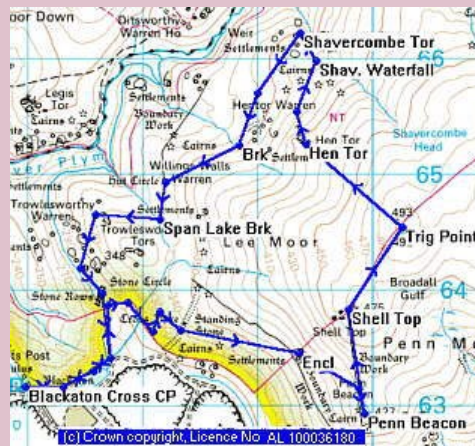


BLACKATON CROSS, PENN BEACON AND SHAVERCOMBE WATERFALL START POINT: BLACKATON CROSS CP GRID REF: 571630

Penn Beacon and Shell Top are local high points on Dartmoor affording magnificent views across Plymouth with a wide arc from way down into Cornwall and round to Bigbury Bay and beyond. All in all this is a magnificent vista; there is of course one minor difficulty, the climb up to Shell Top at 1500 ft.

Blackaton Cross Car Park eases the pain of the climb just a little since it is located high up by the side of huge clay pit workings and overlooking Blackaton Valley with good views across to the moors and Trowlesworthy Tors.

The 8/9 mile walk was scheduled for 1st December 02 and I and a small group of ramblers decided that a recce walk was in order on 24 October 02 to see if the moors were walkable after the heavy rain of the past few weeks.



The route we took is shown on the map above. This outline should be looked at in conjunction with a 1:25000 map of Dartmoor such as the OS map no 28 of the area.



We met at the car park at 10 AM and after a look at the Cross which gives the car park its name we were off walking across level ground parallel to a man made pond which supplied water to one of the clay pits.

The pond is marked on the map and is called 'The Big Pond'.

Along by the far end of the pond we crossed a leat and headed north along the edge of it, this time with a very large clay pit immediately on our right hand side.

There was no sign of any activity in the pit although upon our return a few hours later, there was plenty of signs of work.

By the far end of the clay pit we turned right and followed a rough track as it made its way up on the other side of the pit.

After a short while the path zig zagged up and away from the pit and we followed this easy and dry route up towards the moorland itself.



We continued along the route of the track under some granite clutter with a steepish gully carrying a stream between us and the granite outcrop.



After a few hundred yards we found a bridge made of railway sleepers over the gully and stream and we followed this and off rough track and onto soft moorland.

High above us we could see Shell Top and about a mile away to the south east, again high up was Penn Beacon.

We headed due east and climbed steadily, passing a cairn on the right hand side. Considering the amount of water deposited on the moors during the Autumn the moorland was quite dry, obviously excellent drainage in this area.

This area abounds with history, bronze age settlements, cairns, stone circles and outlines of stone huts. It is salutary to consider in these days of global warming that 2500 yrs ago Dartmoor had a mediteranian climate and was home to a lot of small warring tribes.



What is that saying " what goes around, comes around".

We continued to climb and soon we were entering the first of the Bronze age settlements with its hut circles within.



We stopped a moment to ponder on life as it was then and onwards and upwards, easier going now since we were not climbing so steeply as we headed up. the ground was still seemingly dry with hardly any pools to negotiate.

Before long we reached the well defined track which linked Shell Top and Penn Beacon.

We turned right and followed the track up to Penn Beacon with its trig point and stony outcrop.

Although the visibility was not perfect it was good enough for us to see for many a mile and we



stopped at the local high point to savour the views and to have morning coffee. We had been walking for about 1 hr 10 mins to reach this point.

Shell Top was about half a mile due north of Penn Beacon along an easy to follow track as we climbed the 100 ft up to the rocky outcrop of Shell Top.

High up as we were the terrain was flattish and there was rather more in the way of standing water.



It was nowhere near as bad as I had anticipated it would be.

We headed off north east along a track of sorts heading for a trig point a half mile on at an altitude of just under 500 m.

This trig point was at the highest point of the day and we would of necessity be going downhill for the major part of the rest of the walk.

From this trig point we were aiming for Hen Tor, a large rocky outcrop, about 0.75 miles north east.

This Tor isn't visible from the trig point so we were on a compass bearing of about 310 degrees across tussocks. The tussocks were fairly easy to navigate and amazingly the terrain was still relatively dry.

Before long the Tor could be seen and we made good progress and were soon down by the Tor.



We made our way to the east of the Tor and continued to descend for a further 300 m NE until we were clear of the tussocks.



We swung north and followed the contours until we reached Shavercombe Brook. The waterfall is not immediately obvious unless you know it is there. There are however two or three straggly looking trees on the side of the brook and the waterfall is immediately under them.

By heading downstream a little it is possible to drop down to the side of the brook and then make your way back to immediately below the waterfall itself.

This is a remarkably sheltered spot in a gully with a nice pool at the bottom of the small waterfall and grassy banks.

This is an ideal point for lunch break and we settled down here to enjoy the break by the side of the brook.

Once lunch was over we headed downstream for a hundred metres or so before leaving the now shallowing gully and heading up to the rocks of Shavercombe Tor.

From this point there are good views across to Drizzlecombe and the tall menhirs.



On from the Tor the going is quite easy with mainly short cropped moorland grass with a disused leat on our right hand side.



Progress was swift as we headed back along relatively level ground heading generally south west following the contours and avoiding tussocks and dead bracken.

Off to our right miles away across the Plym we could see Gutter Tor, Eastern Tor, Didsworthy

Warren House and beyond to Sheepstor itself.

The conical shape of Leather Tor and behind Sharpitor, all in all quite a vista.

High above us to the east was Hen Tor and the surrounding clitter and we continued to contour follow until we reach Hen Tor Brook.



There is a ford crossing of the brook, OK if you have wellingtons on but otherwise it is a case of looking for rocks to hop over.

There are some both upstream and downstream and so no problems were encountered in the crossing.

Beyond Hen Tor brook we climbed up over Willings Walls Warren heading more SSW.



Ahead of us we could see the stark relief of Little and Great Trowlesworthy Tors against the skyline.

We followed the contours at the top of the incline and then descended down to our next brook the oddly named Spanish Lake Brook. I have tried, without success, to find out why the brook is given this strange name but with no success to date.

We were soon approaching another ford and easy stone crossing point over the Spanish Lane Brook and then up towards the Tors.

On the recce we headed to the west of Little Trowlesworthy Tor although this can be varied as required to visit the Tors themselves.



There was a lot of evidence of granite mining on the Tor.

Rather than visit the quarry area, we contoured round them and then picked our way through the scattered granite boulders that are scattered all over the area.

From this point we could see across the Blackabrook valley to the cars about a mile away as the crow flies.

On the walk we did walk up to Little Trowlesworthy Tor, climb to the top to enjoy the views and then cross over to Great Trowlesworthy Tor.

There was lots of evidence of the granite quarrying and shaping to huge granite blocks in the vicinity including one huge granite solid cylinder left there post the quarrying era. We couldn't fathom out just what use this well carved cylindrical lump could have been put to.



Before reaching them we still had plenty more to see.

As we headed south and downhill we passed by another two settlements and also clear evidence of the remains of ancient granite buildings, now just the shape of the floor space remains.

A few hundred yards further along we came to a fine example of a double stone row with a stone circle at its head. We conjectured as to the significance and alignment of the very old row and stone circle.

Not far below the stone row we came to a fast flowing leat which carried water to the claypits from a take off point a couple of miles further up the Plym.



There was a point at which the overspill from the leat poured down to form the Blackabrook stream which ran down to rejoin the Plym.

It is quite boggy in this area and we had to make our way round the end of a man made tunnel which carried water down from a stream higher up the moor.

I imagine this was put in by the China Clay company a long time ago to give them the supply of water they need for their operations.



We followed our way generally along the side of the leat until we reached the track round the clay mine workings we had taken some 4 hours earlier.

I did notice a sleeper over the leat and I may try crossing it to avoid the retracing of steps for the final half a mile.

The clay pits were rather more active during the afternoon than they had been in the morning and there was heavy plant movement carrying clay waste for other pits to deposit it in the now defunct pit.

We made our way back and across the moor just under The Big Pond and so back to the car park.

Just behind the car park was a notice reminding us that this area borders land owned by the Clay mining companies and to keep out.

Strangely though there was no sign telling us that there is a public right of way going up to Emmets Post and which meanders on through the workings. I wonder where it is?



This walk had indeed been of the order of 8.5 miles and can be extended with ease by visiting the Trowlesworthy Tors or going further down to near the stream.

On the actual walk on 1st Dec 02 we visited both Tors and crossed over the leat just by the start of Black-a- brook over the strategically placed sleeper.

By so doing we avoided walking the identical out and back route for the first 500 m.

We rounded the walk off by calling into the Moorland Hotel at Wotter, open all day incidentally, to slake our thirst.

It had been a good recce and had shown me that the moor in this area has an amazing ability to get rid of water. There are plenty of other areas where this is not the case however as visits to any river head will show.