

After a few hundred yards the route swung more northerly and we continued along the track through open moorland. After about half a mile on this route we diverged from the Two Moors Way and headed on about 340 degrees more towards the Fernworthy Forest. About a half a mile further along we came upon a very distinct stone row with a slightly larger stone at the top.

We stopped to admire the very old stones before setting off for the forest now visible in the distance. It is bounded by a dry stone wall with entrance gates at various points usually leading to footpaths through the forest.



We set off on a bearing of 210 degrees as we descended towards the pine forest and sure enough as we approached we could see a gate. We were on the right track.

Passing through the gate into the forestry commission land we continued our descent along a broad path towards the reservoir below, not yet visible.

We continued down the path for getting on for half a mile and en route we passed a well defined stone hut circle, one of a few in the forest.

It is quite strange to see them in the middle of a pine forest, what the landscape was like when they were first constructed however is anybody's guess.



A few hundred yards further along the path, we came upon a metalled road and turned right onto it.

A couple of hundred yards further along we could see the reservoir through the trees and a picnic area just off to the left.



We turned left and down past the toilets to the picnic area for morning coffee. Ivan had even arranged for picnic tables to be installed, he must have been a boy scout.

The area afforded good views of the reservoir and was shielded from the wind.

We were soon off again leaving the area via a track through the woods which would take us clockwise around to the other side.

The path varied between woodland to open pasture land passing specially constructed bird hides for the ornithologists to use to admire the many birds which gather here in season.

The path is well signed and is easy to follow and enables walkers to walk around the reservoir, even dropping down below the dam at the east end.

We continued around the nature reserve until we crossed a stream and up the steps at the other side. The path around the lake turned right at this point but we were heading up to the Tors behind.



The path we took headed broadly north along the side of a stream and through very prickly gorse.



It was a barely discernable path at times as the gorse had completely overgrown the path. Luckily no one was wearing shorts otherwise they would have been in real trouble.

The end of the prickly section was soon found and we climbed over a well constructed stile and saw the first of the Tors high up above us about 400 yards away.

Three lady walkers, Joy, Pat and Edna were really setting the pace up the hill towards the Tor and were enjoying the views looking back to the Reservoir below as the rest of us were making our way up the hill to the top.



As can be seen there were splendid views to be had from Thornworthy Tor looking back to where we had been walking earlier.



Further away in the distance we could see the impressive Kestor Rock on the highest ground in the area.

The photograph on the left clearly shows Kestor Tor in the distance. We set off due north from Thornworthy Tor towards Kestor Rocks picking our way through increasingly marshy ground. We could see a dry stone wall in front of us and a typical moorland dry stone

wall stile to climb over.

When we crossed the wall we turned right and followed the wall along as it swung west to east.

The ground was very wet in this area and we picked our way with care through the very wet area.

As we made our way along Middle Tor was up ahead of us but we were not visiting that one either today and we swung round south east and made our way up from the wall to Frenchbeer Rock, two or three hundred yards ahead.



We stopped for lunch tucked in out of the wind at this Tor for twenty minutes. I took the opportunity of admiring Frans' new waterproof GPS and checked with her that the reference it gave was indeed the reference according to the OS map.



After lunch we descended south east for a short distance to meet a narrow lane below. We turned left onto the road and followed it as it descended steeply north east off the moor to farmland below.

Initially I found this confusing as we were now walk directly away from the direction of the starting point.

It was easy to see why. Most of the routes towards Bennets Cross seemed to be private property, no entry.

Yes we were off the open moorland and back onto farmland again.

After a few minutes we came upon a footpath sign indicating the Mariners Way path and we turned right and followed the footpath though the first of a number of farms we were to pass by as we followed the path.

The path took us through Teignworthy Farm as it meandered along.

I must confess I had never heard of the Mariners Way but the footpath was very clearly marked as it passed through the farms up hill and down dale.

We descended steeply into a valley to cross a bridge over a stream and then equally steeply up the other side.



Passing Yardworthy we eventually came upon a road with the signpost taking us up a stile at the top of a hedge, we were still on the Mariners Way it appeared.

Following the track we passed by some small farms and hamlets named on the map as Lower Shapley and Higher Shapley.

Luckily the route was well signposted along the way and so we could make good, if sometimes muddy progress as we made our way along roughly on a bearing of 080 degrees.

At Hurston there were some superbly renovated buildings and we were advised that the renovation in the picture was one of the best examples of old long houses in this region.



Leaving Hurston we were gradually climbing as we gradually headed south west up away from the farmland to the moorland beyond.

Once back on open moorland we tucked in by a dry stone wall for afternoon tea before continuing our climb up to the wide open moorland.



In the distance we could see evidence of old mine workings and we crossed North Walls Brook and picked our way up through the workings.

We could just about see a path heading up to the top of the hill and although not visible the Mortonhamstead road and Bennets Cross Car Park was just beyond the skyline due south of us.

We made our way up the hill on a broad front, some following a path with others favouring a plough through the short rough scrubland.

We could hear the cars on the main moor road and as we crested the hill we could see the road and car park just down the road from us.

A few yards down the road and we were back again in the car park.



Unbelievably it had neither rained nor hailed during the day. The sun might not have emerged much but Ivan had led a dry walk. It had to happen!!

Thanks once again to Ivan and Doreen for their efforts in finding us this varied and interesting walk and we were soon on our way back to Plymouth 16 miles away.

Another good walk for those of us lucky enough to have braved the elements.